January 16, 2026

Dear Rainier Beach High School Community,

We know concerns about the safety of the new Rainier Beach High School have been raised by a recent KUOW news story

While the story sounds alarming, we want to assure you that Seattle Public Schools (SPS) followed standard safety guidelines when designing and building the school.

The story is correct that there was a recommendation to test for methane before the school opened. That test was missed, and we apologize.

We are confident that the building is safe. Recent testing by SPS showed no methane inside the school. We will continue testing for methane. We are also working to hire an outside company to do testing to provide extra reassurance. SPS is committed to sharing test results with the community.

All recommended safety measures were included during building construction. Below, we explain those safety steps and how they were put in place.

If you have questions or concerns, please use Let's Talk to reach the project team.

Sincerely,

Dr. Kurt Buttleman

Assistant Superintendent of Finance

Chief Operations Officer

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## How SPS worked to make sure that the new school is safe

### During Planning

- SPS hired Maul Foster & Alongi (MFA), a well-known environmental engineering firm, to study the school site.
    - MFA found peat soil in some areas.
    - Because peat can produce methane, extra tests were done.
    - Methane levels were below the threshold action levels in all but one test area. One test area was slightly above threshold action levels.
- MFA gave SPS recommendations for ways to reduce the risk of methane.

- These recommendations follow state and federal safety guidelines.
    - Install a system to vent methane from under the building.
    - Install thick waterproof barrier under the building.
    - Test for methane regularly after construction.

**Design and Construction**

SPS included all MFA recommendations when building the school.

1. **Methane Venting System**
    - A venting system was installed under the building's concrete foundation.
    - The system safely moves any methane up and out above the roof.
    - This keeps methane from entering the building.
2. **Waterproof Barrier**
    - A thick waterproof membrane was installed under the foundation.
    - This membrane blocks moisture and methane from entering the building.

Quality checks were done during construction.

- MFA reviewed the design and installation of the venting system.
- Building Envelope Technology & Research (BET&R), a building envelope consulting firm, monitored the waterproof barrier to confirm it was fully sealed.

**Monitoring and Testing**

MFA recommended testing for methane before people moved into the building. Due to the phased opening, this step was missed. Testing has now begun.

- Testing done on Dec. 9, 2025, found no methane inside the school.
- The testing device checks for all explosive gases, including methane.

To give the community added confidence, SPS will hire with MFA to continue regular testing over the next year. After that, SPS will follow a long-term testing plan based on MFA's findings.