

Article 18: WPS Air Conditioning Feasibility Study

2025 Annual Town Meeting



AGENDA

- Background for the Feasibility Study Request
- Temperature Data
- Current State
- Need for Supplemental Study
- Proposed Study Scope
- Project Schedule
- Appropriation Amount



Background & Current State

Background

- After a trend of hot starts to the school year, in 2018 Dr. Lussier asked FMD to look into the feasibility and cost of adding air conditioning to Bates, Fiske, Schofield and WMS
- \$80K was approved as a cash capital project
- Preliminary report was completed and provided to WPS in July 2020
- Air conditioning was added to the Town's Capital Plan in 2020
- Focus was on COVID mitigations and the completion of Hunnewell and Hardy
- Parents and staff continued to raise concerns about the schools without air conditioning
- SC restarted the discussion in October 2023
- FMD updated SC on project in June 2024



Temperature Data

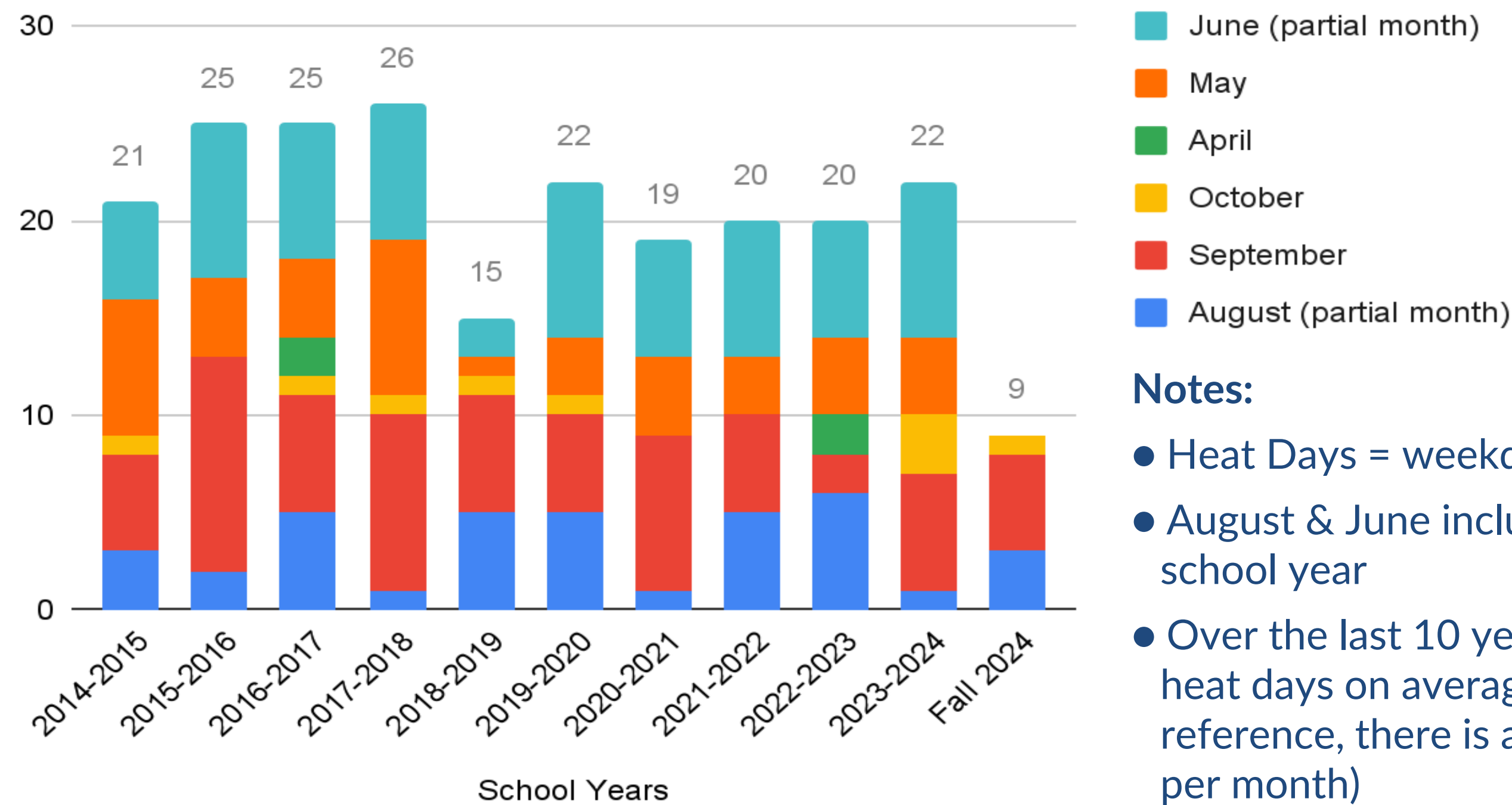
- Current building systems do not fully capture and track indoor temperature or humidity levels in all spaces
- Classrooms within the same building can vary greatly (10-15°) depending on location within the building
- Even on milder days, classrooms are warm
- The MA Dept of Public Health has a recommended range of 70°F to 78°F in occupied areas



Photo Credit: Katy Kehl, Fiske Parent



Heat Days Over Last 10 Years



Notes:

- Heat Days = weekdays with heat index over 80°
- August & June include only weekdays within the school year
- Over the last 10 years, there have been 21.5 heat days on average per year (as a point of reference, there is an average of 18 school days per month)

Current State

We now have four schools (Bates/Fiske/Schofield/WMS) with fundamentally different learning environments in the warm months than the other WPS schools:

- 5 Buildings with Full Air Conditioning: PAWS, Hardy, Hunnewell, Sprague, WHS
- 4 Buildings with Limited Air Conditioning: Bates, Fiske, Schofield, WMS
- 45% of Students and 37% of Staff Impacted, PreK-12

	Students	Staff
Bates	286	45
Fiske	278	48
Schofield	291	47
WMS	920	177
TOTAL	1775	317

Current Mitigation Practices

- Pull shades down; turn lights off
- Utilize floor fans
- Schedule hydration breaks
- Monitor students for overheating and heat exhaustion (all staff)
- Monitor students with medical situations (i.e. asthma, medications, etc.) that place them at greater risk from heat (nursing staff)
- Encourage appropriate clothing for heat (hats, loose-fitting & lightweight clothes, etc.)
- Use cooling centers and rotate students through spaces with air conditioning (nurses office, main office, some modular classrooms, WMS auditorium)
- Check temperatures of playground equipment
- Limit outdoor activities and stay in shade if outdoors
- Adjust recess and physical education activities to reflect heat



Other Temperature Mitigation Proposals

Why don't we cancel school?

- 55% of students are in 5 air conditioned buildings - cancelling school for those students is counterproductive
- Impractical to have some schools on a different schedule
- Unlike a snow day, there is no guarantee the day added at the end of the school year will be any cooler than the day being cancelled

What about early release days?

- Same concerns with students in 5 air conditioned buildings
- Early release days result in loss of academic time and loss of services



Actual Experience on Hot Days

- School leaders focused on student & staff comfort rather than academics
- Classroom environments not conducive to attention and learning; focus on getting through the day
- Common to see lethargic students with red faces, heads on desks
- Individual staff and student medical conditions
- Increased nursing visits - most pronounced at WMS
- Floor fans - while helpful also cause concern with dust, especially for students & staff with asthma or other respiratory conditions
- Classrooms cannot be cross-ventilated - windows only on one wall, exterior doors cannot be propped open, windows cannot be left open overnight
- If outdoor air quality is low (e.g., wildfires in recent years) windows cannot be opened



Supplemental Study Request