



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Kevin S. Parker

## POISONOUS PIPES: A Call for Action in Our City Schools By Senator Parker and Chris Lake

KEVIN S. PARKER October 23, 2017

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With so many hot-bed issues facing New York City Schools and its children today, lead poisoning is certainly one that can easily get pushed to the back burner. However, the sad reality is that New York City public school children have unknowingly been exposed to lead contaminated water every single school day for the past 10 years. In tests conducted last year, hazardous levels of lead were found in water in at least 83% of New York City Public Schools that were tested. Toxic heavy metal above the EPA "action level" was found in the

water fountains, bathrooms, and cafeterias that our children use every day. To compound this, it has been more than 10 years since the water had been officially tested in some schools, and others simply have never been tested at all. Not only is this unconscionable, it's alarming.

Though it can be considered in the category of a "silent prey" the effects of lead toxicity are devastating and insidious. Very small amounts of lead can cause Autism, ADHD, defiant behavior, decreased intelligence, and increased aggression. Higher amounts can result in hearing and speech impairments, kidney failure, seizures, miscarriages, coma, and death. Despite this, New York standards for testing children follow a painfully outdated law from 1992. Because we have not yet updated this law, doctors are blindly following state protocol. Unfortunately, this allows children to have twice the maximum amount of lead currently recommended by the Centers for Disease Control.

The good news is that the NYC Department of Education was swift in response following the test results and ensured that sources of contamination were secured. Parents were informed of the discovery and contaminated fixtures were replaced or sealed off. Nonetheless, the bad news lies in the fact that almost all New York school children in all five boroughs may have been exposed to lead contaminated water for years.

The other good news is that thankfully, I have been joined by several of my colleagues in government to put "teeth" behind progressive lead testing legislation like Senate Bill S6472. Senator Kemp Hannon, Assemblyman Sean Ryan, Assemblyman Ed Ra, Councilman Anthony D'Esposito, and Councilman Louis Imbroto are just a few lawmakers who have supported legislation aimed at updating current testing standards. Final votes in January 2018 on the Bill will bring the issue to the Governor's desk. And with his signature, we can successfully move childhood lead testing into 21<sup>st</sup> Century standards.

However, between now and January, there is still work to be done by every responsible parent and New Yorker. This is *especially* true if you received a letter about lead findings in your child's school. The most important action step to take right now is simply to get your child tested. Visit your family's primary care provider or call 311 to find the nearest medical facility that performs blood lead testing. When you receive the results, write them down and keep a safe record.

Then, when Governor Cuomo signs the new Public Health Law into effect, check back with your doctor to make sure your child is *still* safe. Although it is devastating news to find that poisonous pipes have been present in our schools for an entire decade, it is far worse to do nothing in response. Getting your children tested for lead toxicity may provide life-changing information and intervention that could make a significant difference in their future. This therefore, is your call to action.