

# School Health Watch

The Newsletter of the Illinois Healthy Schools Campaign

Healthy  
Schools  
Campaign



Making Illinois Schools Environmentally Healthy Places to Learn & Work

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[www.healthyschoolscampaign.org](http://www.healthyschoolscampaign.org)

## Apparently Size *Doesn't* Matter

### Two Illinois School Districts Show Successful IAQ Management

Making sure that schools are healthy environments promotes both children's well-being and academic performance. In order to improve the environmental health of schools, the Healthy Schools Campaign advocates for the Healthy Schools Best Practices Act—an act requiring indoor air quality (IAQ) management plans in schools.

When stakeholders are presented with IAQ plans, we often hear excuses for why these plans are too difficult to be implemented. "Small schools don't have the resources to implement EPA's IAQ Tools for Schools" or "Large school districts can't cover all their buildings cost-effectively with IAQ plans." Despite these often-heard concerns, two Illinois public school districts have effectively shown that successful IAQ management plans can be implemented, at limited cost, by any school that has committed leadership. As shown by Illinois School Districts East Dubuque #119 and Naperville #203, when it comes to healthy IAQ, school size doesn't matter.

East Dubuque District Superintendent Donald Kussmaul became involved with IAQ after attending a workshop in 1999 where he realized the importance of a healthy school environment. He decided to start an IAQ program slowly. The first year he worked directly with the maintenance director, conducting a walkthrough of their three buildings that serve more than 700 elementary and high school students. By 2002, Mr. Kussmaul implemented a district-wide IAQ management program with education for all staff members including the nurse, bus drivers, food service staff and all teachers. Despite the relatively small size of his district, Kussmaul found concerned staff to be valuable resources once his leadership made IAQ management a priority.

For Mr. Kussmaul, the investment in healthy IAQ was an easy decision, and not an expensive one. He said that there were extra costs for some materials, including extra ceiling tiles, carpet blowers and furnace filters. However, many of these costs are included in their regular maintenance budget and would have been expenses down the road anyway. "If you can get in and do preventative work," Kussmaul says, "you can really save some money in the long run."

By raising the importance of IAQ issues in his community, Mr. Kussmaul feels that he has a healthier school and can show it by pointing to improved attendance rates—an increase of nearly 5% after implementation.

Superintendent Ron Gibson of the Naperville School District, a relatively large district serving more than 18,000 students, had a different problem to deal with in the late '90s. The district had fresh memories of local IAQ problems, including mold at the DuPage County Courthouse. Additionally, expanding student populations forced the district into some creative but less than ideal situations, including making additional classroom space out of storage closets.

According to a report from the American Association of School Administrators, "Students are more likely to prosper when their environment is conducive to learning. Environmentally responsive heating, air conditioning and ventilating systems, for example, either in a new or renovated school, provide a more comfortable learning environment. Such well-designed systems send a powerful message to kids about the importance their community places on education."

It is with this in mind that Mr. Gibson and a team of administrators decided to take a proactive approach and learn more about the indoor environment. Working together with other school administrators, they determined it would be most cost-effective to implement an IAQ management plan and to create a staff position to



District 119's IAQ team.

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## Fact File

- According to the EPA, human exposure to indoor air pollutants can be 100 times worse than outdoor levels.
- According to the GAO, 70% of schools in Illinois report at least one unsatisfactory environmental condition.
- According to a study done by the Neighborhood Capital Budget Group (NCBG), 20% of teachers reported on average four sick days per year due to poor indoor air quality in schools.
- According to the American Lung Association, asthma is the number one cause of school absenteeism and the leading cause of children's hospital admissions for chronic conditions.
- According to the Chicago Environmental Law Clinic, Illinois has no specific regulations for school indoor air designed to protect children's health.

# Healthy & High-Performing Schools Concept Is Catching On

It is a unique time in educational history. Enrollment rates are rising, current infrastructure is aging and much of this infrastructure needs major renovation. As schools are working hard to balance their budgets, they are spending more than \$6 billion annually in energy costs.

With Illinois continuing to spend millions of dollars for school construction and renovation, the time is right for districts to take a serious look at alternative designs for the next generation of schools.

The "healthy and high performance" school movement has been gradually catching on nationwide as educators search for ways to save money and to better serve their communities.

In March 2000, the U.S. Green Building Council released its Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) rating system. LEED validated healthy and high-performing building in America and enabled this movement to flourish. The Collaborative for High Performance Schools (CHPS), a school building initiative that advocates innovative school building designs, has adopted LEED as its guide for best incorporating healthy and high-performing building in conventional school construction—and schools nationwide are increasingly turning to CHPS themselves.

As part of our efforts to promote healthy and high-performance schools, this is one of the many guidelines and standards we will bring to the attention of school officials at the state and local levels. We believe that CHPS and LEED standards can and should become part of the codes for Illinois schools.

There is growing support not just nationwide, but also at the highest national levels of government. For example, U.S. Sen. Jim Jeffords (I-VT) announced in April a report titled "Building Momentum: National Trends and Prospects for High-Performance Green Buildings." The U.S. Green Building Council coordinated and prepared the report for the Senate Environment and Public Works (EPW) Committee, on which Jeffords serves as Ranking Member.

The report demonstrates the economic and environmental viability of building healthy and high-performing buildings and says buildings that meet the standards in the report increase workers' productivity, consume less energy and water, produce less waste, and can save significant natural and monetary resources in operation and management costs.



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## Size Doesn't Matter (Continued from Page 1)

oversee IAQ issues, rather than continually bring in an outside consulting firm.

Mr. Gibson also created an IAQ management team that was composed of teachers, parents, administrators and others. "By bringing the people together who expressed concerns with the air quality, we were able to more effectively create a group that can address IAQ issues," he says. It also created an avenue for students and employees to express their concerns about the air quality, and learn about how these issues can be addressed.

As for the costs, the school administration decided that prevention was a cost-effective use of maintenance dollars, and that most of the costs associated with IAQ management are really reallocations of their existing maintenance budget. In 2001, after seeing the closing of nearby St. Charles East High School because of mold at a price tag of nearly \$25 million, Mr. Gibson feels that IAQ is money well spent.

However, Mr. Gibson believes that the most important benefit of their IAQ plan can not be measured by cost. He feels that by providing a healthy indoor environment, he is providing the best learning environment possible for his students.

In both of these districts, small and large, IAQ management plans were able to engage concerned staff and parents, make prevention a priority, and save money in the long run.



## Putting Nutrition Back Into School Lunches

The U.S. Congress is considering passage of the Child Nutrition Reauthorization Act, and this is an excellent opportunity to work to improve the nutritional quality of school food programs. Why? The U.S. Surgeon General has identified obesity as a growing public health problem, particularly among children.

While the reasons for obesity are multi-faceted and complex, it is clear that school food programs are partially to blame. USDA Undersecretary Eric Bost identifies the accessibility of vending machines with high-calorie soft drinks and junk food and the availability of high-fat items such as pizza and fast foods in school cafeterias as major contributing factors. He advocates for programs that boost the amounts of fruits and vegetables offered to children.

Many trends in school food service mirror the overall changes in food preparation and delivery. Most schools no longer have kitchens in which to prepare healthy, delicious meals. Most schools contract with major food service companies who prepare highly processed, tasteless meals that can be easily reheated. In 1997, 30% of public schools served fast food. This is an increase from 13% in 1995.

As Congress debates the Child Nutrition Reauthorization Act, which includes the School Lunch and Breakfast Program and Summer Food Program, it is an excellent opportunity to promote strategies that address the problem of overweight and obese children. Farm-to-school projects link local

farmers with the school lunch program, providing the dual benefit of providing healthier food to students while also supporting local farmers. One such program is the "Growing Healthy Kids: America's Farms Feed America's Children." This program creates a \$10 million comprehensive seed grant fund to address the needs of farm-to-school projects and to reduce barriers to their growth and acceptance.

Schools that start farm-to-school projects face a number of initial barriers and expenses. Seed grants, up to \$100,000 over three years, would allow schools to overcome these initial hurdles. Grants would be used to find sources of locally grown food, plan seasonal menus and develop promotional materials, acquire adequate equipment to store and prepare fresh foods, train staff on new food safety, and develop nutrition education related to agriculture.

We urge you to support the "Growing Healthy Kids: America's Farms Feed America's Children" program. Please sign on to our support statement and send a letter to your Congressional representatives. Visit our Web site at [www.healthyschoolscampaign.org](http://www.healthyschoolscampaign.org) to sign onto our support statement or for a sample letter you can send.



## Fundraising Event Drew Laughs, Appetites and Supporters

The Healthy Schools Campaign hosted its first fundraising benefit, "Laughing Matters: Supporting Healthy Environments for Children," on March 6, 2003, at the Second City e.t.c. Theater in Chicago. Over 150 attended this evening of good food and good comedy.

The event featured an 80% organic meal made from scratch at the Illinois Institute of Culinary Arts, and headed up by David Joachim, a winner of the coveted cooking prize known as the James Beard Award and co-author of Generation Green's upcoming cookbook, *Fresh Choices: Easy Recipes for Pure Food When You Can't Buy 100% Organic*. This was followed by the humor and social commentary of the comedy show, "Curious George Goes to War."

Among the many supporters and attendees were the Chicago Teachers Union, Illinois Education Association, SEIU Local 1, University of Illinois at Chicago School of Public Health, American Lung Association of Metropolitan Chicago, AFSCME 31, and Children's Environmental Health Network. A special thanks to Whole Foods Market and Organic Valley, which provided most of the ingredients for the evening's meal.



Rochelle Davis of the Healthy Schools Campaign and James Alexander of the Chicago Teachers Union.

# Healthy Schools Campaign Profile / Spotlight

Mark Bishop  
Policy Director,  
Healthy Schools Campaign



## Quick Bio

- Nearly five years as director of environmental programs at the American Lung Association of Eastern Missouri
- Bachelor's degree in political science and environmental studies and Master's of Business Administration degree

## Getting the Word Out; Getting Things Done

As a director of environmental programs, with four-and-a-half years in the American Lung Association's Eastern Missouri office in St. Louis and six months in its Chicago office, Mark Bishop knows a thing or two about clean air. Specifically, clean indoor air. Now the challenge is to educate parents, teachers, administrators and politicians so that clean air can find its way into Illinois schoolrooms.

Bishop says that in the past five years, the Tools for Schools programs through the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency have come a long way toward educating school employees and school officials about indoor air quality (IAQ) and its importance to the health of students and staff. But there are still gaps in knowledge levels, and where awareness exists, sometimes there is still reluctance to pursue IAQ management plans.

With poor IAQ, he says, "both students and teachers are affected. Student absenteeism increases and their attention spans decrease. It's an education issue, but it's about quality of life too. The issues we are dealing with have broad implications for everyone inside a school. So we're trying to find the voices of those affected, get them heard, and work from the bottom up with concerned parents, teachers and others at the grassroots level. Additionally, we know we need to engage decision-makers and work with them to make changes at an administrative level."

"My experience with indoor air quality management, specifically with the Tools for Schools program, is directly applicable to our goals and mission at the Healthy Schools Campaign. What is exciting for me is that I can take my experience of running these programs and really bring it to a wider audience."



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