

Coalition for Healthier Schools

Position Statement and Policy Recommendations

...providing the platform and the forum for school environmental health...since 2001...

Each school day, 55 million children and 7 million adults—that's 20% of the total U.S. population and 98% of all children—spend their workdays inside P-12 school buildings. Unfortunately, too many of our nation's 130,000 public and private 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. See www.epa.gov/children

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 all affected by:

- polluted indoor air and outdoor air
- toxic chemical and pesticide uses; chemical spills
- mold infestations
- asbestos, radon
- lead in paint and drinking water
- inadequate chemical management
- poor siting, design, engineering
- hazardous materials purchased and stored onsite
- heavy metals and other toxics, such as mercury, CCA, PCBs

Results of unhealthy schools:

- 60% of all children suffer health and learning problems due **solely** to the conditions of their schools.
 - child and staff health problems and absenteeism
 - asthma, allergies, headaches, fatigue, nausea, rashes and chronic illnesses
 - Sick Building Syndrome/Building Related Illness
 - more medication use by children and staff
 - learning and behavior difficulties that worsen
 - greater liability for school districts
 - lower achievement,
- And, reduced revenues due to poor attendance.

Asthma is the leading cause of absenteeism from chronic illness. Asthma is also a leading work-related disease of teachers and custodians—they get it on the job.

Coalition Position

When the nation is committed to raising academic performance and honoring each child's potential, and to improving the environment of every neighborhood, we have a **moral obligation** to protect all children and to accommodate children and personnel who already have impairments. To promote child and adult health, improve education, and create healthier communities, all schools should:

- adopt high performance design and siting standards
- promote 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
- remediate lead, CCA, PCBs, mold infestations, and clean out old chemicals.

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 millions of students in special education programs.

For children, health, environment, education, and communities, we support:

- ✦ **The President's FFY 13 Budget for EPA's Green and Healthy Schools Initiative**
- ✦ **Restoring full staffing and resources for U.S. EPA IAQ Tools for Schools** program at greater than FFY 10 levels, focusing on restoring national and regional grants and staffing
- ✦ **Funding and staffing for federal agencies** to develop a time-lined coordinated federal strategy to address healthy school environments for all children (CDC, EPA, Education, Energy, Labor, Homeland Security), including high performance school design, siting, construction, and the greening of existing schools with preventive maintenance and targeted retrofits.
 - Re-authorize and expand the Healthy High Performance Schools (Subtitle E) of the Energy Independence and Security Act of 2007 that directs EPA to issue voluntary guidelines and partnership grants to states to advance school environmental health programs.
- ✦ **Fund school construction/renovation and urgent repairs**, consistent with enacted laws and guidelines to ensure that renovated facilities are healthy places for children.

State and Local Policy

- ✦ Promote, adopt, fund, and implement **healthy, high performance school facility design**. Factors include: facility oversight and safe siting; adequate, safe space for outdoor activities; low-emission 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 **third party certified green cleaning products**
- ✦ Support and state agency 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; American Lung Association; American Public Health Association; 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); Green Schools Initiative/CA; Healthy Schools Network; Improving Kids Environment (IN); Initiative 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; West Harlem Environmental Action; and League of Conservation Voters, Washington, DC; National Clearinghouse for Educational Facilities; National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners; **and over 200 more organizations nationwide.**

About the Coalition. Convened in 2001, and coordinated by Healthy Schools Network, it provides the national forum and platform for healthy schools, through networking conference calls, meetings, and joint reports and actions. For more information, see www.healthyschools.org >coalition.

Suggested reading: *Sick Schools 2009*; *Green Schools: Costs and Benefits*, Greg Kats, 2006; *Climate Change, Indoor Environments, and Health*, Institute of Medicine (2011); *Green Schools*, National Research Council. 2006; *Learning Curve: Putting Healthy School Principles into Practice*, Environmental Health Perspectives, 2009; and, www.epa.gov/children and www.epa.gov/iaq/schools.