



July 26, 2022

Dear Members of the Committee:

The Departments of Environmental Quality (DEQ), Public Health and Human Services (DPHHS), Commerce, and the Office of Public Instruction (OPI) have collaborated on an overview of lead remediation in our Montana schools. An update from each department can be found below. Attached to this letter are timelines from DEQ and OPI as well as a map of schools that have completed testing and are in the process of testing.

Department of Environmental Quality

Montana Department of Environmental Quality implements the Lead in School Program on behalf of the Department of Public Health and Human Services. DEQ manages the day-to-day operations of the program, develops the program documentation, maintains the database and program webpage (<https://deq.mt.gov/water/programs/dw-lead>), provides trainings, and is the main point of contact for schools. DEQ also has funding assistance opportunities. DEQ manages the Water Infrastructure Improvements for the Nation (WIIN) grant (\$722,000) that covers all the initial sample analysis costs for schools. DEQ provided the funding (\$40,000) for the Lead Remediation Reimbursement Program that OPI manages. DEQ also contracted two technical service providers, MT Rural Water and Midwest Assistance, to provide technical assistance to schools. DEQ works closely with DPHHS, OPI, and the Department of Commerce to provide communication and assistance to schools.

Department of Public Health and Human Services

In January 2020, DPHHS adopted amendments to the administrative rules regarding the matter of health in Montana schools. The amendments included requirements pertaining to reducing lead in schools' drinking water. It requires all schools whose curriculum satisfies the basic instructional program approved by the Montana Board of Public Education to sample for lead. School water sampling costs are currently covered by the DEQ through the EPA Water Infrastructure Improvements for the Nation grant. There are various funding sources to support remediation costs and more funding opportunities may be available soon. DPHHS and DEQ regularly disseminate joint messages to school districts, superintendents, and education advocacy partners about the sources of remediation funding, school testing numbers, and the importance of testing for [lead in schools](#).



Department of Commerce

In its capacity directing the outreach efforts for the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) water and sewer program, the Department of Commerce is contacting counties, towns, and cities that have remaining ARPA water and sewer funding available (from minimum allocation grants outlined in [HB 632](#) and/or Local Fiscal Recovery Funds) to alert them if they have schools within their boundaries that still need to test for lead or that have tested and need assistance with remediation. ARPA funding can be used for lead testing and remediation in school buildings. Through the ARPA Outreach Program, the Department of Commerce can provide technical assistance to help schools and local governments access ARPA or other funding (including ESSER and WIIN) for lead testing and remediation. To access this technical assistance, school and local government officials should visit arpa.mt.gov and then click on the red “CONTACT US” button on the opening page and their request will go directly to Commerce who will respond as soon as possible (typically within one business day or less).

Office of Public Instruction

In total, the OPI received \$593,413,931 of federal [ESSER](#) funds with a funding period starting March 27, 2020, and ending September 30, 2024. ESSER funds are targeted for Montana schools to safely reopen and sustain safe operations of schools while meeting the academic, social, emotional, and mental health needs of students resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic.

[Lead remediation](#) messaging includes:

- Monthly ESSER bulletins and webinars
- [ESSER Funds Management Conference](#) is on August 9
- Monthly allocations and expenditures to school trustees

Sincerely,

Greg Montgomery, Drinking Water Scientist, Department of Environmental Quality
Dawn Nelson, Toxicologist, Department of Health and Human Services
Cody Ferguson, Community Planning Program Manager, Department of Commerce
Elsie Arntzen, State Superintendent, Office of Public Instruction