

READING

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Officials look into complaint Wood End School too hot

Climate control system may need adjustment

By Peter Martin, Globe Correspondent | September 18, 2005

Reading school officials have approached the firm that designed the heating, air-conditioning, and ventilation system at the year-old Wood End School about possibly making adjustments to the system.

The state Division of Occupational Safety received a complaint last school year that it was too hot indoors at the elementary school on hot days. State officials would not reveal who made the complaint, which was filed in June, but said they do not regard the situation as serious since the town is aware of it and is doing something about it.

Ceiling fans have been installed in some classrooms to improve air circulation **at the school**, said School Superintendent Patrick Schettini, and more fans will be added if necessary. Only the nurse's office and several administrative offices, which are occupied year-round, have air conditioning.

The HVAC system draws fresh air from outside and ventilates stale air. The town's health administrator has said the system is only circulating 85 percent of the air in the school, which is adequate, but it should be circulating 95 percent. But the school's PTO president said she has not heard any complaints from either teachers or parents.

Schettini said the school system hired a mechanical engineering consultant from Dartmouth to review the \$600,000 HVAC system and the consultant, Garcia Galuska DeSousa, recommended changes in its design. Schettini said school officials had planned the \$7,000 consultant's review even before any complaints surfaced. He said it is part of an overall review of the \$11 million school project.

"It was my decision before the project was even complete, as a part of checks and balances, to make sure it was all done well and there's good air quality in the school," said Schettini. "People may say you don't need to do that, that it's being too conservative, but I think it's good practice, to ensure quality ventilation and heating in

a school."

The superintendent would not provide details of the consultant's recommendations, but said they have been presented to AI3 of Wayland, the project manager, and to Landmark Facilities Group of Norwalk, Conn., designers of the system.

"The consultants found that the system was installed as designed, with the exception of a few minor things that were corrected," said Scott Dunlap of AI3. "The independent consultant did make some recommendations on the design, adjustments of air flow, and [Landmark] will verify or rebut those recommendations."

Landmark officials could not be reached for comment.

It is unclear who would pay for any renovation or modification to the HVAC system, said Schettini. That would depend on the nature of the work and the contract terms with J & J Contractors, the school's general contractor.

The school, completed in 2004, was used as a temporary home for the students and faculty of the Barrows Elementary School last year while that school was renovated. Wood End opened this year for 350 students from a newly created school district.

Concerns about the ventilation system surfaced publicly in June when Linda Phillips, a Reading resident, visited the school and claimed the indoor air temperatures were stifling.

"It was like a sauna in there; I felt sick and had to leave," said Phillips, who does not have children in the school. "I paid for the school, and I want to make sure it works."

Responding to Phillips's complaint, Jane Fiore, the town's health administrator, toured the building and determined that the ventilation system was operating at 85 percent efficiency when it should have been operating at 95 percent. Fiore said she found an average temperature of 84 degrees, with a top reading of 95 degrees in a corridor with skylights. State regulations, which require that a school be no colder than 66 degrees, do not set limits on degrees of heat.

Fiore said she found no evidence that faculty members had complained about the temperature inside the school and, after speaking with the school nurse, discovered that no one had been treated or sent home because of heat-related problems.

"It was 95 degrees out, and it was cooler inside the school, so something was

working," said Fiore. "It was a hot day; the whole town was hot."

Schettini observed: "We had complaints from teachers in all of our schools on those hot days." But he added: "There's been no consistent complaints about [Wood End] air quality."

Meanwhile, Paula Tucci, president of the Wood End Parent Teacher Organization, said neither parents nor teachers are complaining about air quality at the school. "My children are very excited and happy to be there and all the children seemed happy coming out of school," said Tucci. "It's a school our community can be proud of." ■

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