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Fact Sheets

Title

Cooling Classrooms to Healthy Temperatures

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Cooling Classrooms to Healthy Temperatures

California does not require schools to cool down classrooms on hot days — even though heat leads to health and learning problems for children.

There is no upper temperature limit and no requirement for cooling equipment for California classrooms. The Education Code requires public school facilities to “maintain interior temperatures within normally acceptable ranges,” but does not specify what temperatures are acceptable. Too-hot classrooms lead to learning losses, which primarily affect students of color, deepening racial injustice.

Many state agencies have some degree of authority to establish temperature limits for schools — but no single authority is able to meet or enforce temperature limits for schools.



During a 2022 heat wave, parents and teachers reported classroom temperatures as high as **89 F** (and possibly hotter).



Some researchers have suggested **82 F** as a potential upper limit for rooms occupied by children, but more study is needed.

68–85



California’s child care facilities must keep rooms occupied by children between **68 and 85 F**.

77F



Other places have stricter temperature ranges. For example, New Zealand recommends classroom temperatures under **77 F**.

WHAT CAN THE STATE DO?

Collaborate with researchers and school employees to study and develop an evidence-based temperature limit for K-12 public school classrooms.

- » Research and develop standards for indoor temperatures:
 - » The **Building Standards Commission** and **Department of Education** could develop a standard for school districts to adopt and strengthen as needed.
 - » The **Department of Education** could define what constitutes a “normally acceptable range” of temperatures for students.
 - » The **California Division of Occupational Safety and Health** could establish a heat standard that would apply to school employees.
- » Consider enforcing standards through state funding eligibility. Additional motivators may be necessary for schools not seeking funds.
- » Provide funds to help schools upgrade facilities or equipment to meet standards — and to ensure that upgrades address heat inequity.
- » Install efficient cooling technologies, like heat pumps, when possible.

Policy Action Examples

AB 384 would have required the Department of Education to study a representative sample of schools’ cooling systems (2023; passed by senate and assembly; vetoed).

SB 394 would have included a survey of public school facilities to collect data related to air conditioning status and other relevant metrics (2023; passed by senate and assembly; vetoed).