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NEW DATA SHOW SCHOOLS IGNORE CHILDREN'S HEALTH: GROUPS URGE ACTION BY EPA AND STATES

EARLY SURVEY RESULTS RING LOUD ALARMS

Silver Spring, MD— Advocates today released early results of a nationwide survey of school nurses and urged the EPA to complete congressionally mandated environmental health guidelines for the states to help address school conditions. Responses to the nationwide survey indicate over 40% of more than 350 respondents say that they know children and staff adversely impacted by avoidable indoor pollutants and that virtually no agencies assist local schools.

The 2010 school nurse survey data challenge EPA's and other agencies' assumptions about how effectively states and local schools are managing IAQ and other K-12 environmental issues. EPA has estimated based on a 2006 Center for Disease Control survey that half of K-12 schools have Indoor Air Quality Management Plans. The nurses' survey indicates that perhaps only one-quarter do.

"Parents and taxpayers should be enraged," says NASN Executive Director Amy Garcia, RN. "Children continue to miss school because of illnesses triggered by indoor air pollutants. Attendance is strongly correlated with school success and graduation. School nurses call on school boards, administrators to develop indoor air quality teams on states to assist schools with guidance, and the Environmental Protection Agency to complete work on school environments mandated by Congress."

Over 350 school nurses responded to the 2010 survey. The survey touched on many of the problems raised in the **SICK SCHOOLS 2009** report and issues EPA is mandated to tackle, such as drinking water quality, pest control, and chemical spills.

- 40% know children and staff adversely affected by pollutants in schools;
- only 17% say schools have cleaned up asthma-trigger as requested by parents
 - pests, molds, indoor air quality, sanitation
- over 75% say schools have no indoor air quality team or coordinator;
- only 6% say an outside agency helped their school with environmental issues;
- nurse respondent quotes on discussing environment with school leaders:
 - "Told I was a negative person for asking;
 - "Not encouraged to do so";
 - "No time"

Healthy Schools Network Executive Director Claire Barnett warns, "Parents are stunned when they discover schools have known about environmental factors affecting their child and have done little or nothing. Then they learn that no agency responds either. Every effort should be made to intervene when children are in harm's way."

In 2009, the Coalition for Healthier Schools, coordinated by Healthy Schools Network, published a national collaborative report **SICK SCHOOLS 2009: America's Continuing Environmental Health Crisis for Children**. http://www.healthyschools.org/SICK_SCHOOLS_2009.pdf The report, presented to federal agencies and congress last winter, was co-released by more than 30 organizations, provides a landmark set of state by state data and policy profiles, including policies on School Indoor Air Quality (IAQ), the topic of an annual EPA symposium that begins this week in Washington, DC. Both the National

Association of School Nurses (NASN) and Healthy Schools Network are US EPA IAQ Partners and are attending the EPA Symposium in Washington, DC this week.

Ginny Frazier, Executive Director, ALLY, Cincinnati, OH, a participant in the national Coalition, added, "Studies show that schools with poor air quality increase absenteeism which can lead to decreased academic performance. Environmental and health agencies are in the position to not only positively affect children's health, but also their academic performance.

EPA, advised by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and Education, is congressionally mandated to establish environmental health guidelines on schools and offer voluntary grants to state agencies. To the credit of EPA Administrator Lisa Jackson, EPA pioneered a first-ever monitoring of air toxics outside over 60 schools in 22 states and two tribal nations in 2009-10 (www.epa.gov/schoolair); limited monitoring will continue into 2011. But to date, EPA and CDC have announced no plans to evaluate the health of children attending schools where questionable levels of pollutants were found, a step recommended to EPA by its National Environmental Justice Advisory Committee last year.

Vernice Miller-Travis, who co-chaired the EPA advisory work group on School Air Toxics Monitoring, said, "It is not about how pollution affects bricks and mortar. It is about how pollution affects the children. How are our children supposed to learn if they are made sick by the buildings in which they attend school?"

In related work last year, Healthy Schools Network did a preliminary review complaints to of National Institutes of Occupational Safety and Health from school personnel and the agency's Health Hazard Evaluations. Personnel reported chemical pneumonias, sores, migraines, dizziness and asthma; there was no information about the children attending those schools who are biologically more vulnerable to pollutants and who outnumber adults in K-12 schools by approximately nine to one. http://www.healthyschools.org/HS_Newsletter2010.pdf .

"Many of our teaching colleagues are injured by pollutants in schools; we also know that children are more vulnerable and can't get out of harm's way," **comments Joellen Lawson, Honorary President, Connecticut Foundation for Environmentally Safe Schools**. "This survey indicates that the health of America's school children, teachers and staff is at risk as long as state agency roles and minimum standards for indoor air programs are not explicitly defined and carried out."

Healthy indoor environments prevent both unnecessary, costly illnesses and lost learning time due to missed school days. Yet no one has stepped in for our Nation's children. NASN and Healthy Schools Network partner to keep children safe, in school and ready to learn.

The National Association of School Nurses is a non-profit specialty nursing organization, organized in 1968 and incorporated in 1977, representing school nurses exclusively. NASN has over 15,000 members and 51 affiliates, including the District of Columbia and overseas. The mission of the NASN is to improve the health and educational success of children and youth by developing and providing leadership to advance the school nursing practice. To learn more about NASN, please visit us on the Web at www.nasn.org or call 866-627-6767.

Healthy Schools Network, Inc., is the leading national voice for children's environmental health at school and a national-award-winning 501(c) 3 not-for-profit environmental health organization. Founded in 1995, it launched the national healthy schools movement with comprehensive state policies and a model coalition that have been shared and replicated widely since 1997. The Network can be reached at 518-462-0632 or on the web at www.HealthySchools.org.