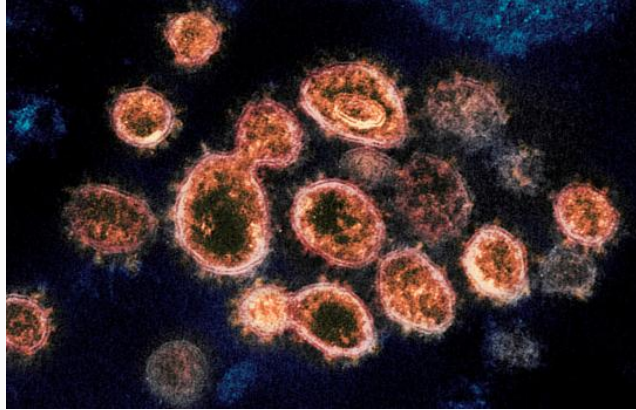


Greater Lowell Tech takes steps to battle coronavirus



This 2020 electron microscope image provided by the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases – Rocky Mountain Laboratories shows SARS-CoV-2 virus particles which cause COVID-19, isolated from a patient in the U.S., emerging from the surface of cells cultured in a lab. According to two new studies released on Tuesday, Dec. 22, 2020, people who have antibodies from infection with the coronavirus seem less likely to get a second infection for several months and maybe longer. (NIAID-RML via AP)

By [PRUDENCE BRIGHTON](#) |

PUBLISHED: February 16, 2021 at 8:19 a.m. | UPDATED: February 16, 2021 at 6:01 p.m.

TYNGSBORO – Greater Lowell Technical High School moved quickly last spring as the pandemic broke out to provide healthy air for students and staff, according to Mark Byrne, who spoke before his recent retirement as director of plant services.

The first step was to amend a just-signed contract with Boston Mechanical Services to replace filters in the school’s HVAC system, including its rooftop equipment. The filters are replaced quarterly. Now, when they are replaced this week with students and staff out of the building on February vacation, the effort will include specialized filters.

While retrofitting the HVAC system was important, more needed to be done to guard the school community against the coronavirus, Byrne said.

Before his retirement, Byrne oversaw the installation of more than 180 Austin Air purifiers in classrooms and shop areas. More are on the way. When the installations are completed, the air purifiers will cycle clean air in classrooms, shop areas, offices and cafeterias.

For Byrne, the project was a matter of “taking care of everyone” at the school. Byrne, who worked for the Lowell Public Works Department for nearly two decades before going to work at GLTHS 17 years ago, has been replaced by Erik Gitschier of Lowell, a former employee of the Lowell Water Utility. Gitschier is also a former member of the Greater Lowell Tech School Committee.

The school teamed with Crimson Medical Solutions, which is the distributor of Austin Air purifiers. With the advent of the pandemic, the Sagamore Beach-based company wanted to find reasonably priced equipment to offer school districts and other public entities.

Crimson CEO Kevin Kelly said the search led to Austin Air, which offers hospital-grade air filters.

Most Austin Air purifiers cost less than \$600, including the model that GLTHS is using.

According to Austin Air, “The medical grade HEPA technology is proven to remove up to 95% of all airborne contaminants as small as 0.1 microns. This includes viruses, bacteria, dust, dander and allergens. “

The COVID-19 virus is 0.12 microns, so Austin Air says its 4-layer filtering system should scrub the air of 95% of the particles in a 1,500-square-foot area.

“Only hospital-grade air purifiers that scrub down to .1 microns can kill COVID-19,” according to Austin Air.

The company’s website indicates its assertion of 95% effectiveness — and 98% effectiveness for contaminants smaller than .3 microns — has been independently tested.

Crimson has also distributed Austin Air purifiers to the town of Arlington, the Barnstable Housing Authority and the Yarmouth Housing Authority.