

FROM
THE OFFICE
OF THE
SUPERINTENDENT



March 14, 2019

Committee on Education and Labor
U.S. House of Representative
2176 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515-6100

“Underpaid Teachers and Crumbling Schools: How Underfunding Public Education
Shortchanges America’s Students”

*Additional Responses submitted by Dr. Sharon L. Contreras
Superintendent, Guilford County Schools*

QUESTION: Dr. Contreras, given the state of climate change and concerns about sustainability, has North Carolina or your district made collective or individual efforts to reduce schools’ carbon footprint?

RESPONSE: Guilford County Schools understands the impact our facilities have on the environment. The district uses a program called Energy WISE (Wisdom is Saving Energy and the Environment) to reduce energy usage throughout our schools. This student-led program aims to educate building occupants and the community about energy efficiency. Currently, 66 schools are participating in the program.

Each participating school forms an Energy WISE team and completes conservation activities around their school. Students patrol the building to monitor and reduce energy waste, and develop outreach projects to inform their peers and local community about the value of conservation. Energy WISE teams have an opportunity to submit portfolios of their activities to the National Energy Education Development (NEED) Project. GCS Energy WISE teams have received 34 NEED awards since the 2010-11 school year.

Guilford County Schools adheres to a modified summer schedule to reduce energy usage. During the summer months, staff work four 10-hour days so that buildings can remain unoccupied on Friday, Saturday and Sunday. Before leaving for the extended weekends, staff will setback temperatures in unoccupied spaces, unplug items to avoid phantom loads, close blinds and turn off computer monitors and lights. Similar protocols are followed during winter break and spring break.

In addition, facilities staff make every effort to update HVAC equipment and controls to more energy-efficient models whenever possible. Lamps and ballasts are replaced with LED units when the older equipment fails. When new construction does occur, buildings are designed to meet revised performance and sustainability guidelines.

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QUESTION: Dr. Contreras, a recent study by Harvard T. H. Chan School of Public Health and the Nutrition Policy Institute at the University of California found that only 25 states had a school drinking water testing initiative between January 1, 2016 and February 28, 2018. Even in the states that did test, the researchers found that there was no uniformity in how the testing was done, or what actions schools took as a result of testing for lead. Can you tell us about how your district works to ensure water testing or other procedures are effective?

RESPONSE: Our large, county-wide district has 126 schools spread out over 645.7 square miles. Our schools are located in urban, suburban and rural areas. While most are supplied by municipal water systems, some are supplied by well water. We also have several schools located on the campuses of colleges and universities. We have a combination of measures, including cooperating and working with local municipalities, to ensure that our students' drinking water meets appropriate safety standards. Each school utilizing well water is subject to State regulation and systematic testing. We are required to complete that testing and have done so for the many years those requirements have been in place. There are no state or local regulations relating to drinking water testing in schools that receive water from municipal systems, although the municipal water itself is tested by the water provider.

Following the heightened awareness of water safety issues raised in Flint, Michigan, GCS began a cooperative testing program in 2018 with our municipal water suppliers. All 99 schools using municipal water sources were initially tested for water quality – one centrally-located faucet at each school was tested. This was provided at no charge to the school district. There were follow-up tests at seven schools that showed evidence of lead levels above action levels of the Environmental Protection Agency's 3Ts guidance.

Because elevated lead levels were found in some schools, GCS established a system-wide water daily flushing process to limit the potential for exposure to elevated lead levels, and instituted a process for system-wide testing and remedial measures. We are still working through the process of testing all faucets and fountains used for drinking water or food preparation at each school, and taking appropriate remedial measures. Needless to say, the resources to test and remediate our water fixtures were not provided to us by any of our funding bodies and we continue to struggle to free up resources for this important task. The GCS website, gcsnc.com, includes information for parents, students and the public about our water quality test results at the special webpage designated Water Quality Protocols.

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