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## **Detroit's proliferation of school cellphone towers prompt study request**

**Mackenzie Thompson and Jennifer Chambers** The Detroit News

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*Detroit* — The concerns about cellphone towers on school property have spread from Wyandotte to Detroit, where parents in Michigan's largest city are expressing their worries and the City Council has asked the health department to do a study.

Aliya Brown, whose daughter attends Paul Robeson Malcolm X Academy, said she became concerned for the safety of children and staff members at Detroit's public schools after learning there are 21 school locations with cellphone towers, including one at the academy. She said she immediately contacted her daughter's principal and asked him about it.

“He emailed the central office, and they said to their knowledge that they were safe,” she said.

In an attempt to get answers, she contacted the Environmental Health Trust, an environmental health hazard nonprofit, attended City Council meetings, went live on Facebook to try to spread awareness to other parents, and contacted state representatives.

“I’ve tried, and it’s been crickets,” she said. “As a stakeholder, I feel very disrespected because you tell us that your core values are integrity and transparency, and that’s none of this.”

These safety concerns prompted the Detroit City Council in May to approve a resolution by Councilwoman Mary Waters that asked the Detroit Health Department to assess the health impact of cellphone towers on the city’s school children.

“One of the primary responsibilities of this Detroit City Council is to protect the health, safety and welfare of all citizens of Detroit, including foremost our children,” Waters said. “We must never place petty cash over the health, including the long-term health of our children.”

Since an initial agreement in 2014 with telecommunications companies, including T-Mobile and Crown Castle, the Detroit school district has placed more towers under short-term leases, Detroit

Superintendent Nikolai Vitti said.

Chrystal Wilson, a spokesperson for the Detroit Public School Community District, said the district reviewed its number of agreements for the towers and found the district complies with all Federal Communication Commission regulations through the providers of cellphone towers.

Wilson noted a report from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration also found that there is “insufficient evidence to support a causal association between radiofrequency radiation exposure and (tumor formation).”

"Researchers also say that the waves radiating from cell towers don't have enough energy to directly damage human DNA or heat body tissues," according to a district statement on its website.

### **How the towers started**

At an April 18 school board meeting, Superintendent Nikolai Vitti said 15 towers were installed on school grounds in 2014-15 under state-appointed emergency management with a company called Crown Castle. The district received a one-time payment of about \$6.8 million.

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The Crown Castle contract is set to run through 2067, according to the district. The contract contains a “no termination clause,” which means the Detroit school district must pay back all of the money to Crown Castle if the district ends the contract.

In addition, four more tower contracts were done under emergency management and are set for potential renewal in 2024 and 2025.

Another 10 contracts were approved by the school board under short-term leases in 2016-17 and are up for renewal in October of this year and December 2027.

Each of the towers added after the original 15 towers generates about \$2,000 per month per tower.

Even though the district has contracts for 29 cell towers, only 23 exist. When Vitti was asked at the April 18 meeting why there are only 23 towers, he said "not all campuses with contracts are outfitted with cell phone towers," according to a report for the Detroit City Council from its legislative director.

The schools where cell towers are located are:

- Bennett Elementary
- Carver STEM Academy
- Crary/Adult Ed West
- Davison Elementary-Middle
- Denby High
- Mackenzie Elementary-Middle
- Mumford High
- Northwestern High (2 towers)
- Osborn High
- Renaissance High (2 towers)
- Burton International
- East English Village Academy/Finney
- Emerson Elementary-Middle
- Pasteur Elementary
- PRMX/Halley
- Trix Academy
- Vernor Elementary
- Wayne Elementary

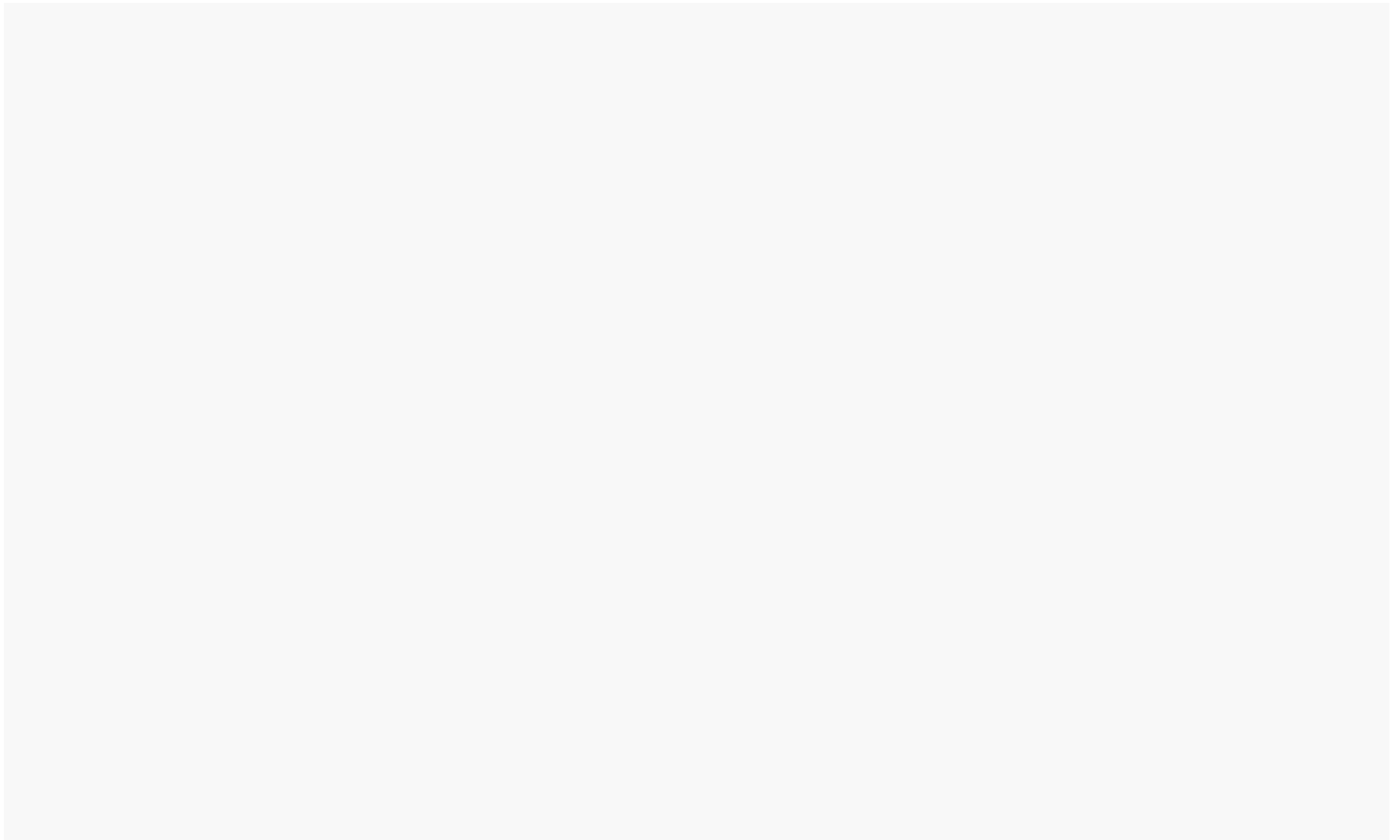
- Cerveny Middle / MLK High
- Lawton
- Oakman Elementary

“We were told that the money is used for children and parent incentives and to feed us,” said Brown, the parent of the academy student. “Like, are you serious? And you're potentially putting our children's and staff members' health at risk for food and treats?”

Detroit school board President Angelique Peterson-Mayberry, Vice President Misha Stallworth and members Corletta Vaughn, Sonya Mays, Sherry Gay-Dagnogo, Iris Taylor and LaTrice McClendon didn't respond to requests for comment.

Waters said the Health Department needs to assess whether Detroit children have been or are endangered by the location of cellphone towers on school property. The first-term council member and former state lawmaker claimed the Health Department initially said it was incapable of performing such a study.

Detroit Health Department spokeswoman Nikita Cargins declined comment.



“That almost political response was an insult to the citizens of Detroit that help fund that Health Department. Our children deserve better,” Waters said.

### **Issue causes waves**

The controversy first gained local notice when Wyandotte parents protested over the five-year lease of a T-Mobile 5G tower at Washington Elementary School, claiming it endangered their kids' health. The controversy resulted in April in the resignation of nine-year Superintendent Catherine Cost.

On June 15, Detroit U.S. District Judge Mark Goldsmith idled a new 5G T-Mobile cellular phone tower atop a Wyandotte elementary as he decides whether a lawsuit filed by residents opposed to the tower should be heard in a federal or state court. Wayne County Circuit Judge Adel Harb ordered the first 14-day restraining order on June 2 after tower opponents filed a lawsuit that argued adverse health effects could come from radio frequency waves emanating from the tower.

T-Mobile is attempting to move the case to federal court because it contended the case deals with federal law regarding cellular technology. The lawsuit alleges the telecommunications giant duped the local school district and a city of Wyandotte engineer into issuing an illegal building permit and certificate of occupancy to build the wireless communications facility atop the elementary school.

Attorneys for T-Mobile have noted in court the cellphone tower will emit radio frequency waves that are well below, about 5%, the acceptable level allowed by the FCC. Other defendants in the suit include the Wyandotte school district, board of education, the City Council, the mayor and Cost.



As the issue has expanded to Detroit, Yolanda Peoples, a mother of two Detroit school district graduates, said she, too, is worried about the possible health effects that cellphone towers can have.

“The research does not state exact distances that are safe. Most of the research is pending, or as I would like to say, the check hasn't cleared,” Peoples said.

The Detroit school district has asked Dan Scripps, chairman of the Michigan Public Service Commission, and U.S. Sen. Gary Peters, D-Bloomfield Township, to make additional information available to the public to help answer any concerns or questions regarding the location of cellphone towers.

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