

School Health Watch

The Newsletter of the Healthy Schools Campaign



Making Illinois Schools Environmentally Healthy Places to Learn & Work

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www.healthyschoolscampaign.org

School Indoor Environments

Improving the Air Quality Where Students Learn and Teachers Teach

by William Phillips,
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As a former school superintendent, I know that numerous factors influence children's ability to learn. Students cannot learn when they are hungry, feel threatened or have difficulty breathing. Asthma, for example, is now the most common chronic childhood disease, affecting more than 227,000 school-age children in Illinois. It contributes to absenteeism, which can negatively impact academic performance. While I was Superintendent of Belle Valley #119, we had an opportunity to improve the school environment and make it a better place to learn and work—without busting the budget.

IAQ Background

Poor indoor air quality (IAQ) in schools can lead to any number of short-term or long-term health problems for both students and staff. Students tend to be more susceptible to the risks of poor IAQ because as children's bodies are still developing, they have relatively higher rates of breathing and metabolism. IAQ is becoming increasingly costly for schools due to the potential for expensive investigations, higher heating and cooling costs, and increased liability. More importantly, high rates of absenteeism due to asthma or other ailments are a disruption to the learning environment, and they ultimately undermine the school's mission of educating children.

However, these problems are not insurmountable. Many resources exist to provide practical and economical solutions to IAQ problems. In order to help improve IAQ problems in school buildings, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) developed the *Indoor Air Quality Tools for Schools* Action Kit. This kit helps school personnel identify, solve and prevent indoor air quality problems in the school environment. Through the use of a multi-step management plan and checklists for the entire building, schools can lower the risk of student exposure to asthma triggers and other environmental hazards. The kit covers the building's ventilation system, maintenance procedures, classrooms (especially animals and mold) and food service areas.

Many schools have formed IAQ coordinating teams to implement the *IAQ Tools for Schools*. Because IAQ problems can originate anywhere in the school building, the entire staff is

typically informed and brought into the process, and students can be involved too. Further information about IAQ curricula can be found on the EPA's web site (www.epa.gov/iaq/schools).

An additional resource is the soon-to-be released *Healthy Schools Campaign Action and Resource Guide for Healthy Schools*, published by the Healthy Schools Campaign. This comprehensive handbook, which is free of charge, will



provide school personnel with the information they need to make their schools healthy places to learn and work. Specifically, it covers: 1) common issues affecting children's environmental health and learning; 2) adult occupational health at school; 3) environmental, health and safety laws and regulations; and 4) resources specific to Illinois. The guide also contains recommendations and organizing information to help administrators work with staff, parents and other members of the community to improve school environmental health. The guide will be published and available in January 2005. For more information, contact info@healthyschoolscampaign.org or visit www.healthyschoolscampaign.org.

Where Are We Now?

As a superintendent in Illinois, I discovered that the only regulatory requirements for environmental issues facing schools were for asbestos. While schools have been dealing with the asbestos issues, other environmental issues have arisen. Indoor air quality, lead in water, radon and mold all affect the health of the school's students and staff.

After researching these issues, I found that there are no state requirements for inspection or correction of these environmental problems.

I chose to take a proactive stance by implementing a plan to determine if our school facilities were facing any of the myriad of environmental hazards.



Fact File

Resources to Help Improve School Indoor Air Quality

1. EPA's Tools for Schools - a comprehensive management plan for improving IAQ. (www.epa.gov/iaq/schools)
2. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention - Addressing Asthma with a coordinated school health program. (www.cdc.gov/HealthyYouth/asthma/pdf/asthma.pdf)
3. Healthy Schools Campaign's *Action and Resource Guide for Healthy Schools* - a primer for environmental issues in schools with documentation of applicable State and Federal laws and regulations. (To be released January 2005)

For information about the action and resource guide, **visit:**

www.healthyschoolscampaign.org

or

contact us at:

info@healthyschoolscampaign.org

Campaign Launches Partnership to Address Health Disparities in Latino Schools

The Healthy Schools Campaign recently received a four-year grant from the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences to form the Partnership to Reduce Disparities in Asthma and Obesity in Latino Schools. Partnering with the Cook County Bureau of Health Services and the University of Illinois-Chicago's Midwest Latino Health Research, Training, and Policy Center, the Healthy Schools Campaign will work with two grassroots community-based organizations: West Town Leadership United and the Little Village Environmental Justice Organization. In progress since September 2004, this project will evaluate the effectiveness of grassroots community organizing in mobilizing schools to implement sustainable environmental solutions as a method of reducing asthma and obesity.



Partners are briefed by a Little Village Environmental staff member.

In recent years, the school environment has emerged as an important area to address in promoting health. Academic researchers, policy experts and education experts have documented a variety of school environmental health issues and their impact on the school community. Many experts have developed proposals and solutions to address these issues in the form of state laws, school district policies, training and education programs. Yet many of these proposed solutions are not being implemented in schools.

This project will seek to understand the obstacles to creating a healthful school environment, and to develop strategies to overcome those barriers. The majority of schools and community health providers lack the knowledge and resources needed to view the scope of school environments and their impact on health. At present, there are no mutually agreed upon tools for the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of asthma and obesity. By creating a dialogue between schools, providers and community members, health care promotion can be more effective. For more information on the Partnership, contact Guillermo Gomez at ggomez@healthyschoolscampaign.org

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What Does It Cost?

When I discuss IAQ, one of the concerns that I hear is "What about the cost?" Whether one has concerns about direct expenses related to the purchase of equipment or indirect staff time, allocating time and effort to a new project means a shift of resources. While the costs associated with these programs are minimal, in an era of tight budgets and restricted school funding, it becomes important to recognize creative ways to tap into alternative sources of revenue to improve the indoor environment.

While our IAQ program was innovative in its nature, it was not overly expensive. A method of financing the IAQ program was found within the requirements of a Risk Management Plan and the Tort Immunity Levy, which is accessible for all Illinois School Districts. Illinois statutes explain requirements of a Risk Management Plan in the following way: "School districts may include as allowable expenditures from the tort immunity levy the cost of risk-management (loss-prevention) programs. Risk management refers to planning and purchasing specialized prevention measures. It includes identifying, measuring and implementing processes for dealing with potential losses of property and injury to persons and their property."

Recent legislative initiatives reflect the interest of the General Assembly in the issue of environmental protection for public schools in Illinois. Senator Kimberly Lightford proposed SB2194 in the recent spring legislative session. This legislation would have required school districts to prepare an IAQ policy. I believe that there will be continued interest in the state legislature to improve school indoor environments. But more importantly, I recognize the importance of IAQ planning and the value of prevention. The combination of low cost prevention, with the possible option of available financing through programs such as the tort immunity levy, should make IAQ programs an important part of regular school operations.

Campaign Completes Green Clean Pilot Projects at Chicago Public Schools

As part of a process to explore green cleaning, CPS held pilot projects to test environmentally preferable cleaning products and equipment. In October 2003, a kick-off meeting launched the pilot program, which concluded in January 2004. Through the use of these products and appropriate staff training, "green cleaning" aims to create healthier school environments for children and reduce janitors', teachers' and visitors' exposure to toxins.



Kim Hall of Rochester Midland explains the health impacts of cleaning to teachers at Mason School.

Pilot projects occurred in ten schools: Addams, Carson, Crane, Cuffe, Earhart, Mason, Peck, Peterson, Simeon and Songhai. Each

school was matched with a vendor that provided green cleaning products and equipment for staff to test. Collected data included inventories of cleaning chemicals that were being used prior to the pilot projects, staff assessments of the green cleaning products and equipment and staff knowledge about cleaning practices. The results of the pilot projects (see sidebar at right) will help develop green cleaning recommendations to the Board of Education. Copies of the full pilot project report can be downloaded at www.healthyschoolscampaign.org/downloads.html.

Anti-Idling Survey Results

This summer, HSC conducted a survey of all Superintendents in Illinois to determine attitudes and awareness levels of student diesel engine exhaust exposure. Of the 199 respondents, 63% have or would consider setting a policy to save fuel, lower maintenance costs and reduce students' exposure to diesel engine exhaust. They also recognized the top barriers to implementing such a policy which include 1) dealing with cold weather, 2) changing already established habits, and 3) working with contracted bus companies. For more information about the survey or for more information about limiting student exposure to diesel exhaust, contact mark@healthyschoolscampaign.org.

School Nurse

Advisory Committee

Healthy Schools Campaign is pleased to announce the formation of a School Nurse Advisory Committee. The Advisory Committee has two main goals: to integrate the school

nurse perspective in the policy and program development of HSC and in policy discussions taking place on school health issues, and to develop programs to provide school nurses and school nursing students with the information and tools that they need to promote a healthy school environment in their districts and/or schools. With funding from the Chest Foundation, HSC is now hiring a part-time person to work on this project. If you wish to participate on the Advisory Committee or apply for the part-time position, contact rochelle@healthyschoolscampaign.org.

Welcome New Board Members

The Healthy Schools Campaign has added nine new members to its Board of Directors! Help us in welcoming Martha Bergren from UIC School of Nursing, Dianne Campbell from Perspectives Charter School, Laura Garza from SEIU Local 1, Bette Lawrence-Water from Healthy DuPage, Clem Mejia from the Regional Office of Education/Kane County, Phyllis Pelt from UIC Department of Public Health, William Phillips from the University of Illinois at Springfield, Myrtis Sullivan from the UIC School of Public Health and Betty Wine from Naperville Central High School.

CPS Taskforce Food Focus

The school year is back in session, and the CPS Taskforce to Promote Healthy Eating & Smart Choices is hard at work. The Taskforce is focused on two initiatives to improve the school food environment. The Cool Foods Project is an initiative designed to increase fruit and vegetable consumption among elementary students in pilot schools through grab-n-go breakfasts, salad lunch bars, after-school snacks and nutrition education. This initiative is being led by the Chicago Food Systems Collaborative. The Eat Smart Initiative will build support for CPS' new snack vending policy through a school-based marketing campaign and nutrition education. This initiative is being led by the Healthy Schools Campaign. In addition, the Taskforce is promoting Coordinated School Health as an important strategy for addressing a range of other issues at CPS including increased physical education and health education. Contact Camille Reid by phone at 312-419-1810 or by email at camille@healthyschoolscampaign.org for more information or to participate in the Taskforce.



Six Findings of Green Clean Pilot Projects

1. The cleaning chemicals being used placed students, staff and custodians at unnecessary risk.
2. Nationally recognized standards exist that make it easy to identify green cleaning chemicals and equipment.
3. Green cleaning products are widely available, perform well and are cost effective.
4. Following specific steps were important for a smooth implementation.
5. Training is a critical issue for success and perhaps the single most important issue.
6. Training vendors varied widely but proved to be an important asset.

Welcome New Staff Members

The Healthy Schools Campaign recently welcomed two additional staff members to their team. Guillermo Gomez, Chicago Director, works primarily with the NIEHS Partnership as well as local outreach through the Community Collaborative program. Claire Marcy, Development Officer, works on a variety of development and writing projects, including the NIEHS Partnership.



Healthy Schools Campaign Policy Focus

The Child Nutrition Act is an important step toward improving nutrition in schools

Supporting School Wellness

When students eat nutritious meals, they are better prepared for the rigors of learning in school. The Federal Government recently passed an important bill that will help provide schools with the framework to implement healthy school food policies and better support student health.

On June 30 2004, President Bush signed into law the reauthorized Child Nutrition Act. One important section requires all school districts participating in the National School Lunch Program to establish local school wellness policies. These policies will include:

- Nutrition guidelines for all food sold on campus
- Goals for nutrition education and physical activity
- Plan for measuring effectiveness of the nutrition policy
- Involvement from parents, school food service professionals, school board members and the public in development of the wellness policy



While the passage of the Child Nutrition Act is an important step towards improving nutrition standards in schools, the Healthy Schools Campaign will work to ensure that the State of Illinois takes a leadership role at promoting school wellness policies through establishing nutritional standards for all food sold within schools.



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