

Report on Inspection of Hunter College Campus Schools facilities

At Silberman School of Social Work, Hunter College

2180 3rd Avenue | Thursday, October 1, 2020 | 12:30 – 2:30 PM

Union: Barbara Bowen (PSC President), Emanuela Calderon (HCCS), David Kotelchuck (Technical Advisor) Eliza Kuberska (HCCS), Viri Pettersen (AFT NE Regional Director), Ross Pinkerton (HCCS), Caitlin Samuel (HCCS), Norman Zuckerman (Technical Advisor, Icahn-Mt. Sinai School of Medicine)

CUNY: Hector Batista (CUNY COO), Howard Apsan, Fabian Bedolla, Joe Feltcham, Joel Fisch, Tony Fisher, Myles Kehoe, Rolland Matten, Jennifer Raab (President, Hunter College), Lisa Siegmann, Andy Silver and Ali Vadavarz

Initially participants received a printed handout from CUNY, developed by Genesys Engineering, listing all the rooms allocated for HCCS at Silberman with their uses, estimated maximum occupancies and maximum ventilation provided. (Attached.) After introductions by Presidents Raab and Bowen the group first went to the rooftop to examine the HVAC system units.

ROOFTOP HVAC SYSTEM: Here Genesys engineers showed us the row of air supply cabinet units and, with building staff help, opened up the doors of a few of them to allow us to observe the filter systems in place. The filters we observed were the older MERV 8 filters, in place since June 2019 and standard in public buildings before the pandemic. These are now ready to be replaced by the now pandemic-preferred MERV 13 filters, several of which were on hand on the roof for our observation and the remainder stored in the basement and loading dock – and observed later by our PSC group. Thus these filters are on hand to be installed this weekend in all air supply units before HCCS use. After this installation additional measuring devices will be installed to tell building staff when the MERV 13 filters have to be changed. In addition the computer systems operating the HVAC system, as well as the related manual valves, have already been re-set to provide 100 percent outside air to all rooms in Silberman. Finally on the roof there is a single central exhaust system for air from the building, which was observed. **Promised and delivered:** Genesys engineers agreed to send the union a written copy of the ventilation procedures and results for the room ventilation measurements in the rooms HCCS will be using and provided in the initial CUNY handout.

FIFTH FLOOR: The group proceeded to the fifth floor, where a suite of 14 rooms are set aside for HCCS use: a nursing station, a waiting room, two medical isolation rooms and individual offices for 10 HCCS faculty and staff. Inspection concerns raised by union inspectors:

- Neither the nursing station nor the isolation rooms are yet set at negative room air pressure, as medically recommended, but administrators promised to do so in the near future. Also none of these rooms had HEPA-filtered air circulation units, however we were told that the nurse's office falls under a different set of protocols and is being

administered by the NYC DOHMH. There was a new portable sink set up in the nurse's office, but it did not currently have soap

- All rooms on this floor are carpeted, including those for medical use. When these rooms need to be cleaned, Pres. Raab said that professional cleaners would be called in, and Mr. Zuckerman urged that the cleaners be required to use HEPA filters for vacuuming.
- Signs for the numbers of persons allowed in each room were posted on HCCS rooms, but a number of signage issues were raised by union inspectors: Inconsistency between capacity figures on classroom signs (nr of students and teachers) and office signs (nr in office regularly, usually one person, but not those there occasionally for counseling, illness or visiting with faculty members). The corridor outside of nurse's room had no occupancy number sign, even though there were two chairs for people to wait. Noted: No capacity signs on doors of social work faculty offices, also on this floor.
- Teachers expressed concern that "crisis rooms" for students in crisis had capacity of one; and were concerned about isolating a student in trouble. Administrators described the 5th floor counseling rooms as places where students can calm down on their own. If they need to meet with a counselor, that would happen in another room (317), which has an occupancy of 2. HCCS teachers asked the administrator what would happen if there were a conflict between two students that required a counselor; he indicated that that is something that still needs to be figured out.
- It was not clear whether there was a respiratory protection program for nurses. At a minimum the program should include, fit testing and training for anyone using a respirator before school begins.
- Despite CUNY's claim that everything was set up, there was no soap in the dispenser at the sink.
- Kitchenette on 5th floor will not be used—but has no sign or yellow tape indicating that—must be done.
- The fourth floor will not be in use, except for one office. Access from stairwell will be prevented by lock, but there is no sign on the door indicating that floor is off-limits.

THIRD FLOOR: Twelve rooms for classes, faculty space and one for student organizations, as well as outdoor and indoor lunchroom eating spaces.

- All classrooms have portable air circulation units with HEPA filters (as promised in the Hunter Re-opening Plan and later mandated via a court injunction) and desks are arranged appropriately to accommodate healthful pandemic separation. The air circulation units are in addition to the 100 percent of fresh air provided by the building's

HVAC system. All classrooms on this floor were viewed and most entered by PSC inspection persons. In several classrooms air supply units were successfully tested for positive air flow using the union's portable anemometer unit. All classrooms clean and in good physical condition.

- This floor houses both an indoor and outdoor lunchroom facility. The outdoor facility is a pleasant, clean eating area with properly distanced, covered seating, and the indoor facility at the other end of a corridor is next to open doors, which of course will be closed during winter months. A pedestal disinfectant stand in the outdoor eating area was a bit unstable and needs repair. Air-flow from ceiling in this lunch area, access to which requires a lift, will be tested on Friday, as will that from the auditorium for similar reasons. Promise: CUNY administrators promised to report results to union by Monday, Oct. 5.

Other issues of concern on this floor to PSC inspection personnel:

- Concerns about air circulation in lunchrooms where students will be eating without masks
- Classroom 330 has a posted maximum total capacity of 19 and there is not much clearance for teachers beyond the 16 students at their desks.
- Classroom 327 has a signed room capacity for 10, but the Genesys handout says ventilation is provided only for 11 persons. If two teachers are present or a teacher and guest speaker, ventilation would be inadequate. Can ventilation provided to this classroom be increased?

SECOND FLOOR: Nine rooms for classes and faculty use, as well as an indoor lunch area. Classrooms all have air circulation units to supplement fresh air provided by HVAC system. All classrooms properly staged for use during pandemic period. Note that rooms 219 and 221 do not have enough air circulation provided for the estimated maximum number of persons in them, according to the initial CUNY handout.

The lunch area is indoors with a high ceiling and linear diffuser above for air-flow. Additional air is also provided from open doors at end of corridor, but this will change when weather changes. Measurement of air-flow in the lunch area requires a lift and will be tested on Friday. As noted above, CUNY promises to report results by Monday.

FIRST FLOOR: Primarily library, auditorium and small lounge area. Concerns regarding the library include:

- Upper level of library has serious trip-hazards around the seating area. Administrators duly noted these and promised to seek remediation of these hazards.
- Some trip hazards observed were covers for laptops outlets and exposed wire on the floor.
- In the library classroom the distance between the first row of students and the Smart board is less than 6 feet and does not leave the teacher room to move if she/he would like to do more than project onto it. The student chairs need to be moved further back.

- There is also some question about whether the ventilation system in the library is sufficient to support the occupancy number in classroom space.
- Lower level of library needs more stanchions with tape to mark off areas that are off-limit.
- There was a question about the occupancy number in library classroom space.

The auditorium is not yet open for student or general use, and thus no sign indicating maximum capacity has been posted. An appropriately distanced student lounge area with seats and tables has been set up just outside the auditorium. The auditorium could not be inspected because they did not have the equipment to lift them high enough to measure air-flow. We were promised results this weekend.

BASEMENT AREA: During the inspection, members of the group examined the remaining elements of the HVAC system, those not on the rooftop. These supply fresh air to the basement, the auditorium and the library. The MERV 8 pre-filters and MERV-13 post-filters had already been installed in these units, and our group observed them in place. Similarly when the new filters are installed on the rooftop during the next day or so, all the air supply units will also use MERV 8 pre-filters to remove larger particles from the incoming fresh air followed by the MERV 13 filters to remove the finer particles, including virus particles themselves and the small particles on which the viruses adhere.

Student lab: The only area the HCCS students and faculty will use on this floor is the student lab used both for chemistry and biology. This lab area was one of great concern to the union inspectors prior to our inspection since it is the only part of the Silberman Building being used for an educational purpose not included in the building's original design. Thus, we were pleased to find a brand-new lab facility set up for 18 students, appropriately spaced, and an air supply sufficient for 69 persons (to cope with emergencies or noxious emissions). The lab design is relatively standard with long worktables containing imbedded vacuum and gas lines. One failing, the HCCS teachers noted, was the limited supply of sinks – with only one full-size sink in the corner of the room and several of limited-capacity at table ends. Also, the location of teacher's computer hookup is too close to one student chair. Appropriately there was an eye wash unit installed, which, however, still lacks a drain, and two doors for rapid egress during an emergency.

NOTE: Basement bathrooms (occupancy of 3 for women and 2 for men) should be sanitized every 90 minutes. They are not at the levels of cleanliness of the bathrooms on the upper floors.

GENERAL BUILDING-WIDE OBSERVATIONS AMONG PSC INSPECTORS:

- There were wipes in every room checked and all observed sanitizer dispensers were full.
- All water fountains had caution tape on their catch basins, but all of those observed had flowing water.
- Classroom spaces each contain heating/cooling units that also recirculate air within a given room.

GENERAL PROTOCOL AND WHOLE BUILDING ISSUES: As might be expected, a number of issues of broader scope arose among PSC persons. Among them were:

- The system will have to be adjusted in colder weather, and we want to be made aware of new tests and changes before they occur, as those plans are made.
- Water testing: We were told that CUNY Central has a monthly water-testing contract; the PSC needs access to those results. CUNY said this could only be discussed in a labor-management meeting, and PSC members were urged to do this by union officers and advisors through an HCCS chapter health and safety committee. President Raab committed to holding labor/management meetings, and President Bowen committed to helping to develop a detailed agenda of remaining safety concerns.
- Legionella testing: CUNY officials said that they have an automated continuous chemical treatment system that should prevent legionella from growing. We were not provided specific information on this system during this inspection, but again this can be requested via a union-wide or chapter health and safety committee.
- HEPA filters were noted in every classroom noted in the affidavit CUNY filed with the NYS Supreme Court, with the exception of the auditorium, which was not visited because testing in that space had not been completed. The classroom air circulation devices were loud and might interfere with teaching. Teachers should be given advice about settings of filters for maximum safety, whether filters can be turned off temporarily during class, etc.
- To help reduce virus levels in air, humidity levels are recommended to be kept above 40%. CUNY engineering officers acknowledged that there are no specific humidifying systems in operation but said that “reheaters” within the HVAC system can help to stabilize the humidity to some extent during cold, dry periods.
- One elevator did not have a limited capacity sign, while two other elevators did.
- The disinfectant schedule in general areas and classrooms must be provided to the union and posted publicly.

CLOSING REVIEW OF SILBERMAN HVAC SYSTEM BY CUNY CONSULTANTS:

At the conclusion of the inspection, CUNY’s Genesys consultants discussed their work modifying Silberman’s HVAC system for operations during the pandemic. Initially they reviewed and validated the building’s original ventilation design drawings, as well as the current NYC Building Codes. They then estimated that the newly mandated six-foot distances between students would reduce the student population density by 40%. Thus, if they continued to operate the existing HVAC system at the same circulating levels as before, they would thereby be able to deliver a greater volume of air to each current student in this smaller student body – and this is what they have done. In addition, the building now uses 100% fresh air, zero recirculated air. As a result, the system is now generally able to deliver 15 cubic feet per person. In almost every instance, the safe capacity of persons based on the air delivered to that room is now larger than the listed maximum capacity of students and teachers.

GENERAL CONCLUSIONS: The Silberman School of Social Work building is one of the newest buildings in the CUNY system. Since 2009, it has housed offices and classrooms for PSC members. Over these years, members of the PSC’s Health and Safety Committee have heard few complaints from our members about their working conditions in this building. This is not to say that there have not been long-standing problems – some of which have been observed during this inspection. The complaints reported in the past concern breakdowns of the elevators and poor temperature control during both hot and cold weather.

During the current inspection of Silberman, whose focus has been accommodation to indoor learning for high-school students during the COVID pandemic, we have focused first on the HVAC system and how it had been modified and adapted to meet our current needs. We have observed the major working units of this system from the rooftop to the basement. We have observed the recommended MERV 13 air filters in place in the basement units and their presence onsite for installation on roof units over this weekend. We have seen that the building's HVAC system has already been converted to 100% fresh air and have observed measurable air flow from all classroom air-supply units in selected classrooms throughout the building designated for HCCS use. We have also observed the presence and operation of air-cleaning units, all with MERV 8 pre-filters and MERV 13 main filters, in every designated HCCS classroom. Finally, we heard a report from the Genesys consulting engineers about their work on modifying and adapting the building's HVAC system to current needs and received written documentation of their activities. Thus, we are convinced that the HVAC system now in place and operational at Silberman is adequate to protect the health and safety of 9th and 10th grade HCCS high-school students for indoor learning.

The second basic element of protection for these students and HCCS teachers and staff is the presence of adequate space to allow for proper distancing in classrooms, offices and public spaces such as study areas and lunchrooms. During our inspection we observed that most classrooms had desks in proper numbers and alignments consistent with the degree of ventilation of these rooms. The relatively few without desks were empty and ready to have desks put in place when needed. We were also delivered written confirmation from CUNY at the beginning of the inspection (attached) of the maximum number of persons who could safely use each room and the maximum number of persons the room's ventilation could safely support. In almost all cases the maximum number supported by the room ventilation was larger than that designated maximum capacity of persons. In only a few was this not the case, and these few were pointed out by the PSC inspectors during the inspection – after which administration officials agreed to lower designated room capacity and change related signage.

The third important element of COVID protection is of course proper masking of all students, faculty and staff, and facilities to support proper personal hygiene. Masking requirements are mandated for public education in New York City and must be maintained by and for the HCCS community. During the inspection PSC observers noted wipes in every room checked and all observed sanitizer dispensers were full. Also, virtually all bathrooms visited were clean and under negative pressure, as required – only the basement bathrooms as noted need improved cleaning. Toilets did not have covers, however, as recommended during the COVID pandemic.

The PSC inspectors certainly found, as expected, many issues still needing attention and further action to protect the health and safety of our members and the students in this program, among them for example corrected signage for some offices and classrooms, as noted above. Also, there are still issues to be resolved about the nursing station and nearby isolation rooms regarding placing these rooms under negative air pressure, as well as room signage and maintenance of appropriate cleanliness procedures. Detailed concerns are listed at length above in this report. These issues should be corrected before HCCS classes in the building begin,

But the most important issue for the faculty and staff, who are members of the PSC, as well as HCCS students and their parents, is whether the facilities at the Silberman School of Social Work are ready to be used safely for in-person learning. Our judgment following this inspection is that the classrooms, offices and public spaces designated for use by HCCS students, faculty and staff are now adequately safe and healthy for in-person learning during this difficult period.

As might be expected, other issues of health and safety concern remain, but we believe many of these can be resolved by HCCS students, faculty and staff after in-person learning begins. Also, faculty and staff have available to them labor-management avenues for issue resolution, and it is essential that the HCCS administration meet as necessary and respond promptly to safety issues as they are raised. They also can mobilize a chapter health and safety committee to continue their efforts and draw upon the CUNY-wide PSC for support and assistance.

Submitted,

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