

Common Fire Safety Hazards in Schools

School staff should ensure their facilities are free of the common fire safety hazards described below. Additional information can be found in [MCPS Regulation EBA-RA, Fire Safety](#) and at the [Systemwide Safety Programs website](#).

1. Combustible artwork and decorations (papers, posters, drapes, curtains)

- Combustible artwork, decorations, and teaching materials may not cover more than 50% of the wall surface area in halls and classrooms (20% for buildings without fire sprinklers).
- Papers, posters, and other combustible items may not be attached to ceilings, lighting, room exit doors, or building exit doors.
- Curtains and drapes may not be installed by school staff without central office approval.
- Cotton batting, straw, dry vines, leaves, and other highly-combustible materials may not be used for decorative purposes.



2. Improper use of power strips and extension cords

- Extension cords are for temporary use only.
- Cords may not be run through doorways, windows, ceilings, walls, or walkways (where they can be damaged or create a trip hazard).
- Appliances (refrigerators, coffee makers, microwave or toaster ovens, fans, air cleaners, dehumidifiers, vacuum cleaners, etc.) must be plugged directly into wall electrical receptacles – they may not be plugged into power strips or extension cords because this can overload circuits and cause a fire.
- Extension cords and power strips may not be plugged into each other – this can overload circuits and cause a fire.

3. Blocked emergency exits, breaker panels, and utility shut-off valves/switches

- All exits must be clear at all times, and exit signs must work properly.
- A 36-inch clear path must be maintained in front of all electrical, mechanical, and HVAC equipment.
- Emergency exit doors should be inspected daily to ensure proper operation.
- Emergency exit doors may not be propped open.

4. Materials storage in halls, stairwells, and closets

- Halls and stairwells may not be used for storage, especially of combustible materials like papers and boxes.
- Halls must have at least a 6-foot-wide clearance to permit safe building evacuation in an emergency.
- Mechanical, HVAC, and electric closets may not be used for storage or as offices.



5. Heat-producing appliances in schools

- Unrestricted use of heat-producing appliances (microwave and toaster ovens, coffee makers, portable cooktops, hot plates, space heaters, dehumidifiers, refrigerators, etc.) is prohibited in MCPS schools. Appliances may be used where necessary to meet medical needs of students or employees.
- Microwave and toaster ovens, coffee makers, electric hot plates, and refrigerators may be used in designated teacher/staff lounges, designated kitchen areas, and 2-3 designated team rooms per floor.
- Refrigerators and microwave ovens may be used in daycare rooms, kindergarten classrooms, and child development rooms where needed for storing and preparing infant formula or milk.
- Space heaters, humidifiers, and dehumidifiers may not be used without Office of Facilities Management approval.