

**NATIONAL PTA  
HEALTHY SCHOOLS NETWORK  
CENTER FOR NEW AMERICAN DREAM  
AMERICAN PUBLIC HEALTH ASSOCIATION  
AMERICAN ASSOCIATION ON MENTAL RETARDATION**

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**EMBARGOED UNTIL MONDAY, APRIL 18, 2005, 8:30 AM ET**

**For more information:**

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***FEDERAL ‘MARSHALL PLAN’ NEEDED TO PROTECT  
CHILDREN’S HEALTH AND SCHOOLS***

***“National Healthy Schools Day”, April 18<sup>th</sup>***

**Chicago, New York, Washington, DC (April 18, 2005)**—School building environmental problems are eroding children’s health and test scores. Parent, public health, environment, and education groups today urged the White House and federal agencies to develop a “Marshall Plan” to identify and to promote solutions to protect the nation’s schools and the health and safety of schoolchildren. This critical issue deserves an action plan that involves federal awareness and intervention.

Each day 54 million schoolchildren and six million adults—20 percent of the entire U.S. population—enter our nation’s school buildings. And, each day too many are exposed to polluted indoor air, chemicals and pesticides, growing molds, lead in drinking water, and asbestos. According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, one-half of the nation's schools have problems with indoor air quality.

**Healthy Schools Network Executive Director Claire Barnett** said, “Today is another un-Healthy School Day, with 54 million children in 120,000 schools: too many have serious environmental problems that erode children’s health. This is not just a local issue. This is America’s largest, single unaddressed public health problem facing the federal agencies.”

Many school facilities have been poorly maintained and thousands of our nation’s schools remain severely overcrowded. These problems contribute to absenteeism, student medication use, learning difficulties, sick building syndrome, staff turnover, and greater liability for school districts.

“On behalf of 6 million parents nationwide, PTA believes it imperative to find solutions to clean, safe learning environments so every child has the best opportunity to succeed,” said **National PTA President Linda Hodge**. “As adults, we expect safe and healthy workplace environments, why would we expect anything less for our children’s workplace?”

Raising concerns about fundamental justice issues, **Doreen Croser, Executive Director, American Association on Mental Retardation**, noted, “Children with intellectual and developmental disabilities often attend school in old buildings that are falling apart. This is absolutely criminal when we consider that children with disabilities may be especially sensitive and vulnerable to environmental contaminants found in these substandard schools. It is also very clear that we must do everything within our power to ensure healthy school environments for all children so each will be afforded the opportunity to learn and to grow to the maximum extent of their individual abilities.”

Federal interventions on school facility environments are supported by a wide coalition of national, state, and local organizations. Adding public health and environmental concerns to the call to action are:

**American Public Health Association’s Executive Director Georges C. Benjamin, MD, FACP**: “It is unconscionable that millions of our nation’s children, many of them from low-income households, are surrounded daily by environmental health hazards such as unsafe indoor air, chemicals, asbestos and mold. Every child should have the right to be educated in an environmentally safe and healthy school, and every teacher, administrator and other school staff member should also be protected. This is a problem that should be addressed swiftly and thoroughly at the federal level to ensure the well-being of all users of school buildings. Adults expect to work in safe buildings, so why should we demand any less for our children?”

**Diane Wood, Executive Director, Center for a New American Dream**, Takoma Park, Maryland: “Not only are the physical structures of the buildings in need of repair, but the cleaning products used to maintain the existing facilities are another important source of potential harm. One out of three cleaning products used in schools have known human health impacts including ingredients that cause learning disabilities, neurological problems, reproductive impacts and cancer.”

**Jay Feldman, Executive Director, Beyond Pesticides**, Washington, DC: “It is critical that city, state and federal policy protect children from pesticide use in schools. With our School Pesticide Reform Coalition, we want to make sure that all children have healthy workplaces in which to learn, free of pests and toxic pesticides.”

### **School Environmental Needs Supported by Wide Coalition**

The national Coalition for Healthier Schools’ *Position Statement 2005* calls for federal, state, and local actions, from siting, to design, to changes in pesticide and chemical use practices, to safer playgrounds. In 2004, the US Department of Education released a long-overdue National Priority Study on the impacts of decayed schools on children. The department has not reported to Congress on its findings as required by the No Child Left Behind Act’s Healthy and High Performance Schools Program. Federal funds to repair schools were last

appropriated in 2000. Scattered, uncoordinated and sometimes conflicting federal programs have contributed to the problems that parents, personnel, schools, and cities and states are having in maintaining environmentally healthy schools that are clean and in good repair.

For more information on the Position Statement of the Coalition for Healthier Schools and a list of supporting organizations, visit [www.healthyschools.org](http://www.healthyschools.org).

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**Editor's Note:**

**Please see attached *Coast to Coast listings and contacts* for local and state activities for National Healthy Schools Day 2005.**

**States: AZ, CAL, CT, DC, GA, IL, ME, MA, MN, NH, NJ, NYS & NYC, OH, WA**

**Issues: Indoor air pollution, asthma, green cleaning, acoustics, toxic chemicals, pesticides, state regulations, playgrounds, new guides to help parents and schools, honoring heroes, and more.**