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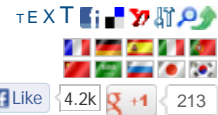
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STUDENTS GET THEIR DEGREES AMID HEAT WAVE KIDS SWELTER WITH NO AIR CONDITIONING.



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BURBANK -- As many Southern Californians escape this week's scorching heat in air-conditioned offices, malls and homes, some Burbank students are sweating out their first week of school in classrooms topping 90 degrees.

Teachers say the kids can't learn in such heat, and parents -- who've been asked to send their kids to school with water bottles -- are outraged.

But Burbank Unified School District officials say they can't get air-conditioning units installed in time to spare everyone from the sweltering heat wave expected to last into next week.

So at about half the classrooms at Providencia Elementary School and most of the classes at Monterey High School, teachers and students are doing whatever they can to stay cool. At Providencia Elementary, teachers just turn off the lights sometimes, or spray students with water.

"When I have the hot little bodies after recess, it's miserable," third-grade teacher Melissa Waters complained to a district official this week.

"Is there anything the district can do right now to (give) us some sort of air-conditioning unit? I mean it's miserable. And the kids can't learn."

L.A. Unified school officials said they could face a similar problem at a few of their San Fernando Valley campuses next week when the massive district starts its school year.

Everyone's crossing their fingers that the heat will go away.

But Wednesday's scorching temperatures, which hit 100 in Burbank, 106 in Chatsworth and 109 in Woodland Hills, are expected to continue today, with a high of 106 forecast for Woodland Hills.

"They expect us to send our children (in these conditions) and be grateful that they're getting a free education," said Rachel Salinas, a parent of a Providencia Elementary student.

The National Weather Service said temperatures would cool slightly by Friday and over the weekend.

"It's still going to be very hot into the weekend, so people should kind of be prepared," said Stuart Seto, a weather specialist with the agency.

Because of high power usage, he said there could be some daytime power outages.

On Wednesday, the California Independent System Operator, the agency that operates the state's power grid, issued a Stage 1 emergency alert indicating that statewide power reserves had dipped below 7 percent.

For several hours, residents were urged to conserve energy to avoid power disruptions.

At Providencia, Principal Maria Delgado said that temperatures often top 85 degrees in classes without air conditioning.

District officials say the electrical system at the school can't support more air-conditioning units. Underground work to improve the school's infrastructure and wiring was supposed to happen over the summer break, but the funding never materialized, officials said.

Fortunately at Monterey High -- where 80 percent of classrooms lack air conditioning -- students get out at 12:35 p.m. because it's a continuation high school. Still, they notice the heat.

"It's disgustingly hot," said Christian Montes, 16. "I mean, there's a fan, but it just blows hot air. It's ridiculous."

Burbank Unified officials say they can't immediately start upgrades -- including the installation of air-conditioning units at Providencia and Monterey -- because they can only handle so many projects at a time.

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The district is in the middle of upgrading Burbank Middle School and McKinley Elementary.

"It's an unfortunate situation that people have to wait. The district is running two projects now," said school board member Larry Applebaum.

"It's probably more than we can manage to do more than two at a time."

The Los Angeles Department of Water and Power reported that Tuesday's power demand exceeded all but two days this summer, even though the temperature has been hotter in past weeks.

As temperatures warm up, the [DWP](#) asks customers to adjust their home thermostats to 78 degrees and to take other steps to reduce power usage.

The high temperatures come just as students are returning to school. All but a couple hundred of L.A. Unified's 30,000 classrooms have air conditioning, said Neil Gamble, director of maintenance and operations.

"I do have some of the portable classrooms out in the Valley that are not air-conditioned," he said, "and they're on my list to be air- conditioned in the very near future."

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CAPTION(S):

2 photos

Photo:

(1 -- color) Without air conditioning, temperatures in Stephen Rivera's first-grade classroom at Providencia Elementary in Burbank reach the mid-90s amid this week's heat wave.

(2) Since Stephen Rivera's classroom at Providencia Elementary School in Burbank lacks air conditioning, the teacher keeps ceiling fans going and the windows open, and walks around squirting his first-grade students with a spray bottle.

John McCoy/Staff Photographer

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