



Wrestlers restrict their diets to shape up for the mat, see page 17.

H₂O or H₂No?

Rusty, Discolored Water Has Concerning Lead Levels

By XAVIER RIVERA
Contributing Editor

Hundreds of students drink from school water fountains, unaware of the quality of the water that they are putting into their bodies - not knowing whether or not they are consuming rusty, lead-filled water.

Samples were collected from 24 RHS water fountains at 10:45 a.m. on Jan. 26. Seven of them had a visibly yellow tint to them with floating solids in the water and settled solids at the bottom of the sample container. Samples were sent to Sheppard T. Powell Associates, LLC labs.

Water from fountains next to rooms 1020, 1039, 1101, and 2065 had lead amounts that surpassed the EPA action level of 0.015 ppm.

According to the World Health Organization, lead can damage the nervous and reproductive systems and the kidneys, and is especially unsafe for young children and pregnant women.

Jim Roenick, a water treatment contractor and chemist for Georgetown University, helped process and interpret the samples. He explained that the yellow tint usually comes from suspended metals in the water (iron, copper and/or other metals). "Whether it's a copper pipe or a steel pipe, it's going to corrode. So now, when you turn the water fountain on, you get those products in the water," Roenick said.

The more a water fountain is used, the more the water gets to run and metals are flushed out of the system. For the less frequently used fountains, the water sits inside the pipes for longer periods of time, increasing the chances that those pipes will rust. These metals then leach into the water that the users will consume, Roenick explained.

Roenick also explained that the farther a fountain is from the main water line and the more twists and turns the pipes take, it is more likely the water will sit and rust the pipes, creating suspended particles in it.

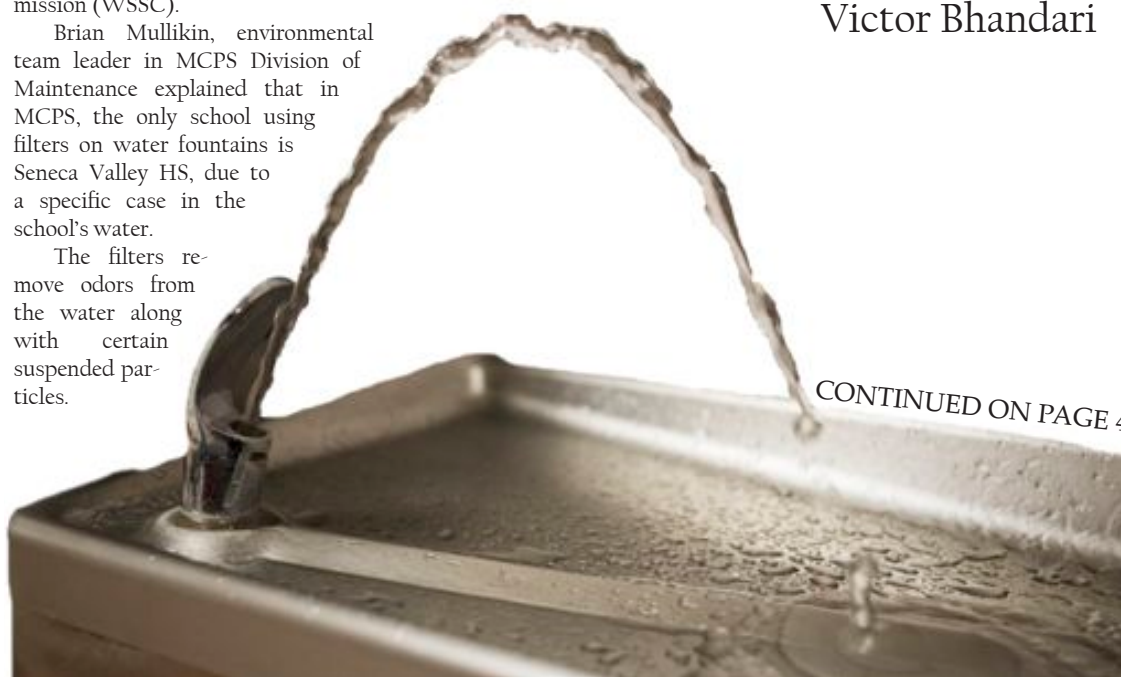
RHS' water, along with most MCPS school water, comes from the Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission (WSSC).

Brian Mullikin, environmental team leader in MCPS Division of Maintenance explained that in MCPS, the only school using filters on water fountains is Seneca Valley HS, due to a specific case in the school's water.

The filters remove odors from the water along with certain suspended particles.

“We just clean the top of the water fountains just to keep it clean, but inside - the mechanical part - no.”

--RHS Director of Facilities
Victor Bhandari



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Xavier Rivera -- The Rampage



Meklit Bekele -- The Rampage

Superintendent Dr. Joshua Starr sits down for an interview Nov. 13 with Rampage Editor-in-Chief Greta Anderson. Dr. Starr will step down from his position Feb. 16.

Superintendent to Resign After Pressure from Board

By MATT OLSON
News Managing Editor

Although Superintendent Dr. Joshua Starr's four-year contract expires in June, he is resigning from his position effective Feb. 16.

The Feb. 3 announcement came soon after the publishing of the news reports that at least four members of the eight-member board were not going to vote for him to have his contract renewed. Dr. Starr would have needed at least five votes to remain the county superintendent.

The Board has decided that MCPS chief operating officer Larry Bowers will become the interim superintendent until the end of the 2015 school year, starting Feb. 16. The Board will form a search committee to find a new superintendent for the 2015-2016 school year.

Patricia O'Neill, MCPS Board of Education President, said in a message, "We believe that Bowers is well-suited to lead the district in this time of transition ... he under-

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School Earns Second Highest Increase in Graduation Rate

By AMANDA KABONERO
News Managing Editor

Rockville High School has established itself as one of the most rapidly improving high schools in the county, having recently been ranked second in MCPS for graduation rate increases over three school years. For the 2013-14 school year, RHS had a graduation rate of 90.1 percent.

Superintendent Dr. Joshua Starr released a memorandum to members of the Board of Education detailing the increasing graduation rates in MCPS for the 2013-

2014 school year, which rose 2.9 percent since 2011, to 89.7 percent in 2014, higher than the 86.4 percent rate in the state of Maryland.

College and Career Counselor Janet Harris said, "Now students are more aware of the importance of education, whether it's going to MC or going to a four-year school ... because once you walk out of the doors of a high school and you have no plan, you're sort of stuck, it is just like trying to climb out of a hole."

RHS is ranked second in terms of graduation rate increases from the 2011-12 to the 2013-14 school year. RHS had an increase

of 7.0 percent following Watkins Mill HS which had the highest increase at 7.2.

"I'm glad that the graduation rate is up at Rockville because it reflects the work of the students," junior Charith Wickramaratne said.

Programs like Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) and Achieving Collegiate Excellence and Success (ACES) help students take the necessary steps for collegiate success. These programs have played a role in the rising graduation rates at RHS and other MCPS graduation rates. In late November, Dr. Starr visited RHS to see the development of the ACES program within the school.

Principal Billie-Jean Bensen said, "We're going to continue to build our ACES program and make it become a standard within the building for the students who the program is designed for."

In the 2013-14 school year, the growing graduation rate amongst students exemplifies the shrinking achievement gap. African American students had a 5.1 percent increase and Hispanic students had a 4.7 percent increase over four years. Both Hispanic and African American MCPS students have graduation



Camila Torres -- The Rampage

Principal Billie-Jean Bensen hands alumnus David Nguyen (2014) a diploma at last year's graduation ceremony, held at Strathmore Hall.

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