

CASE STUDY

Boston Healthy Schools Task Force: Community and school stakeholders promote asthma-friendly school environments

In the 1990s, a Boston City Council ordinance calling for annual inspections to be conducted at all schools served as a strong foundation to assess indoor air quality and create more asthma-friendly school environments. This created an opportunity for the former Boston Urban Asthma Coalition to bring together parents of children with asthma, school staff, and community partners to advocate for the implementation of these annual inspections. The Healthy Schools Task Force was then formed to monitor an implementation plan for safe, healthy, and asthma-friendly schools. The task force includes representatives of various Boston Public School (BPS) departments, the Boston Public Health Commission, and community partners from the Boston Healthy Homes and Schools Collaborative. The collaboration has also fostered initiatives that assist the district in providing training, developing and revising policies for green cleaning and recycling.

The Healthy Schools Task Force examines each of the district's policies and practices through a health and asthma lens. The school inspection program audits building conditions such as leaks, mold, pests, and clutter. The inspection data help pinpoint specific problem areas in a school and also identifies schools with the highest percent of pests and clutter. This enables school staff to change their own practices, follow up with work orders, and/or allows the district to target specific schools with clutter clean-out interventions. At the district level, data promotes broader policy and practice goals. Findings of the annual inspection are summarized for each school and shared through the school's website. This information is also helpful for parents and health care providers who create student asthma action plans.

BPS revised its district-wide Wellness Policy in 2012. The Task Force identified this as an opportunity to educate the District Wellness Council on the importance of integrating healthy school environments into a whole child approach to wellness. As a result, BPS' existing asthma policy – which included management of the school's environmental conditions (annual audits, integrated pest management, use of green cleaners, and tobacco control) as part of a child's asthma management program – then became part of the district's overall wellness policy. Now part of a comprehensive district-wide wellness policy, the asthma-friendly policies and practices are communicated alongside seven other components (for example, physical activity) that school-specific wellness councils may add to their annual wellness action plan.

The BPS Wellness Policy has resulted in better communication across the various departments involved with its implementation. For example, there has been an increase in healthy foods and snacks served each day to thousands of students. But as food is being served in more places (including classrooms), it comes with the risk of greater pest problems, which in turn can have an impact on children with asthma. Task Force members brought this concern to the district Wellness Council to encourage greater coordination between the food services department and facilities. Such coordination, including the scheduling of

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eating, the storage of food in the schools, supplementing cleaning practices, and recycling food containers and waste, can have a positive impact on pest management and an asthma-friendly environment.

The collaboration among stakeholders with the Healthy Schools Task Force has brought greater resources to bear on creating asthma-friendly school environments across Boston. This multi-strategy approach to creating health school environments is sustained by the diverse skill sets and capacity of individuals and organizations that have shared their resources and even secured joint project grants to achieve Task Force goals.

Related resources

Healthy School Environments, Boston Public Schools

<http://bostongreenschools.org/programs/health/HSE//>: BPS Healthy Schools Environment Toolkit, BPS policies, and additional resources.

Wellness Policy, Boston Public Schools

https://drive.google.com/a/bostonpublicschools.org/folderview?id=0B5XW_RQDmW_0NzhzMVMtVG1WNkU&usp=sharing&tid=0B5XW_RQDmW_0eFFZTEtERVzbVU: BPS Health and Wellness Policy, including Healthy Schools Environment Policy.