Hot Weather Precautions

Hot humid weather will undoubtedly cause uncomfortable conditions in classrooms and hazardous heat conditions outdoors. Unfortunately, there are currently no temperature guidelines requiring schools to use air conditioning, though the union has been pushing for them for some time.

Temperatures in the 90s can put some sensitive persons at risk of heat-related health effects. Sensitive persons include the elderly, young children and babies, children with special needs, people who are overweight, and those with high blood pressure or heart disease. Although temperature conditions may be uncomfortable, most people are not at a health risk in a school.

Preventing Heat Exhaustion and Heat Stroke in the Classroom and Outdoor Play

Here are some recommended ways to help keep everyone cool in classrooms:

- Wear light clothing.
- Drink plenty of water and encourage students to drink fluids.
- Close window shades to minimize direct sunlight.
- Turn off all unnecessary lights and equipment.
- Turn off computers, copiers, smart boards, and other electronic equipment when not being used.
- Use a thermometer to measure the temperature levels.
- Utilize all air-conditioned spaces in the school first and for schools without air conditioning operate fans when possible.
- Prepare quiet activities.
- Stay indoors and out of the direct sun.
- If outside stay in shady areas.
- Do not use top floors if possible since these are hotter.

Previously the DOE sent the following heat guidance information to Principals: “When temperatures and humidity soar, children are at increased risk for heat-related illness and may have lower tolerance for exercise. During this period, with high temperatures and high heat indices, please keep students in air-conditioned spaces and limit children's outdoor recess and playtime between the sun's peak hours (10 am - 6 pm); both the intensity and duration of outdoor activities should be significantly reduced for all students. Staff and students should use any rooms with air-conditioning, including medical rooms, to cool off. For any building where the medical room is without air conditioning, we recommend finding an alternative location for
the nurse so that they can help students and staff stay cool and safe during this heat wave.”

In addition, students should have easy access to water and be encouraged to drink often. The Centers for Disease Control and Environment advises avoiding sugary and calorie-laden sports and soft drinks when the temperature rises. Water is the best way to hydrate the body. Clothing also should be light-colored and lightweight. Please pay special attention to children who may be more susceptible to heat related illness, including those who are obese, have chronic medical conditions such as diabetes and asthma, or are suffering from a gastrointestinal illness.

DCAS Cooling Season Guidance
The NYC Department of Citywide Administrative Services (DCAS) establishes annual guidelines and recommendations for the use and maintenance of air-conditioning systems in City buildings, including school buildings. Part of their yearly Cooling guidance dictates the period when air conditioning units can be used and the temperature the units should be maintained at. Typically, the dates for the cooling season range from late May to late September and school room temperatures are supposed to be maintained no lower than 78 °F. For more information, visit the DCAS website.

Air Conditioning
There are currently no temperature guidelines requiring schools to use air conditioning, though the union has been pushing for them for some time. Currently, most schools should have some air-conditioned spaces.

- Mayor Bill de Blasio in 2017 announced a five-year commitment to get air conditioning units into every New York City public school classroom. Many classrooms are now air-conditioned; however, thousands of school spaces were also excluded from that plan such as offices, gyms, and cafeterias. If a formerly non-classroom space has been reassigned into a classroom space and lacks air conditioning, your principal should work with DSF to ensure that that classroom space is fitted with air conditioning.
- One of the criteria used when selecting sites for summer programming is the availability of air conditioning. All summer sites should have air conditioning for all programs in the building. The Superintendent teams and Directors of Operations can support programs moving to air-conditioned spaces within their current building.

Repair of existing air conditioning unit(s)
The UFT will address temperature complaints on a case-by-case basis with the DOE Division of
School Facilities (DSF). The follow-up for these complaints will depend on the type of air conditioning unit(s).

- If it’s a central cooling system, we can try to get an update from DSF on the repair timelines. DSF is responsible for maintaining central systems.

- If it’s a window air conditioning unit, the process relies on the principal. If it’s not something the custodial staff can repair, any replacement and/or repair of window units should come out of the school’s budget. The principal will need to reach out to a DOE contractor for window units. Additional funding can also be sourced from RESO A funding, grants, and PTA monies.

If a member wishes to pursue a complaint, he or she should keep a log of the room temperature and also provide specific information including:

- Specify your school
- Rooms impacted
- Is it a central system or a standalone window unit that is impacted?
- Have you reported the issue to the Custodian Engineer and principal?
- Has the principal reached out to their custodial engineer to initiate repairs or a DOE contractor for a new replacement window unit?
- Can the principal relocate the class?

For more information, contact your UFT borough health and safety representative and notify the UFT at (212) 598-9287 immediately if you think a school is too hot and classes should be relocated.