



City of La Quinta

TO: The Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council

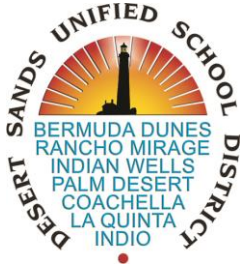
FROM: Frank J. Spevacek, City Manager

DATE: March 3, 2015

SUBJECT: RESPONSE TO PUBLIC COMMENTS – LA QUINTA MIDDLE SCHOOL

At the February 17, 2015 meeting, seven speakers addressed the Council regarding cancer concerns at La Quinta Middle School. I have had a few conversations with Dr. Rutherford regarding this matter in order to better understand the scope of the potential problem. Dr. Rutherford indicated that the Desert Sands Unified School District (District) is not avoiding this issue and has, and will be, conducting further investigations. He also provided the attached correspondence that was circulated to all La Quinta Middle School parents, faculty and staff. City staff will continue to monitor this situation. As stated at the February 17 Council meeting, the City does not have legal jurisdiction over District matters since the District is an extension of the State of California. However, the City can monitor events and provide thoughts and comment, accordingly.

Attachment



Desert Sands Unified School District

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BOARD OF EDUCATION:

Michael Duran, Donald B. Griffith, Wendy Jonathan, Matteo Monica III, Gary Tomak

SUPERINTENDENT: Dr. Gary Rutherford

February 10, 2015

Dear Families and Staff of La Quinta Middle School:

Over ten years ago, concerns regarding the cancer occurrences at La Quinta Middle School (LQMS) were first raised. Desert Sands Unified School District (District) launched a thorough investigation to ensure that the environment at LQMS is safe for students, staff, and community members.

A local television station has resurrected this issue based on allegations by the same individuals who raised the question in 2004 and again in 2008. The current assertions are based on what these individuals claim are new cases of cancer. The names of the individuals with these new cases have not been provided to the District nor have the individuals contacted us directly.

In 2004, as part of its efforts to ensure the environmental safety at LQMS for anyone who enters the campus, the District invited several independent agencies, recognized experts in their fields, such as the California Department of Health Services (CDHS) and the Coachella Valley Water District, to test its air, soil, water, classrooms, and electrical systems. All of the reports from these agencies cleared the site of any dangerous contaminants and failed to identify any other environmental factors that could contribute to an increased cancer occurrence.

In addition, at the request of CBS 2 News, the law firm of Masry & Vititoe (of Erin Brockovich fame) conducted its own water and soil tests, and concluded that none of the test results violated California or Federal EPA standards.

The District also worked with Dr. John Morgan, cancer epidemiologist, Region 5 of the California Cancer Registry, to respond directly to teacher concerns about the cancer occurrence among those assigned to work at LQMS. The District fully cooperated with Dr. Morgan by providing the information he requested to enable him to carefully evaluate whether the cancer occurrence at LQMS constituted a "cancer cluster." Dr. Morgan advised staff and the District that his team did not find evidence of what might be characterized as a "cancer cluster" at LQMS.

At that time, a retired epidemiologist from the State of Washington raised allegations pertaining to his theory of "dirty power." Although the District had been advised by other medical and scientific experts that there is no agreement or consensus within the scientific community conclusively linking EMF or "dirty power" to health problems like cancer, the District allowed this individual to conduct and present to the California Department of Health Services his own studies and research. In addition, the District contacted two reputable firms, FBA Engineering and Field Management Services (FMS), to test and evaluate the electrical systems at LQMS. The testing was observed by a State Department of Health Services representative that praised the record of these companies, their instruments, and their methods.

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FBA determined that the electrical distribution system is safe and in good condition, all electrical distribution equipment is properly bonded to ground, and there were no apparent defects or code violations. FMS concluded that all measured classrooms and occupied area readings were well below ambient EMF levels.

Out of an abundance of caution, the District also contracted with two firms (Electrical Reliability Services and FBA & Associates) to conduct a power quality survey. Those results concluded that there were no indications of electrical noise problems or electrical code problems with the main switchboard.

Ultimately, theories pertaining to LQMS were not substantiated and the CDHS cleared the school.

The District has invested considerable time and money investigating and testing at LQMS. The District sought out and utilized the best experts in their fields to make sure the campus at LQMS is safe. The valid scientific evidence strongly supports the conclusion that the campus meets or exceeds governmental and industry health and safety standards. There is no credible scientific evidence that LQMS poses any emergency or threat to the health or safety of students or staff.

The District has continued to routinely conduct safety inspections of all facilities and has remained committed to addressing any substantiated health risk and, just this past week, entered into discussions with Dr. John Morgan to review the data and findings from the past while looking at any new data.

Without new scientific or substantiated facts KESQ television and the same retired Washington-based doctor, and others associated with him, contacted the District at the end of January to request further testing. They claim that they are aware of new cancer cases, but have not provided the District with anything other than their own, uncorroborated anecdotes. Despite being provided with historical information and the opportunity to interview Dr. Morgan, KESQ has stated its intention to broadcast a story bringing into question the safety at LQMS.

In an effort to minimize any unnecessary stress or fear that this story may cause, we write to reassure you that the District has taken every step to ensure the safety of the learning and working environment at La Quinta Middle School. Please be assured that if the District had any legitimate, substantiated information calling the safety of the site into question, the District would, as it has historically done, promptly investigate and address those concerns. Such information has not materialized. The District has, and will continue to, vigilantly monitor LQMS and all of its campuses to ensure the safety and well-being of its students and staff including a new study based on factual information provided to the California Department of Health Services.

Should you have any questions or concerns, please contact: Mary Perry, Public Information Officer, 760-771-8502, mary.perry@desertsands.us.

Sincerely,

Gary Rutherford, Ed.D.
Superintendent

LQMS UPDATE: AT-A-GLANCE

- Questions on the likelihood of La Quinta Middle School being a “cancer cluster” were raised in 2004 and again in 2008.
- Following these concerns, Desert Sands Unified School District worked with the California Cancer Registry and the California Department of Health Services, among other agencies, to test and verify the safety of La Quinta Middle School.
- Results from the work of the above organizations indicated that there was no reason to believe that LQMS had an unusual number of cancer occurrences, resulting in conclusions that there was no cancer cluster and that there were no environmental hazards contributing to an unusual occurrence of cancer diagnoses.
- In a 2009 issue of the American Journal of Industrial Medicine, a letter to the editor drafted by Dr. John Morgan was published disputing a prior article regarding the safety of LQMS.
- In late January 2015, the original parties again contacted DSUSD claiming there were new cases that have not been submitted to the District for investigation.
- KESQ television met with a representative of the District and was provided with Dr. Morgan’s article that clearly sets forth his own research and analysis that disputes assertions that LQMS is unsafe. The District also responded to questions by KESQ and pointed out the absence of new, reliable information that would call into question the safety of the school.
- DSUSD is working with Dr. John Morgan to again provide an assessment on the situation based on incidences of childhood cancer within the geographic area of the school.
- As always, the safety of our students and staff remain our top priority and the District will work with state authorities to once again assist the State Department of Health Services to assess the situation.

