



Coalition *for* Healthier Schools

*...providing the national platform and
the forum for environmental health at school, since 2001...*

Coordinated by Healthy Schools Network

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Today is National Back to School Day: Coalition urges new action for clean, green and healthy schools for all children

(Tuesday, August 7, Albany, NY) – As the nation’s children head back to school, a coalition of healthy school advocates from across the country are urging parents, teachers and administrators to make sure schools are clean and healthy environments where children can learn to their maximum abilities. Parents and teachers are concerned about the safety of the water children drink, the air they breathe, and the chemicals they come in contact with. Increasingly, families want to know that the nation’s aging school infrastructure can provide an educational environment – in classrooms and schoolyards – where children can go to learn in facilities that won’t make them sick.

“The safest schools are healthy schools,” said Coalition for Healthier Schools Coordinator and **Healthy Schools Network Founder and Executive Director Claire Barnett**. “As children across the country get ready for the new school year, the national Coalition is urging parents to join us in this fight. We are calling on the Trump Administration to include \$1 for every child in public and private schools and child care facilities in the US Environmental Protection Agency’s budget. That’s a very affordable \$65 million annually. The science is clear: the physical environment of schools impacts children’s health, thinking, and learning. Thus, we also support efforts in Congress to rebuild public school infrastructure with a commitment of \$100 billion.”

“School business officials understand that school infrastructure issues are inextricably linked to student health, well-being, and academic success. Without safe and healthy school environments, students cannot learn. We urge local, state, and federal lawmakers to work with district leaders to invest in school infrastructure so that we can work together to repair, renovate, maintain, and construct the facilities our children need to grow and thrive” said **John Musso, CAE, RSBA, Executive Director of ASBO International (Association of School Business Officials)**.

Other issues on the [7th Annual National Back to School Day agenda](#) include calls for lead-free products, safer pest control, and green cleaning products.

School Supplies: Safe Shopping Guide

In conjunction with National Back to School Day, the US Public Interest Research Group (USPIRG) is releasing its *Back to School Safe Shopping Guide*. Cuts to school budgets increasingly resulted in

parents and teachers bringing needed supplies into the classroom. Shockingly, there are still basic products on the market with the potential to harm children. "This fall, parents and teachers can use our safe shopping guide when purchasing school supplies," said **Kara Cook, director of U.S. PIRG's Toxic Free Kids campaign**. "We should feel safe knowing we're sending our kids off to school with supplies that don't contain asbestos or lead."

Back to School (BTS) Toolkit Release

To help empower parents, teachers, school leaders and others to advocate for cleaner, healthier schools, the **Coalition is today releasing a [Back to School \(BTS\) Toolkit](#)**, with information and how-to guides. Among the tools available in the kit are a draft op-ed, sample social media content, as well as fact sheets and guidance on addressing lead in school water, finding lead-free computers and tablets for school use, safer pest control for schools (Integrated Pest Management), and green cleaning products. The Toolkit also contains updated information about increasing opportunities to buy other green products. Gone are the days when the cost of green products was an excuse for no action. Many state and city governments and other institutions now buy green at same or lower costs, thanks to collective purchasing agreements. Nothing prevents school districts from benefitting from these arrangements. It's time for all school leaders to take advantage of these deals.

Clean drinking water at school is one of the latest examples of growing public awareness of toxic threats in schools. More and more states are beginning to test at the tap for lead contamination in schools. For instance, starting in 2016, New York has tested every tap in every public school in the state. Under a new state law, remediation is required for all taps with lead content about an action level of 15 parts per billion. More than 11 percent of all taps tested in New York City exceeded that level, and it was higher in the rest of the state. Independent analysis by Healthy Schools Network of the state's reported results showed that schools serving poor, minority children had the most taps closed due to elevated lead levels.

"The Collaborative for High Performance Schools (CHPS) supports the Coalition for Healthier Schools' Back to School Action Toolkit through its Core Criteria which set robust standards for schools for indoor air quality, natural lighting, acoustics, energy efficiency, and use of clean building materials. All of these not only make our school buildings safer and healthier, but also provide beautiful, comfortable, and stimulating spaces for our children to learn and thrive."

**Elisabeth Krautscheid, Managing Director
The Collaborative for High Performance Schools (CHPS)**

"Children should not have to pay for their education with their health. Successful pest control places priority on public health and our environment. There is significant, positive impact to academic performance as well as a school's budget when **IPM [Integrated Pest Management]** practices are institutionalized. Gaps in existing law allowing hazardous chemicals to be used while children are legally obligated to be in school must be closed. Adopting IPM will help protect children from preventable exposures to pesticides (that lead to injury and absences). Take action today – for your child's sake."

**Veronika Carella, Legislative Director
Maryland Children's Environmental Health Coalition**

"Children and youth are 22 percent of our population, but all of our future," says Elaine Auld, MPH, MCHES, Chief Executive Officer of the Society for Public Health Education. "Back to School Day is a reminder to all school officials, teachers, parents and child health advocates that health and academic achievement go hand in hand. School health education must be prioritized as an academic subject and be fully funded at the federal, state, and local levels."

**Elaine Auld, MPH, MCHES, Chief Executive Officer
Society for Public Health Education (SOPHE)**

"Young, developing bodies can be especially vulnerable to toxic chemicals and polluted indoor air. We owe it to our kids to ensure that the spaces where they'll be spending 900+ hours this year are cleaned and maintained with the healthiest products possible. Minimizing their exposure to harmful toxins is vital for both short- and long-term health."

**Kat Danaher, Senior Marketing & Communications Leader
Green Seal, Inc.**

"Eliminating sources of lead exposure in our schools will better ensure kids will be able to read, learn and succeed in the classroom."

**Ruth Ann Norton, President and CEO
Green and Healthy Homes Initiative
(Coalition to End Childhood Lead Poisoning)**

"Our children will only be as healthy as the air they breathe, the water they drink, the food they eat and in the environment they live and learn. It's our responsibility as adults to ensure that our schools are healthy since that's where they spend the first eighteen years of their lives."

**Deirdre Imus, President and Founder of The Deirdre Imus Environmental Health Center(r) at
Hackensack University Medical Center and Co-Founder/Co-Director of the Imus Cattle Ranch
for Kids with Cancer**

"The School District of Philadelphia (PA) has developed a Paint and Plaster Stabilization Program jointly with parents and the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers' Union. The program involves removing loose, peeling and crumbling paint and plaster under controlled conditions. Schools were prioritized based upon building age (prior to 1978), quantity and severity of paint damage, and the age of students six and under. Work is performed in accordance with the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Lead Renovation, Repair and Painting rule. The purpose of the work is to minimize the risk of children's exposure to lead paint while at school. Two schools were completed in school year 2017-18 and there are 40 more in line for this work. On June 29, 2018, PA Governor Tom Wolf announced \$7.6M in state funding to accelerate paint and plaster stabilization work at forty (40) schools. The work is scheduled to begin the week of July 30, and anticipated to take 18 months to complete work at all locations. More information about the project can be found at www.philasd.org/facilities."

**Francine Locke, MS, Environmental Director
School District of Philadelphia (PA)**

"As a pediatrician, I guide schools in managing students' asthma through asthma action plans. Schools can expand their impact by adopting clean air policies as students return to school, like monitoring the air quality index daily and limiting outdoor activities on red and orange days, planting more trees and gardens, maintaining indoor humidity between 30-50% and having no-idling policies for cars and buses."

**Yolanda Whyte, MD
Dr. Whyte Pediatrics**

"Children in schools may be exposed to toxic chemicals in cleaning products, toys, furniture, food packaging, and more. Many of these toxic chemicals can result in lifelong health consequences, including some that hinder the ability to learn. New York State should take action by removing toxic

chemicals from school supplies, drinking water, cafeterias, classrooms and playing fields, and encouraging the use of safer alternatives.”

**Kathleen Curtis, LPN, Executive Director
Clean and Healthy New York**