

MCPS Thermostat Usage – Q & A's for the Cooling Season

It's really hot and humid. Can I have my thermostat set point lower?

From spring to fall, high humidity can make us feel too warm, even in buildings with air-conditioning. But don't turn down the thermostat! Lowering the temperature in your room below 76° F further increases the relative humidity, and does not reduce water content in the air. Temperatures below 76° F also create serious problems of water condensing in our buildings, as explained below. To comply with MCPS policies and protect our buildings from costly damage, please set thermostats no lower than 76° F for cooling.



Examples of thermostats found in MCPS schools.

Why is condensing water a problem?

Moisture promotes growth of **mold and mildew** whose spores may trigger health problems for some people. Water also destroys drywall, ceiling tiles, carpeting, and insulation, and harms electronic equipment such as computers.

How can a temperature set point cause water to condense in a building?

During most of the cooling season, outdoor air carries a large amount of water. This water can easily condense out of the air - all it takes is the right temperature - called the "dew point". During periods of the cooling season, the dew point can rise into the upper 60's and low 70's F. Water condenses wherever humid air comes in contact with a surface below it's dew point like water droplets form on an ice water pitcher during the summer. Basements become damp when the walls are below the dew point. Air conditioning a room below 76° F creates the same effect! (See Figure 1 below).

What can I do to prevent moisture problems in my school?

- Set thermostats no lower than 76° F during the cooling season. Exceptions are computer labs and media centers; set these rooms to 75° F to meet the more demanding cooling requirements.
- Do not change thermostat settings back and forth.
- Keep windows and doors closed, especially during rainy and humid weather.
- Keep air flow to all grilles and thermostats clear of any obstructions.
- Report any moisture or mold in your room to your building service manager promptly.

Who can I contact for more information?

Please call MCPS Environmental Services/Indoor Air Quality at 240-740-2520.

Figure 1.

