

Coloring Contest Voting Now Open!
HOW TO VOTE: Starting on August 1, 2020 – Head over to www.facebook.com/TBRNewsMedia to check out the galleries and vote for your favorite photo in each age category! The photo with the most likes in each category will be declared the winner.
Deadline to vote is August 13, 2020, after which winners will be officially announced.
Winners will be featured in the Times Beacon Record and in local Bank of America financial centers.

A yellow banner with a red border. On the left and right sides, there are illustrations of colorful pencils. In the center, there is a small image of a coloring page showing a landscape with a boat and trees. The text is in blue and pink.

Northport Middle School Closes: Benzene Found in Septic Systems/Relocation Info. Updated

Environment & Nature Times of Huntington Times of Huntington-Northport Town of Huntington

by Donna Deedy - January 18, 2020



Northport Middle School closed after contamination concerns. File photo

Northport-East Northport Union Free School District Superintendent Rob Banzer has decided, effective immediately, to close Northport Middle School for the remainder of the 2019-20 school year after P.W. Grosser Consulting, the environmental firm who has been testing soil around the school property, found on Saturday elevated levels of benzene in two separate septic systems on site.

Classes for the Northport Middle School students were cancelled for Tuesday, Jan. 21 and Wed. Jan. 22, and will resume on Jan. 23 in new locations.

“It is important to note that preliminary air testing indicated no observable detection of volatile organic compounds or VOCs, which includes benzene, inside the building, or from soil samples, as well as at the source of the septic tanks,” Banzer said in an email notice to parents sent at 4:00 p.m. Saturday afternoon. “However, in the best interest of students and staff and in consideration of ongoing testing and remediation, the building will be closed for the balance of the school year.”

During an unscheduled workshop with board members Wednesday, Jan. 15, Banzer presented and reviewed a decisive contingency relocation plan for Northport Middle School students that ultimately became necessary to implement just days later.

The plan, developed with goals identified by all stakeholders, maintains the school's curriculum, allows for spring sports, and enables students to access science labs. It was considered the best, least disruptive option.

As discussed during the workshop, transportation is feasible, but may require that some students change buses at the William J. Brosnan School building on Laurel Avenue. Additional drivers and buses might alleviate the need for transferring, Banzer said, but could be tough to secure.

“Although a great deal of the plan is already in place, we will need Tuesday and Wednesday to refine the logistics for staff and students, including scheduling, transportation and food service,” Banzer stated in his note to parents.

As explained to parents and reviewed in the Jan. 15 workshop:

- Northport Middle School 8th graders will relocate to a special wing of the high school.
- Northport Middle School 7th graders will relocate to East Northport Middle School.

Originally, Northport Middle School 6th graders were expected to be relocated to either Norwood Avenue or Bellerose Elementary schools. But, as explained in a letter sent to parents Jan. 20, the district opted to keep all of the 6th graders together at Norwood Avenue school. The gifted and talented program will instead be relocated to Bellerose

Suffolk County Department of Health Services requires that the site be remediated to remove the benzene. The health department also requires remediation for high levels of mercury and silver found in the leaching pools outside of the schools G-wing. Remediation plans are still under development.

Many parents have been conflicted about sending their children to the school. Students and staff have complained about unidentified foul odors that regularly surface inside the building. Some parents, retired teachers and community members blame chemicals previously identified on school grounds as a potential cause for their illnesses. As the environmental investigation continues, some parents are breathing a sign of relief.

“We are happy to know that the testing can be completed with the children and staff relocated to safe locations,” said Bethany Watts.



Donna Deedy

