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Letter: 'We are all watching'

Thursday, November 3, 2005

To the editor,

A recent article discussed the unhealthy, uncomfortable HVAC conditions at Reading's new \$11.5 million Wood End Elementary School. Unfortunately our local officials continue to deny and cover up problems found in our school building projects. A few examples:

According to Superintendent Schettini, "We had complaints from teachers in all of our schools on those hot days - there's been no consistent complaints about Wood End air quality." However, Schettini fails to mention in the article he met with the Wood End teachers because they were upset that nothing was being done about the intolerable working conditions at the school. While his own employees suffering in the heat "repeatedly expressed their concerns verbally and in writing to both the Principal and Superintendent," Schettini claimed there were "no consistent complaints." How is this possible? Why were huge fans installed to provide heat relief?

Supt. Schettini's claims that he hired a \$7,000 HVAC consultant to review the Wood End HVAC system before the Wood End School was finished "to ensure quality ventilation and heating in a school" is completely false. The consultant hired in February 2005, did not visit the school until May (near the end of the school year). The consultant's report was completed in August, one year after the school was already in use. The report reveals, just as the teachers, parents, and students already knew: Wood End Elementary's heating, ventilation and fresh air intake are defective and inadequate. While the contents of the report have yet to be discussed in public or officially shared with parents and teachers at the school, the report can be found on the Informed Residents of Reading Web site www.iror.org under "news."

In spite of repeated verbal and written concerns expressed by the faculty, parents and school employees, Reading Health Administrator, Jane Fiore denies hearing complaints about the extreme heat conditions at the school. A June 9, 2005 report in her file confirm other parents complained anonymously and verifies, in spite of her denial, she was aware of the abnormal, unhealthy conditions at the school but chose to ignore the complaint.

Ms. Fiore states in the article that the "HVAC system was operating at 85 percent efficiency instead of 95 percent efficiency." Ms. Fiore is not qualified to comment on the efficiency of the HVAC system at the school. Her own notes from the school tour reveal Supt. Schettini as the source

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of that information. Yet, Supt. Schettini denies he has any information that confirms any percentage of the HVAC operating efficiency at the school. His response, "I don't know where Ms. Fiore got that information from, the Globe reporter must have gotten it wrong."

In spite of denials by the school department nursing director, substitute nursing staff verify that they did "treat heat-related illnesses by offering icepacks, cool compresses, and other temperature reducing remedies" to the students and staff who needed medical attention in the wake of the excessive heat last May and June.






Few dare to speak out about these multi-million dollar school-building projects in which outside architects and contractors have benefited over the safety and well being of our students and teachers.

Maximizing contractor profits at the expense of the health and safety of our students and teaching staff should not be tolerated! Fix the new \$11.5 million school the way it should have been built in the first place, with adequate heat, fresh air, ventilation and skylight shades. Do it for the children. Do it for the teaching staff. And do it because it is the right thing to do! Stop giving lip service to the public and making excuses. We are all watching!

Linda Phillips

Reading Town Meeting Member

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