

COALITION FOR HEALTHIER SCHOOLS

Press Release: SICK SCHOOLS 2009

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SICK SCHOOLS 2009 - National Report Released

Boxer, Lautenberg, Klobuchar thanked for EPA child health priority

reducing health costs, boosting test scores

(Washington, DC, December 3, 2009) Releasing "Sick Schools 2009 - America's Continuing Environmental Health Crisis for Children" a national report with state by state assessments of the problems and opportunities, advocates for environment and children's health thanked Senators Boxer, Lautenberg, and Klobuchar, and other members of the Environment Committee for advancing the EPA priorities on children and schools and urged more support for EPA. The report, with contributions from policy advocates in 20 states and the District, offers peer-reviewed studies and compelling evidence of how polluted air inside and outside schools escalate health care costs, increase absenteeism, and reduce test scores.

Doreen Croser, Executive Director of American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, a leader in advocating quality of life and rights for people with disabilities, said, "Students with intellectual and developmental disabilities need protection in America's schools. Special education students are often more vulnerable to lead, pesticides, hazardous cleaning supplies and contaminated indoor air found in too many schools. An unhealthy school environment makes learning more challenging and staying healthy harder."

Vernice Miller-Travis, Vice-Chair, Maryland State Commission on Environmental Justice and Sustainable Communities said, "The fact that the poorest, highest risk children have the schools in the worst condition has been a civil rights issue going back to Brown v. Education of Topeka in 1954. Today, we know even more: that the impacts from toxic school siting to lead in drinking water to mold infestations and to chemical spills are damaging millions of children every year, taking away their health and their chance for a productive future."

Georges Benjamin, MD, FACP said "Unhealthy conditions in our schools lead to failing grades and failing health." Benjamin is **executive director of the American Public Health Association**. He added, "Environmental concerns such as asbestos, mold, poor air quality and other hazards affect children's ability to learn and their health, and schools in low-income communities are often disproportionately affected. We must close this gap and ensure that all of our kids are given an opportunity to learn, grow and play in safe, healthy schools."

Bill Orr, Executive Director, Collaborative for High Performance Schools said, "The time has come to stop mortgaging our children's health in the name of the status quo. A truly high performance school does not just protect the environment, but makes the health and well-being of schoolchildren and staff the top priority. EPA has shown the scientific evidence and importance of investing in healthy schools, and now Congress must take heed of its counsel."

Rick Engler, Executive Director, NJ Work Environment Council said, "Children, along with the whole school population – custodial and maintenance workers, food service workers, secretaries, security officers, bus

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drivers, teachers, paraeducators, and administrators – are exposed every school day to a wide array of hazards, such as poor indoor air quality (IAQ), chemical exposures, and toxic and dangerous construction and renovation work. New Jersey's 2,477 school buildings are crumbling from decades of neglect. Federal guidelines along with funding for state agency action plans are needed.”

Deborah Moore, Executive Director, Green Schools Initiative (CA) said, “California still has a long way to go to ensure that all of its school facilities have healthy indoor environments and are adequately maintained. By adopting the Clean and Healthy Schools Act (AB82, pending in the legislature), schools could switch to green cleaners and reduce asthma and absenteeism while saving money.”

Julia Earl, Executive Director, Preventing Harm MN said, “We thank Senator Klobuchar for her leadership and commitment to Minnesota children. We hope she will review this compelling new report on children’s health and environment and continue her strong support of EPA’s voluntary programs.”

Said **Claire Barnett, Executive Director, Healthy Schools Network**, “Children’s health and a clean environment are federal agency concerns that were not ever left to the states. This report documents that the nation’s children, compelled to be in dank, dirty, polluted schools, will not benefit from trading off breathable indoor air for a “tight” energy-efficient schoolhouse. We commend EPA for prioritizing its complex work on school environments; Congress should support EPA as well.”

Healthy Schools Network Board President John Shaw, a health policy researcher, said, “This report highlights actions we can all take to accomplish two goals simultaneously. Not only can we provide a healthier environment for our children to learn and play, we can also make a down payment on Health Reform by saving billions in avoidable health care costs we currently waste having to treat environmentally related conditions like asthma.”

Susan Wooley, Executive Director, American School Health Association said, “Children spend more hours in school than any place other than their homes. The schools they attend need to have a healthy environment – one that is dry, clean, and quiet and has good indoor air quality. Because funding for school buildings is public money, we all have a responsibility to see that public funds result in schools that are Healthy and Green. Every day should be a healthy school day for every child.”

Founding director, CDC’s Division of Adolescent and School Health, now Associate Dean for Global and Community Health at Indiana University Lloyd J. Kolbe, PhD added, “If we were forced to work year after year in unhealthy buildings: at best, we would assume our employers cared little about us—as long as we produced; at worst, we would seek legal redress, passively or actively revolt, or quit. When will we collectively care just as much about our children as we do about ourselves?”

Policy advocates from 20 states and District of Columbia contributed to the new report, as well as national organizations. States include **Alabama, Alaska, California, Connecticut, DC, Kentucky, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Texas, Vermont, Virginia, Washington, and Wisconsin** where the Governor signed a new school environments law this week. The national **Coalition for Healthier Schools** Policy Position Statement is found at www.healthyschools.org/coalition.

First convened in 2001, the Coalition has shaped and won two federal laws to address children’s environmental health in schools, and through regular conference calls and annual meetings, has provided information and technical assistance to foster the and share the work of scores of state and local policy groups seeking root reforms. For annual meeting agenda and speakers, as well as pictures, see <http://www.healthyschools.org/coalition.html>

Boxer Chairs the US Senate Environment and Public Works (EPW) Committee. Senator Lautenberg sponsored the High Performance Green Buildings Act of 2007, and Senator Klobuchar Chairs the EPW Subcommittee on Children.

The full **SICK SCHOOLS 2009** report can be read at www.healthyschools.org. Selected highlights of the national report are attached.

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HIGHLIGHTS:

- EPA needs resources to meet congressional mandated deadlines for federal guidelines on school siting (June 2009), other environmental issues (December 2009), and to provide grants to states.
- There is a robust scientific literature in children and healthy school environments; benefits and savings from healthier occupants far outweigh savings from energy efficiencies.
- EPA has long-standing voluntary programs on school environments.
- States have little capacity to address children’s environmental health at school.
- Despite published, accepted science, there is no systematic national state by state survey of the conditions of schools, taking into account environmental factors that impact children.

Summary of Data for Public School Buildings. For data table footnotes, see Appendix of full report

No. Public School Buildings	98,793	States Offering Grants for Construction	38
No. Public School Students	49,292,507	States Requiring Integrated Pest Management	15
No. Minority Students	22,229,907	States with Indoor Air Quality Laws (cannot be categorized)	Footnote 8
No. Students in Special Education Program	6,247,443	States with Green Cleaning Laws	8
No. Employees in School System	6,215,635	States Adopting High Performance Green School Design	21
Percent of Youth 4-17 Ever Diagnosed with ADHD	7.74%	States with School Infrastructure Assessments	28
Percent of Schools with at Least One Inadequate Building Feature	68%	Percent of Children (18 or younger) Without Health Insurance	12.5%
Percent of Schools with at Least One Unsatisfactory Environmental Factor	57%	Percent of Children with Asthma (under 18)	8.9%
Estimated No. Students At High Risk Daily due Solely to Condition of Schools (estimated by formula)	32 million 60% of all students	States with School Facilities Offices *	39
States Adopting OSHA Plans	24	*Only 20 states plus District of Columbia have school facility offices, and offer grants for construction, and have some type of school infrastructure assessments	

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