

## Parents: Central School heat too much for kids

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**T**he extreme heat over the past several days has been brutal for many in Stoneham.

But according to several parents at the Colonial Park School, the lack of air conditioning at their children's school has just been too much.

The Avalon Road school's temperature has soared into the 90s during the past several days, according to several parents who contacted the Stoneham Sun this week.

Parent Kathy Holland said visitors to the school can feel the heat immediately.

"When you walk in, you can feel it in the hall," she said. "When you get into a classroom with 18-plus kids, the fan is blowing around the hot air. The kids are soaking wet.

"I don't understand how the teachers can teach in that environment."

Parent Alex Masel said he walked into the school Monday and found the building unbearable. His son is a first-grader at the school.

"It had to be at least 90 degrees," he said. "Plus, the air quality wouldn't be that good in that closed environment."

Masel said he has spoken with a number of parents and teachers who have expressed similar concerns.

"The teachers and everybody else have been told it's too expensive to turn on the air conditioning," he said. In fact, he said school officials have told him it would cost approximately \$5,000 to turn on the air conditioning at the school. One parent, he said, told him she planned to keep her child out of school until conditions improve there.

"I just don't understand it," he said. "Why do the taxpayers pay to install the air conditioning if they aren't going to use it in extreme conditions?"

Superintendent Dr. Joseph Connelly said several parents have complained about the situation over the past several days. But he said money in the budget originally slated for air conditioning costs was redirected to pay for school personnel that would have otherwise been cut.

He defended a decision made by the School Committee to keep the air conditioning off because of budget concerns.

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"It's costing us between \$5,000 and \$7,000 each month to run the air conditioning in the elementary schools," he said. "The largest part of that amount is the monthly charge for turning on the chillers. In four schools, that would amount to \$20,000 a month for July, August and September. That potential added cost of \$60,000 was difficult for (the School Committee) to justify when we could use that money for staff instead."

### **Hot stuff**

Gary Holland, Kathy Holland's husband, said he has observed days when the temperature inside the school hits 87 degrees.

"It's extremely humid in there," he said. "I think it would make (the students) very lethargic in the classrooms and possibly dehydrate them."

The Hollands have two girls who attend the school, one in pre-school and the other in first grade. The older one first complained about the heat.

"She's the one who's been really complaining about how hot it's been in there," said Gary Holland.

Holland said he recently spoke to the secretary to Superintendent Connelly.

"She told me there was no way there were going to turn on the air conditioning because of a lack of money in the budget," he said. "I asked her if hers were on and she laughed and said 'yes, but this is the first year we've had it on.' I don't think it's right for the students and the teachers to suffer and the administration can have their air conditioning on.

"I don't think it's right."

Connelly said he hopes the "natural air conditioning and the movement of the air" by ventilators and fans will keep the school cool in the next few days. The final day of school is Tuesday, June 21.

"Hopefully between now and next Tuesday, the last day of school, we won't have any additional hot days," he said.

Colonial Park Principal Maureen Burke said any decision to turn on the air conditioning at the school would come from Connelly's office. She said she was not aware of either students or teachers who have reported health problems because of the heat.






"It's been warm the last few days," she said. "I imagine everyone has been complaining. But the checks I have done in the classrooms have shown the temperature has not reached 90 degrees. If a parent chooses not to send their child to classrooms, that's their decision. But the teachers and the (Parent Teacher Organization) have done everything we can to keep it as cool as possible."

Burke said school officials have brought in fans and made sure the shades are kept down during the day.

But for Kathy Holland, sending her children to school during the recent hot spell has been a difficult decision.

"I feel awful sending them in there when it's so hot and humid," she said. "With the humidity in there, it creates unhealthy air. The buildings were built and designed for the purpose of having the air conditioning on."

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