

# Coalition for Healthier Schools

## Position Statement and Recommendations

Each school day, 54 million children and 6 million adults—that's 20% of the total U.S. population—spend their workdays inside school buildings. Unfortunately, too many of our nation's 120,000 public and private K-12 schools are “unhealthy” buildings that can harm their health and hinder learning. Today, clear and convincing research shows that improving specific factors such as school indoor environmental quality improves attendance, academic performance, and productivity.

### About children

Children are more vulnerable than adults to environmental hazards because they're smaller, have developing organs, and breathe more air per pound of body weight. They cannot identify hazards. Adverse exposures and injuries during childhood may have a lifetime impact.

### School factors affecting health

Many school environmental factors can affect the health of children and employees. Too many schools are sited near industrial plants or toxic waste sites; some are sited on abandoned landfills. Many school facilities are poorly maintained. Schools are more densely occupied and more intensively used than office buildings, magnifying problems. Thousands of schools are severely overcrowded, which compromises ventilation systems, acoustics, food service, recess, and sanitation and lavatories. Children also spend extra hours in vehicles or buses when their schools are beyond safe walking and biking distances.

The U.S. EPA has estimated that up to half of all schools have problems with indoor environmental quality. Children and staff are affected by:

- polluted indoor air, including from nearby pollution sources
- toxic chemical and pesticide use
- mold infestations
- asbestos, radon
- lead in paint and drinking water
- heavy metals and persistent toxics, such as mercury and PCBs

### Results of unhealthy schools

School environmental problems contribute to:

- child and staff absenteeism
- asthma, allergies, headaches, fatigue, nausea, rashes and chronic illnesses
- Sick Building Syndrome/Building Related Illness
- more medication use by children and staff
- learning or behavior difficulties
- greater liability for school districts
- reduced funding due to poor attendance

An estimated 1 in 8 U.S. school-aged children has asthma, resulting in an estimated 15 million missed school days annually (CDC). Asthma is the leading cause of absenteeism from chronic illness. Asthma is also a leading job-related disease of teachers and custodians.

### Coalition Position

At a time when this nation is committed to raising academic performance and honoring each child's potential, we have a **moral obligation** to protect and accommodate children who already have health and learning problems, and to reduce the risks to other children and personnel. To protect child and employee health, improve education, and create healthier communities, we believe all schools should:

- adopt high performance design and siting standards
- ensure and sustain quality indoor air
- use safer cleaning and maintenance products
- use non-toxic products for instruction
- use integrated pest control and weed control
- provide quality lighting, including daylighting
- provide good acoustics and noise control
- select durable, easy-to-clean flooring
- offer wholesome food and exercise opportunities
- provide safe spaces for outdoor activities
- build or retrofit facilities for energy and other resource efficiencies

**A powerful array of groups support new policies and actions to ensure all schools are environmentally safe and healthy, including parents, unions, educators, health and environment groups, and advocates for the 7 million students in special education programs.**

**A vote for healthy schools is a vote for children,  
for health, for education, for environment, and for communities.**

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## **We support and ask that elected and appointed officials:**

### **National Policy**

- **Support full staffing and resources for U.S. EPA** children's health protection and schools programs (FFY 06 levels)
- **Support full funding and staffing for federal agencies** to coordinate federal plans to address healthy school environments (CDC, EPA, Education, Energy, Labor, Homeland Security), including high performance school design, siting, construction, and the greening of schools with preventive maintenance (IAQ, IPM green cleaning and more)
  - **\$25m appropriation** for Healthy and High Performance Schools provisions of NCLB
  - **\$ 8m appropriation** for the Healthy High Performance Schools (Subtitle E) of the Energy Independence and Security Act of 2007 that directs EPA to create new guidelines for school environmental health programs and for the siting of schools.
- **Support federal funding for school construction/renovation and urgent repairs**, consistent with enacted laws promoting healthy school environments

### **State and Local Policy**

- Promote, adopt, fund, and implement **healthy, high performance school facility design**. Factors include: facility oversight and siting; adequate, safe space for outdoor activities; construction materials; pollutant source controls; ventilation; durable and easy-to-clean surfaces and floors; moisture and mold controls; temperature and humidity controls; acoustics and noise controls; ergonomics; safety and security; daylighting (maximizing natural light); and energy conservation.
- Promote, adopt, and fund standards and programs to promote use of **environmentally preferable materials** for school construction, instruction, maintenance, and cleaning, such as **integrated pest management (IPM)** and **green cleaning**.
- Promote and fund state programs **to reduce use or storage of toxic chemicals**, such as mercury, pesticides and solvents. **Remediate hazards** such as PCBs, asbestos, and lead in drinking water.
- Ensure that parents and employees have an active **"right to know"** about hazards.
- Ensure that all facilities are **fully accessible** to students and employees with asthma and environmental, learning, and physical disabilities and do **no further harm** their health.

**This message sponsored by:** American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities; American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees; Alliance for Healthy Homes; American Lung Association; American Public Health Association; Apollo Alliance; Beyond Pesticides; Children's Environmental Health Network; Healthy Children-Healthy World; Connecticut Foundation for Environmentally Safe Schools; Environmental Defense; Funders Forum on Environment and Education; Healthy Kids: The Key to Basics (MA); Healthy Schools Network; Improving Kids Environment (IN); Institute for Children's Environmental, Health, Learning Disabilities Association of America; Marin Golden Gate Learning Disabilities Association (CA); Massachusetts Healthy Schools Network; National Center for Environmental Health Strategies; National Education Association; National Education Association Health Information Network; National PTA; Natural Resources Defense Council; New Jersey Work Environment Council; New Jersey Environmental Federation; Oregon Environmental Council; Physicians for Social Responsibility; Public Education Network; Twenty-first Century Schools Fund (DC); State of Washington Healthy Schools Roundtable; West Harlem Environmental Action; and League of Conservation Voters, Washington, DC; National Clearinghouse for Educational Facilities; National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners; **and 200 more organizations.**

**About the Coalition.** Convened in 2000, it provides the national forum and platform for healthy school environments, through regular conference calls, meetings, and joint actions, such as national, state and local events for National Healthy Schools Day annually. JOIN: <http://www.healthyschools.org/coalition.html> or call 202-543-7555.