

COALITION FOR HEALTHIER SCHOOLS

Position Statement: 2004

Background on Issues:

Improving education, child health and learning, and the environment.



Each day over 53 million school children and 6 million adults - 20 % of the entire U.S. population - enter our nation's school buildings to teach and to learn. Unfortunately, in too many cases, they enter "unhealthy" school buildings that undermine learning and health.

Many school facilities have been poorly maintained and thousands of our nation's schools remain severely overcrowded. Schools are often sited next to industrial plants or on abandoned landfills; new schools are built beyond safe walking or biking distance for students. In a recent five-state survey, more than 1,100 public schools were built within a half-mile of a toxic waste site. Polluted indoor air, toxic chemical and pesticide use, growing molds, lead in paint and drinking water, and asbestos are also factors that impact the health of our nation's students and school staff. These problems contribute to absenteeism, student medication use, learning difficulties, sick building syndrome, staff turnover, and greater liability for school districts.

According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, "Studies show that one-half of our nation's 115,000 schools have problems linked to indoor air quality. Students, teachers and staff are at greater risk because of the hours spent in school facilities and because children are especially susceptible to pollutants." Schools are also more densely occupied and more intensively used than offices, which contribute to the overall problem.

This comes at a time when 5.2 million school age children are afflicted with asthma. As a result, asthma is the leading cause of school absenteeism due to chronic illness. According to the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, approximately 14 million school days are lost annually as a result of asthma. The increase in asthma is particularly acute in urban areas where large numbers of African-American, Hispanic American, and other minority students live.

At a time when this nation is committed to raising academic performance and making sure each child has an opportunity to learn to his or her potential, we believe we have a moral obligation to protect and promote the health of our nation's school children. Clear and convincing research shows that improving school indoor environmental quality, siting, and design, using non-toxic products for cleaning, maintenance and instruction, providing more natural daylight, and creating energy efficient, neighborhood schools with adequate, safe space for outdoor activities, will all contribute to protecting the health of our children, to improving public education, and to creating healthier communities.

There is a powerful and growing array of groups for protecting and improving the health and learning of our nation's school children. Millions of parents, thousands of organizations, community groups, public health and professional organizations, school employees, labor unions, and environmental groups support environmentally safe and healthy schools, including the parents and teachers of the seven million children in special education programs (IDEA). They are core constituencies that care deeply about these issues.

We support and ask that elected and appointed officials:

Federal Officials

- Insist that the US Department of Education submit the long-overdue report to Congress on its required Study of National Significance on the impacts of unhealthy school buildings on child health and learning (*Sec. 5414 of No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*).
- Fund the Healthy High Performance School Act in No Child Left Behind at 25 million dollars a year. The appropriation will allow Department of Education to activate a grant program to help states show schools how to design and engineer healthier and more energy efficient facilities, improve indoor environmental quality, protect and conserve water, take advantage of new energy technologies, and save money (*NCLB of 2001, Sec. 5581-86 ff defines and establishes Healthy, High Performance Schools state grant program*).
- Increase funding to support and expand EPA's *LAQ Tools for Schools* and *Design Tools for Schools*. These voluntary technical assistance programs are part of the EPA's commitment to improve schools with resources directed at state agencies and at local school facility managers, administrators, architects, engineers, parents, teachers, school nurses, staff, and occupational and environmental health specialists to help them address environmental problems.
- Support federal funds for the states for health and safety repairs and renovations to local schools. Federal assistance will help state and local school districts remediate and renovate school buildings.
- Continue funding for the National Clearinghouse for Educational Facilities sponsored by the United States Department of Education. This outlet summarizes and provides online resource on planning, design, financing, construction, operations and maintenance for safe, healthy and high-performance educational facilities (www.edfacilities.org/healthy_school_environment).
- Pass the School Environmental Protection Act. This act would require local educational agencies and schools to implement integrated pest management systems to minimize the use of pesticides in schools and to provide parents, guardians and employees with notice of the use of pesticides in schools (*HR 121 by R. Holt and G. Miller, to amend the Federal Insecticide, Fungicide, and Rodenticide Act and in S.448 by C. Dodd, NCLB of 2003*).

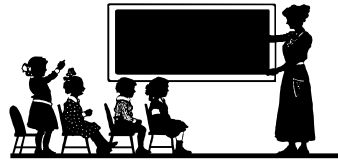
State Officials

- Promote, adopt, fund, and implement state guidelines for healthy, high performance school facility design. These include proper facility oversight and siting, adequate, safe space for outdoor activities, environmentally preferred materials for construction, pollutant source controls, adequate ventilation, durable, easy to clean surfaces and floors, moisture and mold controls, temperature and humidity controls, acoustics and noise control, ergonomics, safety and security, day lighting, and energy conservation.
- Promote, adopt and fund state standards and programs to promote the use of non-toxic, environmentally preferable products and materials for school construction, instruction, and maintenance and cleaning.
- Promote and fund state programs to reduce or eliminate toxic chemical products used or stored in schools such as mercury, pesticides, and solvents.



Local Government and School Board Officials

- Adopt and support the use of best environmental practices, including training for school officials and staff for pest control, housekeeping, maintenance, and selection of least-toxic materials to promote and maintain a healthier school environment.
- Adopt US EPA's *LAQ Tools for Schools* and *Design Tools for Schools* as model programs for improving indoor air quality and for the design and construction of healthy, productive learning environments.
- Adopt an integrated pest management program to reduce the use or eliminate toxic pesticides used around students and staff.
- Provide parents and employees with a Right-to-Know about chemicals and environmental hazards at school.
- Ensure that all local school facilities prevent hazards to occupant health and are fully accessible to all students and staff with asthma, environmental, learning, developmental, and physical disabilities, and do not further compromise their abilities to stay healthy, to learn, and to work.



Sources:

Total enrollment and employees: 53m total public and private enrollment; public only enrollment projected at 48.2 million for 2004; 6m total public school employees. National Center for Education Statistics, "State Nonfiscal Survey of Public Elementary/Secondary Education: School Year 2001-02", 2003.

Walkable communities: US EPA, "Travel and Environmental Implications of School Siting", EPA 231-R-03-004, 2003.

Contaminated sites: "Poisoned Schools: Invisible Threats, Visible Actions", Center for Health, Environment, and Justice, March 2001.

Asthma: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Surveillance for Asthma- United States, 1980-1999, MMWR March 29, 2002, Vol. 51, No. SS-1.

Numbers of schools and air quality: US EPA *LAQ Tools for Schools*, 115,000 is estimated total of all public and private schools; number of public schools only, 94,112 in 2001-02, National Center for Education Statistics, "Overview of Public Elementary and Secondary Schools and Districts: School Year 2001-02", 2003.

Children and Pollutants: Federal Executive Order 13045 (April 1997, amended April 2003), "The Protection of Children from Environmental Health Risks and Safety Risks", establishing national priority on protection of children and Inter Agency Task Force.

Students in special education: 23rd and 24th US Department of Education/Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) Annual Reports to Congress.

THIS MESSAGE SPONSORED BY American Association on Mental Retardation, American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees, Alliance for Healthy Homes, American Lung Association, American Public Health Association, Beyond Pesticides, Center for Health Environment and Justice, Children's Environmental Health Network, Children's Health Environmental Coalition, Connecticut Foundation for Environmentally Safe Schools, Environmental Defense, Funders Forum on Environment and Education, Healthy Kids: The Key to Basics (MA), Healthy Schools Network, Illinois Healthy Schools Campaign, 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 Environmental Education and Training Foundation, 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, Stuyvesant High School Parents Association (NY, NY), Twenty-first Century Schools Fund, 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 ENDORSED BY American Lung Association of Maine, Boston Urban Asthma Coalition, MA, Buckeye Environmental Network, Grove City, OH, Californians for Alternatives to Toxics, Eureka, CA, The Ashkin Group, Bloomington, IN, Cancer Prevention Coalition of Los Angeles, Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Program/MI Dept. of Community Health, Citizens Environmental Coalition, Albany, NY, Clean Air Council, Philadelphia, Coalition to End Childhood Lead Poisoning, Baltimore, MD, Coalition for Environmentally Safe Communities, Rockville, MD, Community Toolbox for Children's Environmental Health, CAL, Connecticut Education Association, EcoSchools USA, San Francisco, CA, Education Law Center, Newark, NJ, Embracing Your Life, Louisville, KY, Environmental Health Watch, Cleveland, OH, Fulton (NY) IAQ Task Force, Greater Newark (NJ) Conservancy, Health Impact, Seattle, WA, Healthy Buildings Network, Washington, DC, Healthy Children's Organizing Project-Consumer Action, San Francisco, CA, Healthy-Communications.com, Healthy Homes Network of Greater Kansas City, Healthy Living Foundation, Jupiter, FL, Informed Choices, Slidell, LA, Innovative Solutions, Tucson, AZ, Isles, Inc., Trenton, NJ, Jordan Institute, Inc., Concord, NH, Kids for Saving the Earth, MN, Learning Disabilities Association of Maine, Literacy for Environmental Justice, San Francisco, Maryland Association for Environmental and Outdoor Education, Westminster, MD, Massachusetts Association of Special Education Parent Advisory Councils, Massachusetts Coalition for Occupational Safety and Health, Massachusetts PTA, Mississippi 2020 Network, Jackson, MS, Montana Environmental Information Center, New Jersey Citizen Action, New York State Association of School Nurses, New York State United Teachers, Ohio Help End Lead Poisoning, Ohio Fair Schools Campaign, Parents for Nontoxic Alternatives, Washington, DC, Partnership Effort for the Advancement of Children's Health, Durham, NC, R&D Supply, Inc., WA, ReSource for Health, Louisville, KY, Safe Minds, GA, Safer Pest Control Project, Chicago, IL, South Bronx (NY) Clean Air Coalition, Toxics Information Project, Providence, RI, Trenton (NJ) Coalition for Healthy Schools, Turtle Clan Environment Testing, Inc., Stratford, CT, Western New York Council on Occupational Safety and Health, Buffalo, NY, *and many more.*

Lists in formation.

The national ***Coalition for Healthier Schools*** provides a forum for education, health, labor, parent, environment, and building sciences organizations and is committed to collaborative efforts to build and to advance the platform for environmental health at school.



Healthy Schools Network, Inc.

www.healthyschools.org