

Children First!

News & Information from Metro Nashville Public Schools

Aug. 17, 2007

Start of the 2007-2008 school year

More than 75,000 students have returned to Metro schools that were freshly scrubbed, properly supplied and ready to immediately start the new school year with an emphasis on academics.

Registration and class schedules were quickly handled at almost all of the district's 136 sites, although Overton High School experienced some delays because hundreds of unexpected students reported on the first day. Those students have now been placed in class.

The successful first day of school was a great follow-up to the city's First Day Festival organized by Mayor Bill Purcell. More than 20,000 family members attended the downtown event, where they received free school supplies and enjoyed a variety of entertainment. Special thanks are due to all of our students who performed, including band members from Antioch, Hillwood and Whites Creek high schools.

New dress code policy implemented smoothly

Schools Director Dr. Pedro Garcia and all the MNPS staff members applaud the exceptional support we have received from parents and the community as we began the school year with our revised dress code policy.

From the first day of school, more than 98% of our students have dressed in solid-color shirts and pants, shorts or skirts. That rate has improved throughout the week as students familiarize themselves with all the rules, such as wearing a belt with garments that have belt loops. Teachers, principals, parents and members of the Board of Education have all complemented the students on their dress and commented on this year's calmer school environment. Again, the MNPS staff is grateful for the participation of parents who have helped us create a school climate focused on academic achievement.

It's been hot

The past week of triple-digit temperatures have been a strain on air conditioning units throughout the region, and MNPS has felt that strain. We have had daily reports of outages in our schools, but the majority of these problems are isolated to certain areas or classrooms. If there is space available, students are moved to cooler areas of the building. In a few instances, the problems are school-wide and those cases are top-priority on the repair schedule.

Our maintenance department has 18 employees on nine trucks who are working extended hours and responding to these calls as quickly as possible. Like everyone in the city, we look forward to a break in these extreme temperatures but until that time, our employees will continue to do everything possible to keep air conditioners up and running.

We have also been concerned about the temperature on our school buses, particularly during their afternoon routes, and have been working to ensure the safety of students. Some of the steps we have taken include:

- Allowing students to bring bottles of water onto the bus;
- Making water available to students and drivers on buses as needed;
- Placing coolers of iced water in all safety investigator vehicles to be delivered as needed to buses whose drivers indicate a student or driver is in need.
- Taking daily temperature readings in random buses throughout the county to monitor interior temperature during travel. These readings are averaging anywhere from two to 10 degrees warmer than the outside air;
- Collaborating with officials with the Metro Health Department for dealing with this extreme heat.

While our buses are not air-conditioned, they do have built-in cooling features such as white roofs and tinted windows to deflect heat. Between 40 and 50 of our special education buses are air-conditioned, and these are used for transporting our most medically fragile students.

The cost to retrofit air conditioners to our buses is \$15,000 per bus, plus continuing additional fuel costs. We have more than 650 buses, and use around 570 of those daily. Most of our students are on the bus between 30-40 minutes.

Our transportation department staff has surveyed nine other districts in the state, including surrounding counties and Shelby County. All are facing similar concerns and taking similar precautions, and as of today, none are considering any type of change in school hours. However, MNPS officials will continue to monitor the effects of the unprecedented heat wave.