

Primrose Elementary School facing serious water issues

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Parents of students at Primrose Elementary School are calling on the Upper Grand District School Board (UGDSB) to be more transparent as the local school continues to face water problems.

"We feel completely disappointed in the school board and we feel like there is a distinct lack of transparency in the communications that they have sent to us and to all parents," said Karen Kennedy, co-chair of Primrose's School Council. "We have been fighting this for so long and we are fed up that they didn't do what they said they would do when they had the opportunity."

On Sept. 8, Primrose principal Marianne Millsap, issued a statement notifying families that the decision had been made to close the school for the day "due to water concerns at the school and a lack of available portable toilets."

According to updates from the UGDSB on Sept. 14 and Sept. 16, the existing well for the school was determined to no longer be sufficient to supply the water flow needed. A long-term solution of digging a new well was provided to families.

In the meantime, the school board said portable toilets and alternative water sources would be utilized as short-term solutions.

"I'm obviously mad about it. I feel like it's not fair that these kids have had two very difficult years of a pandemic and now this," said Kennedy, who has two children attending Primrose. "It just seems like it's the bare minimum, they're providing the bare minimum for those kids and I'm shocked because of where we live."

While the water problems at Primrose may seem new, the water system at the local elementary school officially showed signs of failure dating back to the previous school year.

In May of last year, the school began receiving shipments of clean filtered drinking water due to high sodium content.

"As a parent I wouldn't be caught dead drinking it and we were expecting our kids to," said Kennedy. "It was the result of letters that got us drinkable water, because the board must have recognized that this was a serious problem."

According to the Primrose School Council, a solution via reverse osmosis at the filtering stations was proposed to the school board in 2019 as a solution to the drinking water problem.

"Nothing was done," said Kennedy.

During the same school year, concerned parents sent letters, which the UGDSB confirmed were received, regarding the water pressure.

Kennedy told the Free Press at the time teachers were reporting having to pour buckets of water in toilets to allow them to flush.

In an email to the Free Press, the UGDSB said an investigation into the water taste and pressure were completed over the summer.

"However, the well water level dropping as low as it did was a new development that happened at the beginning of the school year," wrote Heather Loney, communications manager for UGDSB.

Kennedy said she believes the water issues at the school are the result of the over capacity in students. Built in 1994 with the

capacity for 377 students the school now has 600 students.

?I think the school was functioning with a smaller population of students. They readjusted the boundaries about three or four years ago and we got a bunch of new students drawn into our school that were not there before,? said Kennedy. ?We are a tiny country school that is on a well and a septic, the system cannot handle that.?

The UGDSB said it would not provide details on how much is being spent financially to pay contractors and service companies through the short-term solution.

A timeline for how long the process will take to fix the water problems has yet to be provided, but reports indicate upwards to six months.

The Shelburne Free Press is following for future developments.