

# The real story about conditions at Congdon Elementary School

The following was submitted in response to the comments on the recent story: [Congdon School teacher details rodent infestation, severe mold and bats at school:](#)

“After reading online stories and comments implying that the James B. Congdon Elementary School just needs a good cleaning, I felt a responsibility to address some of the misconceptions that are out there.

The reasons we need a new building for the students at Congdon (and at John B. DeValles) are not related to the building being unkempt. The issue is that the building is too old to accommodate the educational and social-emotional needs of students living in the 21st century.

A look inside Congdon further proves my point.

For example, the principal is unable to add more technology in the classrooms because the electrical system in the building is unable to support it. There is no access to student bathrooms or water fountains anywhere except the basement. The cafeteria is also in the basement of the building.

Four classrooms on the third floor have no windows and two offices on the third floor have no heat in the winter. The third floor is used as a library, a gymnasium, and an auditorium. The specialist teachers' desks are on the stage in the auditorium/gymnasium/library because there aren't enough classrooms for all teachers. There isn't adequate office space; the main office and nurse's office is a shared space.

There are two English as a Second Language (ESL) classes in one classroom. The special education teachers are doubled up

in one classroom, and the reading specialist shares a space with an ESL teacher. There is limited space for speech therapy, occupational therapy, or counseling in the building. The classrooms don't have drop ceilings, causing noise to travel and it to be noisy in the building at times.

The current principal at Congdon took the position almost five years ago. Since her first day, she has worked tirelessly to clean out the building and address and remedy any and all health and safety concerns.

The recent problem with rodents came about immediately following a pipe repair in the basement, which created easier access for rodents to enter the building. An exterminator is in the building weekly to address the problem, which is making trapped rodents more visible. The current custodial staff work very hard to maintain the cleanliness of the building and address any and all concerns.

Many visitors have come to Congdon this year after it was designated a school of recognition by the state. The Mayor, members of the school committee, the Commissioner of Education, delegates from many other districts, State Senators, newspaper, radio, and television reporters, Leadership Southcoast members, and New Bedford firefighters have all toured Congdon this year. Many of the visitors commented on how clean the building is despite its' age and that they would love for their own children to attend Congdon.

Despite the limitations the staff and teachers face at Congdon, they do what is necessary to make the best of the facility and give the students what they need to be successful. Needless to say, I was disappointed with the city council's vote not to send a statement of interest to the state to begin the process of building a new school.

I spend more time at Congdon than my home, by choice. Congdon is not my child's neighborhood school, but I love Congdon so

much I requested special permission for her to attend Congdon. It is an amazing place to work and have my child attend. I would never put my child or myself in a school that was dirty, unhealthy and/or unsafe. The teachers and staff work hard every day to provide the students with a great educational experience. Trust me, I know first-hand.”

Justine Santos – Assistant Principal at Congdon