

# School Health Watch

The Newsletter of the Illinois Healthy Schools Campaign

Healthy  
Schools  
Campaign



Making Illinois Schools Environmentally Healthy Places to Learn & Work

Winter 2003, Vol. 2, Issue 1

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

## 2003 Policy Agenda Announced

State and Federal Officials Must Act Now to Protect Schoolchildren and School Staff

Children spend most of their waking hours outside of home in school, so we need to make sure schools are healthy environments that promote children's well-being and performance.

Irritants like pesticides, toxic molds, asbestos and cleaning products can negatively impact indoor air in schools, which in turn can adversely affect students. The effects of poor indoor air quality on health, learning and general well-being are wide-ranging, including allergies and asthma, increased rates of infectious diseases, chronic sinusitis, headaches, and a variety of respiratory diseases. Children are particularly vulnerable to these health effects.

For the last nine months, the Illinois Healthy Schools Campaign has been documenting the problems in Illinois schools relating to school environmental health. The Campaign surveyed media reports between March 1999 and June 2002, and we found media stories addressing environmental hazards in 22 schools. Of these, 14 had mold problems that resulted in over \$25 million in repair costs, four schools had students who developed mysterious rashes, two schools had asbestos problems, one school tested high for herbicides, one had a problem with lead paint, and one school found high levels of pesticides which cost \$50,000 to remove.

To address this problem, the Campaign has developed a set of policy recommendations for the state and federal governments. Here are some highlights:

- The Healthy Schools Campaign will introduce the Healthy Schools Best Practices Act, which will amend the Health, Life and Safety Provision of the School Code by requiring all school districts to develop indoor air quality (IAQ) management plans, as well as mandate training to help school districts develop such plans.
- The Better Schools Accountability Law of 1985 requires public school districts to provide school report cards each year to parents (and others upon request), and the Campaign will work to expand this report card to include facility information.
- The Campaign will work for full implementation of the Hazardous Waste Collection Act, a 1995 law that was

passed but has never been fully implemented. This law requires the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency (IEPA) to remove educational hazardous waste from the state's school laboratories and classrooms.



- The Campaign recommends the passage and funding of the Clean School Bus Grant Program, which will provide subsidies for school districts to purchase natural gas and low-emission diesel buses.
- The Healthy and High Performance Schools program adopted as part of the No Child Left Behind Education Act of 2001 includes a Healthy and High Performance School Grant Program that was never actually funded. We will continue to press for such funding.

To obtain our full report, "Healthy Schools: Making Illinois Schools Environmentally Healthy Places to Learn and Work," call Louella Hung at (312) 419-1810, e-mail her at [louella@healthyschoolscampaign.org](mailto:louella@healthyschoolscampaign.org), or visit our Web site at [www.healthyschoolscampaign.org](http://www.healthyschoolscampaign.org).

## GET INVOLVED

There are several ways you can get involved to make schools healthier and safer places to learn and work.

- Join the Healthy Schools Campaign. Sign up for monthly action alerts or join our Grassroots Leadership Team.
- Invite us to speak at your meetings or conferences. Contact Louella Hung, Outreach Director, at (312) 419-1810 or e-mail her at [louella@healthyschoolscampaign.org](mailto:louella@healthyschoolscampaign.org).
- Write our new Governor, Rod Blagojevich, at Office of the Governor, 207 State House, Springfield, IL 62706, or e-mail him at [governor@state.il.us](mailto:governor@state.il.us).
- Write your State Legislator. To find your state legislator, go online at [www.healthyschoolscampaign.org/solutions-2.htm](http://www.healthyschoolscampaign.org/solutions-2.htm).
- Write the Illinois Board of Education Chairman, Robert Schiller, at 100 North 1<sup>st</sup> Street, Springfield, IL 62777. A sample letter is located at [www.healthyschoolscampaign.org/solutions-3.htm](http://www.healthyschoolscampaign.org/solutions-3.htm).



## Fact File

A recent review by the Environmental Law Clinic of laws and regulations in Illinois related to school environmental health found a number of glaring problems:

- In spite of the fact that indoor air quality can be up to 100 times as polluted as outdoor air, there are no standards for school indoor air that have been established to protect children's health. (OSHA has exposure standards. These standards do not take into account children's vulnerability and only apply to employees.)
- Current inspection programs only cover traditional health, life and safety issues and do not include indoor air quality. Also, inspection reports are not readily available to the public.
- Except for the Integrated Pest Management (IPM) in Schools Act, there are no state initiatives promoting best practices that might improve school indoor air.

## Making Schools "Clean & Green"

The Healthy Schools Campaign is currently working with the Chicago Public Schools on implementing a 'green' cleaning project. Through the use of environmentally safe cleaning products and appropriate staff training, the project aims to reduce janitors' exposure to toxins and create healthier school environments for children.

Schools are four times as densely occupied as commercial office spaces; and children are not known for neatness. More children have asthma and allergies than ever before, and constant foot traffic stirs up dust and tracks in mud and debris. Schools often schedule cleaning during after hours. Yet, some over-crowded schools have adopted split sessions, some provide breakfasts, after school programs, sports activities, and summer school sessions. Some school buildings and grounds have become "centers of community" and are used for evening and weekend programs. The bottom line: schools have more users, for more hours than ever before.

A wide variety of toxic or hazardous products are routinely used for cleaning. Whether a product is freshly applied or misapplied during class, mixed improperly (some common cleaning products when mixed together can give off deadly gas) or used in an undiluted state, stored in an unventilated hall closet, or leaves a heavy residue, school occupants and janitorial staff can be unnecessarily exposed to toxic chemicals.

It is senseless to keep using environmentally harmful and/or toxic substances to clean schools, when safer and more responsible alternatives exist. Our children and teachers and other school staff deserve campuses that are clean without being laden with chemicals that can harm their short-term and long-term health.

*The Healthy Schools Network, with which we coordinate on various issues, is a good source of additional information on environmentally healthy ways to clean schools. To learn more or to obtain their report, "Healthier Cleaning & Maintenance: Practices and Products for Schools," visit their Web site at [www.healthyschools.org](http://www.healthyschools.org).*



## Special Event

### Laughing Matters: Supporting Healthy Environments for Children

Thursday, March 6, 2003

The Second City e.t.c. Theater  
230 W. North Ave., Chicago  
(Under the Piper's Alley marquee)

#### Benefit Chairs

James Alexander, Chicago Teacher's Union • Congresswoman Jan Schakowsky

6 p.m. — Buffet Dinner & Cocktails

David Joachim, a winner of the James Beard Award, will prepare delicacies from Generation Green's upcoming cookbook, *Fresh Choices*

7:15 p.m. — Second City e.t.c. Performance  
By Chicago's premier comedy club

#### Ticket Prices (Dinner and Show)

Producer — \$2,500 (10 tickets, premier seating & ad in program)

Director — \$1,000 (4 tickets, priority seating & ad in program)

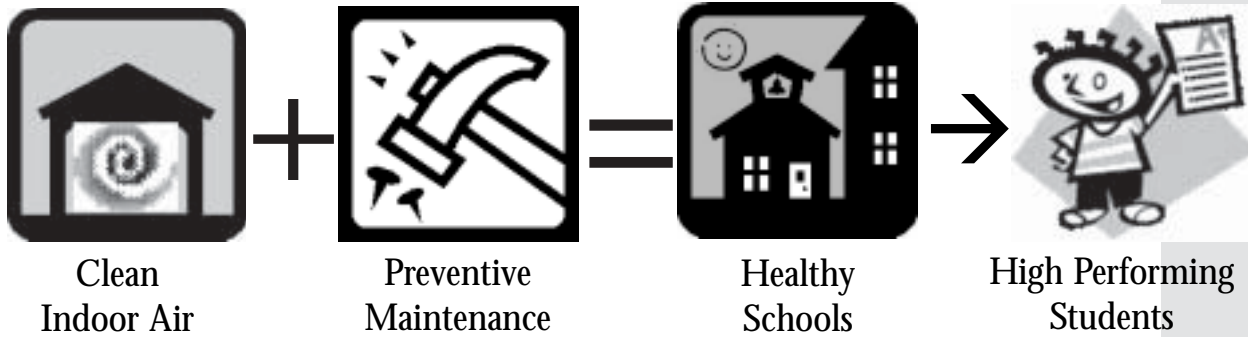
Stage Manager — \$500 (2 tickets & ad in program)

Choreographer — \$250 (2 tickets & recognition in program) • Cast — \$75 (1 ticket)

Contributions to Laughing Matters will support Generation Green Fund and its projects and are tax-deductible to the extent allowable under the law

To purchase tickets, visit  
[www.generationgreen.org/tickets](http://www.generationgreen.org/tickets)  
or  
contact Rhonda  
([rhonda@generationgreen.org](mailto:rhonda@generationgreen.org)  
or 312-419-1810)

## You Do the Math...



- 100 According to the EPA, human exposure to indoor air pollutants can be 100 times worse than outdoor levels.
- 70 According to the GAO, 70% of schools in Illinois report at least one unsatisfactory environmental condition.
- 20 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.
- 1 According to the UIC School of Public Health, asthma is the number one cause of school absenteeism and the leading cause of children's hospital admissions for chronic conditions.
- 0 According to the Chicago Environmental Law Clinic, Illinois has no specific regulations for school indoor air designed to protect children's health.

## Do School Facilities Affect Academic Outcomes?

A growing body of research has begun to establish the relationship between academic performance and school environment. Mark Schneider with the National Clearinghouse for Education Facilities summarizes this research in his article, *Do School Facilities Affect Academic Outcomes?* (November 2002). A number of researchers make the simple link between poor indoor air quality (IAQ), sick students and teachers, and poor performance.



Most notably, poor IAQ has been associated with increased student absenteeism. Some researchers found a link between airborne bacteria and mold and asthma in children, which in turn increased absentee rates. In fact, the American Lung Association found that children miss more than ten million school days each year because of asthma exacerbated by poor IAQ. Since school funding is tied to student attendance, this also has an impact on the school district's

financial health. Research has documented the fact that schools serving poor and minority students suffer disproportionately from poor IAQ. This should be of particular concern as school districts attempt to address the minority achievement gap.

"We already know what is needed: clean air, good light, and a quiet, comfortable, and safe learning environment," Schneider says. "This can be and generally has been achieved within the limits of existing knowledge, technology, and materials. It simply requires adequate funding and competent design, construction and maintenance."

But at the same time, he admits that we need to know even more to do an adequate job of addressing IAQ and other environmental problems at schools. The quality of facilities-related research, he says, ranges widely. Much of it is case-based and verges on the anecdotal, and many literature reviews simply count up articles or present undocumented summaries of findings. Better research offering more definitive findings is needed.

(You can read the article at [www.edfacilities.org/pubs/outcomes.pdf](http://www.edfacilities.org/pubs/outcomes.pdf))

# Healthy Schools Campaign Profile / Spotlight

Township High School  
District 211



## District 211 Snapshot

- Serves Palatine and Schaumburg, Illinois, in northwestern Cook County
- Composed of 5 large high schools with enrollments ranging from 2,000 to 2,800
- Food service staff of 20 to 25 people per school

## A 15-Year-Old Farm-to-School Success Story

The Healthy Schools Campaign is dedicated to making Illinois schools environmentally healthy places to learn and work. While the campaign primarily focuses on improving indoor air quality, reducing pesticide use in schools and promoting green cleaning, we have started to look at the issue of school food, including farm-to-school programs.

For more than a decade and a half now, Township High School District 211 has been buying produce for its food service programs from the Schaumburg Farmer's Market, following it from one location to another to keep the relationship going.

The effort requires the food service managers and Ruth Jonen, food services director, to expend time and energy instead of simply taking the easy route and having all the produce delivered by a full-time vendor. But it's effort well spent, they feel.

"Why do we do this?" asks Jonen. "I guess the answer is that we want nothing but the best for our students and staff. We can save money since we always check to see that we are buying at the same or lower cost than our commercial sources. We can buy better quality produce-cucumbers without wax, vine-ripened tomatoes, just-picked produce of all types. We can get our creative juices flowing and make special dishes that take advantage of the fresh produce."

"Our students and staff are the winners," she adds. "My only wish is that we had the chance to buy fresh produce year-round."

*(For the full article on District 211, visit our Web site at [www.healthyschoolscampaign.org/story-jonen.htm](http://www.healthyschoolscampaign.org/story-jonen.htm))*



Address Service Requested

Healthy Schools Campaign  
205 W. Monroe, 4th Floor  
Chicago, IL 60606

E-Mail/Visit Us At  
[info@healthyschoolscampaign.org](mailto:info@healthyschoolscampaign.org)  
[www.healthyschoolscampaign.org](http://www.healthyschoolscampaign.org)



Call Us At  
(312) 419-1810



Write to Us At  
205 W. Monroe,  
4th Floor  
Chicago, IL 60606