

# Toxic vapors plague Gowanus-area school

## Trouble in the air

**PUTRID:** Officials aren't certain if the polluted Gowanus Canal is causing dangerous fumes at a nearby elementary school, but adding an air-filtration system hasn't been effective.

### Breathing uneasy

Toxic fumes are still being detected in the air at PS 372's annex at 219 First St. near the Gowanus Canal.

PS 372 Main building  
512 Carroll St.

PS 372 Main building  
219 First St.

Gowanus Canal

BROOKLYN

NY Post Design

Helaine Salzman for the NY Post

By SONYA GUGLIARA

About 450 young kids at a special-needs elementary school near Brooklyn's putrid Gowanus Canal have been breathing toxic fumes in their building more than two years after the state vowed to fix the problem.

The state Department of Environmental Conservation installed an air-filtration system at the annex for PS 372 at 219 First St. in 2025 — but it failed to adequately purify contaminated air.

Yet parents only learned last week that their kids have been possibly endangered for two years and that the school still might not be safe for the coming school year.

Despite the yearslong mitigation efforts, traces of potentially cancer-causing vapors and other hazardous substances were detected.

Officials are not sure if the bad air comes from the polluted canal or from "unknown secondary sources," the DEC revealed last month to Principal Rosa Amato and Father Orlando Ruiz of Our Lady of Peace Church, which owns the school's buildings.

The school's pre-K and kindergarten classrooms are located in the annex, around the corner from the main building at 512 Carroll St.

Gym, science and specialty classes are also taught there for all grades.

Parent Julia Finnegan, whose two kids are entering fifth grade and pre-K at the school, said officials have been trying to reassure the school community that "it would take a lifetime of exposure" for the chemicals to cause health risks.

"But these are our youngest, smallest children," she said. "If

they stay at the school for pre-K and kindergarten, that's half their lives they've spent in this space exposed to chemicals."

### Parents surprised

Parents have been left in the dark, she added.

"We were under the understanding as families that this system was up and running and working," said Finnegan of the filter system. "But little did we know they were continuing to do testing. . . . and they have discovered that there's basically still chemicals and vapors being found in the air with the system running."

Officials admitted that some of the chemicals detected inside the annex — including cancer-linked byproducts of the gas industry such as benzene and xylene, "are

above levels that would typically be found in indoor air," the DEC and the State Health Department told The Post in a joint statement.

But they were "determined not to pose an increased health risk," the officials insisted.

Environmental groups are not buying it.

"The school epitomizes the massive uncontrolled toxic hazards throughout the entire Gowanus Canal area," said Walter Hang, the president of Environmental Health Research Group, which leads toxic cleanup campaigns across the state. Another elementary school, PS 32 on Union Street, sits on the east side of the canal.

"The state has completely failed to protect the health of the students, the faculty and the staff in the school."

sgugliara@nypost.com