American Lung Association.

Indoor Air Quality in Schools

What Administrators Should Know

Students spend nearly half their waking hours inside school buildings, where levels of airborne pollutants can be two to five times higher than outdoors. Exposure to indoor air pollution can cause a wide range of health effects which may lead to increased absenteeism, lower productivity, and poor academic performance. It is vital for administrators to take action to improve indoor air quality (IAQ) in their schools. Good IAQ is foundational to a healthy environment for students and staff.

Clean air helps remove respiratory health risks → A healthy student is present in class more often → A present student is more engaged in their learning → An engaged student is often more successful

While addressing IAQ problems in schools can be challenging due to budget constraints and competing priorities, failure to address or prevent IAQ issues can compound problems for schools later, such as:

- Costly repairs and subsequent school/room closures
- Reduced efficiency of school buildings and equipment
- Negative publicity or damage to relationships with parents, teachers, and school administration
- Increased liability and risk
- Lower job satisfaction and staff turnover

How can school administrators address IAQ?

Administrators can take action to protect their students, teachers, and staff by implementing policies, programs, and practices that promote good IAQ. One of the first things that should be done is a walkthrough of school buildings, conducting a visual assessment of facility conditions, and documenting issues using an IAQ School Walkthrough Checklist. After completing a thorough building walkthrough and documenting findings, the next action is to develop a comprehensive Energy Efficient IAQ Management Plan.

Support and guidance on conducting IAQ Assessments and developing IAQ Management Plans is available to schools. Get started by contacting CASC@Lung.org or visiting Lung.org/CASC.

Five Reasons School Administrators Should Prioritize IAQ

Vision and Strategic Planning

An Energy Efficient IAQ (EE IAQ) Management Plan can align with a 10-year capital plan by projecting timelines and scheduling of large upgrades or renovations. Having an EE IAQ Management Plan will:

- help with long-term facilities management and adherence to scheduled system maintenance.
- prolong building lifespan and optimize systems performance.
- help schools adhere to any IAQ requirements outlined in state regulations.

Staff Retention

Poor IAQ also affects staff. Arriving earlier and staying later than students in the building means staff are exposed to pollutants for longer periods. Staff also have fewer fresh air breaks.

- Taking action to improve IAQ demonstrates to staff their employer prioritizes employee satisfaction, health, comfort and safety, all factors linked to staff retention.
- Including staff as part of the building assessments make staff feel invested in and demonstrate ownership over their workspace.

Fiscal Responsibility

- High staff retention reduces expenses associated with hiring and training new staff.
- If teachers are absent due to illness or respiratory viruses, the school will have additional expenses of paying substitute teachers.
- Deferring maintenance for too long leads to more costly repairs on building systems in the long run
- A Plan that concurrently addresses IAQ and energy management can result in long-term energy costs savings. Energy is the second highest operating expenditure for most schools.

Public Relations

Taking action to improve school IAQ will:

- Demonstrate to parents and community members the school's commitment to a healthy learning environment.
- Show leadership and investment in students and teachers.
- Build trust between administration and parents.

Student Success

Poor IAQ is associated with:

- Increased viruses, breathing emergencies, and asthma episodes which in turn increase student absences.
- Negative impact on student concentration, energy, and class engagement, thus risking their academic success and test performance.

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