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School officials respond to heat complaints

By Danielle M. Pothier / Staff Writer

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Students at South School are learning about extremes. But not during any lesson plan.

The heating system at the three-year-old elementary school building is heating some rooms excessively, and barely touching others.

"We know we have a problem," said Superintendent of Schools Joseph Connelly. "We don't need to be reminded that we have a serious problem. And we have hired [R.D.] Kimble to solve the problem."

According to parents, children are wearing jackets in some classrooms, while others are steaming up in other rooms. South School Principal Nick Leonardos said one teacher often moves the classroom to the science lab, which is much warmer than the students' classroom.

"For the last three years, we have not been able to balance and get this system working correctly," said Connelly. "We have spent a great deal of time and funds to fix the problem and we're not happy."

The School Building Committee has contracted Kimble, an independent third party firm, to investigate the problem and solutions. Kimble is expected to have a preliminary report by the first week of November.

"We will correct the problem as soon as possible," said Connelly. "We think the system is working a little better than it did a year ago. And we hope to get it working 100-percent efficiency in a short matter of time."

The superintendent said officials chose to hire Kimble, and not go back to the original contractor who installed the heating system because the town may have to pursue litigation.

"It is absolutely the goal of the Building Committee to spend the funds necessary to fix the problem," said Connelly. "If we have to go back to litigation to recover... we will not wait for litigation to fix the problem."

Facilities Manager Ken Ingersoll said the school is experiencing some problems because it has a "single-pipe system, [which] doesn't allow us to have both [heating and air conditioning] systems going at the same time."

Ingersoll explained any single-pipe system can be out of whack in October because of the fluctuation in temperature. If it is cold in the morning, the heating system will go on. But if the temperatures reach 70 degrees

in the afternoon, the outside air is mingling with the heat and not air conditioning, which is already shut off for the season.

"The problems we found and addressed here, it has been one thing after another," said Ingersoll. "When we fix one problem, another one appears... Most of our problems in this school aren't really with the equipment itself, it is with the controls."

School Committee Chairman Marc Grimaldi called the heating situation "unacceptable."

"To say we share your concern is an understatement," he said to parents last Thursday night. "We are very concerned about this."

Officials encouraged parents and teachers to report the heating inconsistencies to Ingersoll.

"I will send [employee] John Bennett down here 10 times a day if I have to," said Ingersoll. "The more you tell us about the problems, the more we can help."

"We are aggressively attacking [the problem] and we want to know what is wrong with it," added Connelly.

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