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Mold at Nathan Hale High leads to tests and repairs

Stained ceiling tiles, other water damage addressed by district

By DEBORAH BACH, SEATTLE POST-INTELLIGENCER REPORTER
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Jennifer Aspelund took her son North Aspelund Jr., 16, out of North Seattle's Nathan Hale High School because she feared that his compromised immune system could be put at risk by mold at the school. North has battled leukemia since age 4. Photo: Karen Ducey/Seattle Post-Intelligencer

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Jennifer Aspelund considered [Nathan Hale High School](#) the perfect choice for her son, North -- it had a nurse and it was close to a hospital, important considerations for a child with ongoing complications from cancer.

But she pulled 16-year-old North out of Hale recently, fearing that his compromised immune system could be put at risk because of mold at the [North Seattle school](#).

North was diagnosed with leukemia at age 4, relapsed four years later, then endured a bone marrow transplant and the removal of a cancerous kidney.

"Here you have this kid who's got special needs in with all this mold," Aspelund said. "Had we known there was mold in there, that would not have been a choice that we would have taken."

Aspelund said she contacted the district in the fall after noticing an odd smell in the school library. District officials ordered a consultant to take air samples and test for mold in several locations, and conducted walk-throughs at the school, said [Seattle Public Schools Risk Manager Richard Staudt](#).

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Ceilings in several classrooms have visible signs of water damage and mold, Staudt said, and tests detected the presence of several types of mold.

An area above a northeast stairwell contains *Stachybotrys atra*, a greenish-black mold that typically grows on material with a high cellulose and low nitrogen content, such as paper or gypsum board, in areas with condensation or water damage.

A report prepared for the district by toxicology consulting firm GlobalTox said air tests showed no signs of *Stachybotrys* but detected strains of *Aspergillus*, a more common type of mold, at lower levels than are typically found outdoors.

According to the [Centers for Disease Control](#), numerous types of mold are found in homes and buildings and do not typically pose a serious health risk.

But people with chronic respiratory problems or those exposed to large amounts of mold in occupational settings may be more sensitive and can experience severe symptoms, such as fever or difficulty breathing.

Both *Stachybotrys* and *Aspergillus*, which produce potentially harmful toxins under certain conditions, create a risk of pulmonary infections that can spread to other organs, the [CDC](#) advises.

The GlobalTox report recommended no further testing at the school.

"Air sampling data cannot be used to determine the risk of potential health effects of mold spores, and therefore, this sampling does not provide any additional information to help determine the need for response," the report concluded.

During a presentation to the [Seattle School Board](#) last week, Chief Operating Officer [Mark Green](#) said the district replaced more than 700 water-damaged ceiling tiles at the school when it got a new roof last year, and removed mold where it was found, with the exception of the problematic stairwell. The area was not easily reachable, Green said, so the mold was covered with shellac to contain it.

Staudt said the district will now replace tiles in that area, as well as in an audio booth in the school's radio station, and in three classrooms on the second floor over the winter break.

Loose tiles in another classroom will be replaced, he said, and the area between the ceiling and roof will be inspected to determine the extent of the mold growth.

"Depending on what's found, we'll make a further decision on what our next steps should be," Staudt said.

State Rep. [Maralyn Chase](#), D-Edmonds, went on a recent walk-through at the school and said she was shocked to see missing ceiling tiles and water stains.

"This is disgusting," she said. "We would not allow an apartment house owner to maintain his property in that condition. We have standards for everything except our school buildings."

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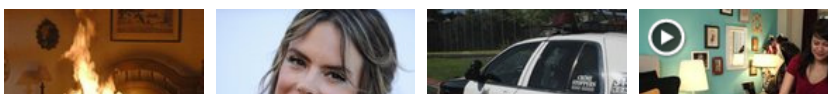
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