

Get Smart about Healthy School Buildings

Healthy School Buildings and Learning

Poor Physical conditions in schools can have a negative impact on both the children and the adults in the building. Higher absenteeism, increased respiratory ailments (asthma), lowered test scores, decreased staff and teacher productivity, allergies, flu and sick building syndrome (a combination of illnesses) are often the result of poor building health.

Healthy school buildings that are safe places for students and adults are a vital part of a healthy school. Improved ventilation can reduce the number of cases of cold and flu. Improved lighting and temperature control can improve a student's mood and temperament, and contribute to fewer behavioral issues. Improved air quality and reduced chemical use can drastically reduce the number of asthma and allergy cases for both students and staff.



Did you know?

- In the report, "*Sick Schools 2009 – America's Continuing Health Crisis for Children*" the healthy school network indicates that **55 million** of our children attend public and private K-12 schools where poor air quality, hazardous chemicals and other unhealthy conditions make students (and their teachers) sick and handicap their ability to learn.
- According to the National Gardening Associations evaluation summary of 2008/2009 school garden grant winners, program leaders noted that students participating in the school's garden program showed a marked improvement in the following areas:
 - 89% Self-confidence
 - 87% Social skills
 - 85% Leadership skills
 - 82% Attitude towards school
 - 77% Nutritional attitudes
 - 65% Motor skills
 - 63% Scholastic achievement

Why Schools?

Words like carbon footprint, eco-friendly and e-cycling are increasingly becoming part of our everyday vocabulary. Being green is as much a part of our culture as apple pie. But what does it mean for schools? Healthy school building environments mean healthy students. Taking care of the health of your building is as important as taking care of the health of students. And providing a safe and secure school environment is equally important.

Why? On average, children in the US spend approximately **180 days** and over **1,000 hours** in school each year. Keeping air ducts clean, changing filters regularly, choosing environmentally friendly products, and promoting riding your bike or walking-to-school initiatives can improve the environment in and around the school. Plus, emphasizing fair play and nonviolence on school grounds, on the school bus, and at school sporting events can provide a safe environment.

For further information

US Environmental Protection Agency - Indoor Air Quality (IAQ) Tools for Schools

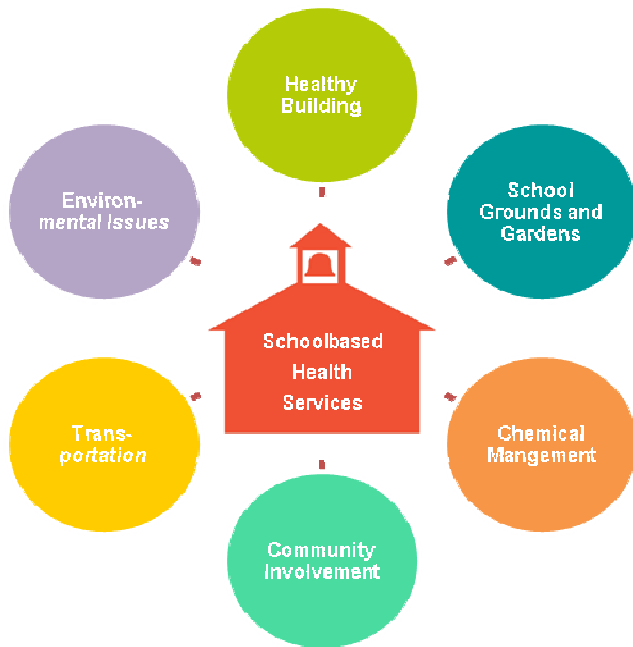
<http://www.epa.gov/iaq/schools/index.html>

Healthy Schools Network Inc.

<http://www.healthyschools.org/>

Comprehensive Healthy School Buildings

Your school can offer a wide variety of services designed to meet the multiple and changing needs of children and their families. A comprehensive, interconnected school-wide program will make healthy school buildings an integral part of your school's culture. A fully integrated program contains each of the following categories.



Healthy Building

The school has an indoor air quality management plan and it is reviewed on a regular basis. The school's air supply and exhaust vents are kept clear. Classrooms are free of objectionable or unusual odors such as mold, mildew or sewer smells. The school's appliances have air ducts or exhaust hoods. The school's onsite drinking water storage is protected from contamination. Drinking water is tested for lead and levels are below the EPA recommended level.

School Grounds and Gardens

The school has a natural resources management plan for the school grounds. School grounds are conducive outdoor instruction.. The school has a policy that prohibits the dumping of gasoline, oil, chemicals, and lawn and garden pesticides down the drain, into surface water, onto the ground or in the trash. The school has a garden that contains fruits and vegetables, herbs, flowers, or butterflies. Foods from the school garden are used in cafeteria lunches, youth farmers markets, or in learning lab kitchens.

Chemical Management

The school has a written plan for handling all chemicals on school grounds, including addressing chemical spills. The school has all Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDS), readily accessible to teachers, staff and students.

Community Involvement

The school involves the community in healthy and safe building initiatives. Community members donate time and materials to school activities related to safety, health or the environment. Long-term collaborative relationships are built with businesses, government agencies, environmental/nature centers etc. that actively and regularly support students and teachers on safety, health or environmental learning projects.

Transportation

The school has an effective transportation plan that encourages carpooling, use of public transportation, or non-vehicular transportation to and from school. The school curriculum includes transportation safety. Students are encouraged to participate in a Safe Routes to School program that provides walking and biking opportunities. Crossing guards are recruited to assist with safe street cross over.

Environmental Issues

The school offers environmental awareness instruction and activities. Students are instructed on local and global issues and responsibilities for the environment. Students or staff participates in anti-pollution activities.

Jump start your healthy school buildings program

Start small and grow from there with some simple activities like holding a class outside and changing heating, ventilation and air conditioning filters on a regular basis.

Long term success

Each of these categories can involve a multitude of strategies to help ensure long term success. To identify the ones that most appropriately meet the needs of your school, please contact Cathy Schmelter at Get Smart Schools – cathy@getsmartschools.org.