



Coalition *for* Healthier Schools

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the forum for environmental health at school, since 2001...*

Coordinated by Healthy Schools Network

For Immediate Release October 14, 2021

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October is Children's Health Month: National Appeal to Congress to Put Children and Schools First

Fund US EPA's Healthy Schools and Healthy Children Programs

Washington, DC – As Congress debates how to finalize and pass historic legislation to invest in children and the nation's health and well-being, the Coalition for Healthier Schools, urging healthier environments in schools, is pressing congress to allocate robust funding for the US Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) proven education and technical assistance programs for schools that can help them become more resilient to disasters and healthier places for learning.

October is Children's Health Month at EPA, yet Congress is perilously close to falling short when it comes to the impact of climate resiliency and COVID-19 on schools and on children left behind due to closures. "Students have returned to buildings that were in terrible condition before the pandemic; today they still are without ventilation, air conditioning, and even safe drinking water," said **Claire Barnett, executive director of the New York based Healthy Schools Network**. "Yet, we have known for decades about the environmental conditions needed to promote health and learning in schools and what kinds of conditions permanently damage health and learning. Safe indoor environments don't happen by accident."

\$1.15/year/child. To ensure more resilient schools, facilities that can stay open or reopen quickly after major disasters, the Coalition is calling on Congress to boost funding for the EPA's Indoor Environments Division (OAR/IED) by \$65M annually, and EPA's Office of Children's Health Protection (OCHP) by \$10M annually, in all, the equivalent of \$1.15/child/year enrolled in schools and child care. Senior EPA officials say that investments in healthy schools are high priorities to advance the health and education of our nation's children, particularly in disadvantaged communities and that additional funding would be welcome.

Bruce Lesley, President, First Focus Campaign for Children said, "The measures required to combat COVID-19 have only confirmed what we already knew: our nation's schools desperately need an

infrastructure upgrade and established guidance. We call on Congress to provide adequate funding to EPA so that all children and teachers are learning and working in a healthy and safe environment.”

Kenneth Mendez, President and CEO of the Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America added, “It is critically important that Congress funds EPA to ensure the safety of our children in schools. Poor indoor air quality in schools has been a longstanding issue for the six million children with asthma. Poor ventilation, outdated HVAC systems, aging buildings, mold, and school placement near sources of pollution play significant roles in triggering asthma. Clean air in schools and safe learning environments for all children cannot wait. Congress must prioritize children’s health.”

Debra Coyle McFadden, Executive Director New Jersey Work Environment Council said, “A healthy environment is a fundamental step forward to begin to close the gap on education inequity. That is why we are demanding bold action by our leaders. In NJ, schools were closed recently due to damage sustained by Hurricane Ida. Seventy-two percent of those were in low- income districts. We need healthier and more resilient schools.”

Code Red for Schools, before and after the pandemic. The American Society of Civil Engineers has repeatedly rated school infrastructure a “D,” prompting the Coalition to urge congress to step up to the challenge. Funding for school rebuilding is of course critical, but more critical is having local schools with the knowledge and the technical support to put new funds -- or scarce funds-- to effective use. The House has proposed \$100M for US EPA’s healthy schools programs over ten years, but the bare minimum amount falls short of what is needed to restore and expand EPA’s long-standing work towards healthful indoor environments in schools and in child care.

As budget talks continue this month, the White House and congressional leaders should prioritize children and direct more funding to EPA which has a 25-year proven track record on school facilities. Congress should not assume that federal agencies with less or no experience in school facilities are ready to address complexities of K-12 facilities.

Linda Mendonca, DNP, President, National Association of School Nurses added, “The health and welfare of our nation’s children and youth are dependent upon the quality of the environment in which they live, learn, play, and work. To ensure equitable environmental protections and support for the healthy development of all children, funding must be adequate and federal coordination essential, as well as serving as a model for state efforts in data collection, communication, and enforcement of existing laws, rules, and regulations.”

Voicing similar concerns about the future of children, **Elisabeth Krautscheid, Managing Director, Collaborative for High Performance Schools (CHPS)** said, "Making a commitment to our country's future starts with making a commitment to our children, and that means doing all we can to provide healthy learning environments. We call on all members of Congress to invest in EPA and in bringing our aging, poorly maintained schools up to a standard that gives our kids a fighting chance to live up to their potential."

The national Coalition for Healthier Schools, coordinated by Healthy Schools Network, engages over one-hundred national NGOs supporting the need for healthy learning environments for all children. For more information, visit HealthySchools.org.