

# Akron Beacon Journal

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## EDUCATION

# APS fixing issues after only 1 school passes initial fire inspection



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## Key Points

Akron fire inspectors found more than 200 fire code violations at Akron Public Schools in 2025.

Only one school passed its initial fire inspection.

Akron fire officials say the number of violations is not surprising and there is no imminent fire danger at the schools.

Fire inspectors found hundreds of fire code violations at Akron Public Schools last year.

Missing ceiling tiles, appliances connected to surge protectors and extension cords instead of wall electrical outlets and blocked exits were among the most common violations cited by inspectors in 2025 at 44 school sites, many of which also double as community centers.

Only one school – Forest Hill Community Learning Center – passed its annual fire inspection the first time, according to the Akron Fire Department's 2025 inspection reports obtained by the Akron Beacon Journal in December through a public records request.

Altogether, inspectors cited Akron Public Schools for roughly 230 fire code violations last year, with Hyre Community Learning Center and the high school side of East Community Learning Center receiving the most at 16 violations each.

Akron fire officials say no imminent danger exists at any of the school sites. Even one violation, no matter how minor, triggers a failed inspection in the Akron Fire Department's computer system, department officials said.

Akron Public Schools Superintendent Mary Outley said a majority of the violations have been corrected. She said she and other district leaders are taking the failed inspections seriously and have adjusted their response process to remedy the remaining violations quickly.

**Akron schools had 200+ fire violations:** [See your school's results here](#)

## How common are failed school fire inspections or school fires?

School districts in Ohio must follow the minimum standards set by the Ohio Fire Code, just like any public or commercial building in the state. Because children occupy their buildings, schools also must comply with other specific regulations, including [frequent fire drills](#), enhanced fire signals to alert occupants during emergencies and annual inspections of [protective door assemblies](#).

No statewide data is available for how many school districts fail their annual fire inspections or how many non-compliance citations are issued for school districts, according to the Ohio Fire Marshal's office. The Akron Fire Department's inspection software system didn't identify whether a facility passed or failed its inspection until about a year ago when the city updated the software.

The city fire department's annual reports from 2017 to 2020, which are the most recent reports available online, show that schools in Akron (including all public and private schools in the city) ranked consistently among the entities with the most fire code violations, along with restaurants and professional offices.

National statistics focus on the number of fires at school properties. The [National Fire Protection Association](#) found that fires at school properties represented 1% of all U.S. structure fires between 2014 and 2018 and had been declining. Nearly half of the 3,230 school fires nationwide reviewed over the five-year period had been

intentionally set. Nearly one-third of them had been caused by cooking equipment, the association's report shows.

The most recent fire at an Akron school facility occurred at [Ellet's field house](#) in March 2025. The cause and origin of the fire at the then-unoccupied, detached structure were undetermined, the fire department said at the time.

Sierjie Lash, district chief of the Akron Fire Department's Fire Prevention Bureau, said Akron Public Schools' more than 200 violations in 2025 were not surprising to her, citing the high number of occupants in the schools and the traditional wear and tear of the buildings.

"I don't think we have a problem with any of our schools," said Lash, who emphasized that fire inspectors work closely with school custodians and safety officials to resolve the citations.

Lash said the annual inspections help keep the department and school leaders abreast of any potential fire safety hazards.

"Sometimes things just need attention brought to them," said Lash, who said the number of code violations found at the schools varies year to year. "But there's nothing of great concern that has not been addressed."

Akron fire regulations, which incorporate Ohio's fire code, allow the department to [penalize operators](#) for not timely correcting violations. But Lash said Akron Public Schools has been cooperative in addressing its violations and is not near the stage where it would be penalized.

"We don't just go and do an inspection and don't go back," she said. "We return and make sure we have open communication and dialogue to make sure everyone in the schools is safe – not just the students and the staff, but if there were to be a fire incident, we want firefighters to be safe when they enter as well."

## What violations did Akron fire inspectors find?

The 44 reports provided by the city of Akron on Dec. 18 show that most fire inspections at the Akron Public Schools were conducted in July, with most of the reinspections conducted in November.

Of the 24 school sites that had been reinspected by December, 14 of them resolved their violations and passed. Ten sites still had outstanding fire code violations.

In some cases, the violation was cleared by inspectors after the district offered an explanation. For example, inspectors cited Ritzman Community Learning Center for failing to have an elevator inspected in 2025. Inspectors cleared the violation after the district's environmental health and safety specialist explained that the Ohio Department of Commerce evaluates the elevators each year but does not always leave a tag to indicate the inspection had been done, records show.

The most common fire code violation in Akron Public Schools last year was the use of extension cords or surge protectors for certain appliances that could lead to overheating. Inspectors cited East Community Learning Center for refrigerators, microwaves, toasters and coffee pots that needed to be plugged directly into a wall outlet.

Ceiling tiles, which can help slow the spread of fire, were missing in nearly 20 schools, the inspection reports show.

Eleven schools were cited for blocking exits. Hyre Community Learning Center was cited in four separate instances for blocked doors. The items blocking the exits included a pallet of rock salt, bleachers, a high jump pad and a foosball table. Ellet Community Learning Center was ordered to remove an ice cream machine in front of an hood suppression pull station and a laser printer that was blocking a door. Multiple schools also were cited for cluttered electrical and boiler rooms.

Inspectors also found:

A door chained shut with a padlock at North High School in July, in violation of the fire code that requires doors to be readily openable.

Keys that firefighters need to access various portions of the buildings in an emergency were missing, including keys for Pfeiffer Elementary's furnace room, boiler room and main office; the roof at Rimer Community Learning Center; Ellet's field house and football field and Buchtel's esports and multimedia rooms and an elevator. Many of these violations have since been resolved.

Electrical hazards in at least nine schools, including an electrical outlet in Buchtel's gym and an electrical box at Bridges Learning Center that needed to be replaced.

## **APS puts new protocols in place**

Outley said that since she [became superintendent](#) in April, she and her administrative team have been taking a proactive approach to resolving the fire code violations and avoiding future violations.

Some of the changes to the district's revised fire management response plan include expanded monitoring meetings attended by Outley, facility services leaders, building leadership, principals and safety and security staff.

She said monthly mandatory briefings also are held with principals and building leaders to ensure they are equipped to monitor their facilities for hazards.

Principals already are reminded of the most common fire safety violations at the beginning of the school year and are expected to share the information with their staffs, but Outley wants to expand fire safety awareness and training districtwide.

She herself has begun looking for potential fire hazards, such as appliances not directly plugged into wall outlets, during her visits to classrooms.

"I'm asking for everyone to have skin in the game," she said. "It's for all of us to address."

District spokesperson Stacey Hodoh said the district also has eliminated the internal breakdown that led to the failed reinspections by requiring a supervisor to physically verify that each task is corrected before it can be marked resolved. She added that the district is analyzing repeat violations to pinpoint whether the root causes are related to training, awareness, process gaps or technology and equipment issues.

“Through our transparent partnership with the AFD (Akron Fire Department), we will continue to work tirelessly to ensure our community knows their schools are safe places to learn and work,” Hodoh said.

Debra Foulk, executive director of business affairs at Akron Public Schools, said the changes already have led to a significant decline in reinspection violations. She estimated that roughly 90% of the violations from 2025 have been corrected and parts or supplies have been ordered to correct others.

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