

SPPS Facilities Position Statement on the use of Room Air Conditioners

8/4/2023

Room air conditioners are often viewed as a simple, inexpensive solution for keeping a room cool during hot summer months. However, there are several functional limitations to these units and their use in a school building, so their practical application is limited. The purpose of this document is to explain the types of room air conditioners that are available, the circumstances under which they are allowed, and the room air conditioner requirements at SPPS.

The two types of room air conditioners currently in use at SPPS are:

- **Portable A/C Units**
 - These are freestanding units that can be placed in a room to cool down the room. They are about the same size as a residential dehumidifier.
 - They usually come with a hose and window kit to vent the hot, humid air they generate outside. Venting out of a window on the ground floor poses a security risk.
 - If a portable A/C unit is placed in a room without windows or with inoperable windows, installation is much more complex because the hose will need to be routed outside.
- **Window/Wall Mounted A/C Units**
 - These units sit in a window opening or are mounted in an exterior wall that has been framed specifically to fit it. These are common in houses that don't have central air.
 - Most windows throughout the district can't accommodate a window unit, so wall units are more common.
 - The hot, humid air generated by the A/C unit is dumped directly outside of the window or wall in which it is mounted.

SPPS Facilities acknowledges that, even though most summertime programming is located in fully air conditioned buildings, there are situations in the district when staff and/or students need air conditioning and don't have access to it. SPPS Facilities approves the use of room air conditioners in the following circumstances:

- A student or staff member has a medical condition or ADA accommodation that requires them to be in an air conditioned room and relocating them to a room with A/C is not an equitable or viable option.
 - SPPS Facilities will work with Human Resources to ensure the room A/C unit will meet the needs of the medical condition/accommodation.
 - In this case, SPPS Facilities will purchase, install, and maintain the room air conditioner.
- A staff member is required to be present in a building for at least 8 hours/day, 5 days/week, 6 weeks/summer and does not have access to a room with A/C to take breaks to cool down.
 - Staff with jobs that are physical in nature take priority.
 - This does not apply to staff that can work remotely for at least 4 hours/day (for instance, during hot afternoons) or staff that can relocate to a room that has A/C.
 - In this case, SPPS Facilities will purchase, install, and maintain the room air conditioner.

- A school or program would like to purchase a room air conditioner for an activity that meets at least 24 hours/week in the room for at least 6 weeks in the summer.
 - In this case, the school or program will purchase, install, and maintain the air conditioner. During winter months, the A/C unit must be covered and sealed to prevent cold air and pests from entering the building. It will not be the responsibility of the school custodial staff to assist with install, maintenance, or sealing the A/C unit.
 - SPPS Facilities is available to assist with installation and maintenance, but wrench time and materials will be tracked and charged back to the school/program.
 - SPPS Facilities will review the purchase to ensure it meets the district's requirements and recommendations (see next section).

If any of the above conditions is met, below are the district's requirements and recommendations when purchasing a room air conditioner:

- The unit must have a UL or ETL Safety Listing (or be certified by an equivalent [Nationally Recognized Testing Laboratory](#)). This is a City of St Paul Fire Marshal requirement.
- The air conditioner must be installed so that the hot, humid air it generates is vented to the outdoors, unless Facilities approves an alternative configuration.
- The venting of the air conditioner must not pose a safety or security risk (e.g. a window A/C unit installed in a ground floor window).
- The electrical requirements of the A/C unit must not exceed the capacity of the existing electrical circuit the unit will plug into.
- The unit should be right-sized for the room. The estimated cooling coverage area of the A/C unit should closely match the size of the room it will cool.
- The noise rating of the air conditioner should be 65 decibels or less.

If the above conditions are not met, the application of a room A/C unit does not meet the definition of a sustainable use of resources and will not be allowed - including if the unit(s) may be donated by outside entities (PTOs, individuals, etc). Factors that contribute to this determination include:

- Lack of equity between school buildings and programs (e.g. some schools have fundraising capacity that other schools do not, largely due to the student populations they serve)
- Compromised effectiveness of primary building HVAC system throughout the year due to system imbalance and building envelope loss of performance due to vents / window units.
- Utility costs in operating the units
- Administrative costs related to unit removal / relocation during winter months as well as storage

Questions can be directed to the SPPS Facilities Department (facilities@spps.org) or via work order from the building Head Engineer.