

Statement from Norfolk Public Schools

First and foremost, the staff of Crossroads School and Norfolk Public Schools are deeply saddened by the death of a staff member from that school. The individual was held in high regard and will be deeply missed. We extend our heartfelt sympathy to the family.

In the midst of this tragedy it appears Mr. Thomas Calhoun, president of the Norfolk Federation of Teachers, has taken issue with how the school followed up with employees who had been in contact with the individual. While we understand his advocacy position, NPS strongly disagrees with the characterization that Crossroads' administration mishandled the notification.

In consultation with Principal Dr. Kristen Nichols, this is what took place:

1. On June 28, Crossroads' administration notified via telephone every staff member who worked with the individual who had tested positive for COVID-19 or who was known to be in the building when he was present. These four staff members who worked directly with the individual who had tested positive were advised to self-quarantine for 14 days and were encouraged to make an appointment with their physician to get tested. Initially, a supervisor advised these staff members that they should report to work. However, the principal was able to correct that mistake immediately and thus none of them reported to work for 14 days.
2. Dr. Nichols was notified of the death on July 3 and all school staff were notified via telephone and told guidance counselors were available should staff members need help grieving.
3. It is our understanding that Mr. Calhoun has noted that Crossroads staff were told not to tell anyone about the death. This is a mischaracterization. The Health Insurance and Portability Accountability Act (HIPAA) has stringent privacy strictures. Staff was reminded that they should not discuss specific health details in this case for that reason. In addition, release of information about a death of an individual is in a family's purview not the employer's nor its employees'. Staff members were asked to adhere to that courtesy.

Tonight the Norfolk School Board will review three options for the opening of school with the goal of making a final determination in August. We acknowledge that we are not operating in a risk-free environment. However, the goal of Norfolk Public Schools is to do whatever possible to help ensure the safety of students and staff while providing students with an excellent education.