



Healthy Schools Taskforce E-Newsletter

FEBRUARY 23, 2011

VOLUME 1, NUMBER 1

In this edition:

- [What is the Healthy Schools Taskforce?](#)
- [Best Practices: Environmental Audit](#)
- [Healthy School Highlight: The Trotter School](#)
- [Tips/Factsheet: Green Cleaners](#)

For more info click on the links below :

1 [Healthy Homes, Healthy Schools](#)

2 [BPHC](#) (bphc.org)

3 [DPH](#) (mass.gov/dph)

4 [EPA: Tools for Schools](#) (epa.gov/iaq/schools/index.html)

5 [BTU](#) (btu.org)

6 [HRIA](#) (hria.org)

7 [MassCOSH](#) (masscosh.org)

BPS Facilities Management

www.bostonpublicschools.org/node/750

617-635-9162
26 Court Street, 2nd Floor
Boston, MA 02108

To get updates, info or ask a question to (answer in next issue) please email:
al.vega@masscosh.org

What is the Healthy Schools Taskforce?

Boston School children have among the highest asthma rates in the State and asthma is the leading cause of school absenteeism. If students aren't in the classroom they can't learn and if the classroom is unhealthy – they can't achieve! The **Healthy Schools Taskforce (HST)** was established in 2002 to address environmental conditions in the BPS that can affect health and learning. HST develops environmental policies and procedures to improve indoor air quality and school building conditions and reports progress annually to the City Council.

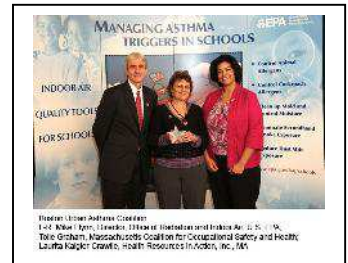
HST members include BPS facility/environmental staff, Boston Public Health Commission, school staff unions and a community coalition - the Healthy Homes, Healthy Schools Collaborative. HST meets quarterly to review results from the environmental inspections and to make policy recommendations for prioritizing repairs that can affect health; IPM (integrated pest management), green cleaning, and programs that link school and home asthma management and environmental improvements. An **Environmental Committee (EC) sub-committee** meets regularly to work more directly with schools on these issues.

Some of the successes of the Healthy Schools Taskforce:

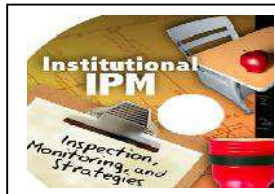
Compliance with State IPM law for each school: more quarterly inspections; training school staff to use their IPM log book to document pest sightings which assists exterminators.

6 annual environmental audits of 138 school buildings with reports posted on each school's website. All data is analyzed to assess key interventions (a focus on asthma triggers) and repairs are prioritized for health and safety **establishing Environmental Teams** and targeted clean-outs in those schools.

At the [EPA's 11th Annual Indoor Air Quality \(IAQ\) Tools for Schools National Symposium](#) in Washington, D.C. on January 13-15, 2011, **the Boston Urban Asthma Coalition (Healthy Homes, Healthy Schools Collaborative) and MassCOSH were presented the National IAQ Tools for Schools Connector Award** for spearheading the city-wide Healthy Schools Taskforce that promotes healthy IAQ in schools and demonstrate a significant dedication to student and staff health and wellness.



BEST PRACTICES: BPS Annual Environmental Audits



BPS with BPHC conducts annual inspections of all BPS school buildings. The focus of the inspection is to assess conditions in the buildings which may affect the environmental health and safety of the students, staff, parents and other school visitors. Please remember that these inspections are only a snapshot in time and may not indicate conditions occurring during the course of the school year.

Conditions that are noted in the inspection report include but are not limited to the following: building repair; cleanliness and housekeeping; pest and rodent activity and related IPM (Integrated Pest Management) issues like storage clutter, sanitation; water-staining and leaks for visible and potential mold growth areas; chemical storage; heating, ventilation, and plumbing system operation, etc. In addition indoor air quality measurements are done in at least 10% of the occupied spaces.

The Environmental Audits along with numerous other inspections conducted by BPS Facilities Management personnel, City of Boston Inspectional Services Department, Boston Fire Department, BPHC and others provide a blue print for planning future school renovations and repairs. The audits, along with minimum quarterly IPM inspections by a Massachusetts licensed pest control contractor, provide the school and Facilities Management a valuable tool to focus their efforts.

TIPS FOR TEACHERS TO KEEP SCHOOLS HEALTHY

Avoid using chemicals. Only use the "approved" non-toxic cleaner from the school. Don't bring in your own bug spray or pesticides; it's against the law. Use odorless, water-based markers and art supplies. Chemicals can be respiratory irritants.

Do make sure your **univent** is working and bringing fresh air into your classroom. (*The univent is the place where air is circulated in your room—usually under a window.*)

Don't obstruct your **univent** with books and supplies. Keep furniture a few feet away from univent so air can flow.

Avoid bringing **pets and plants** into the classroom. Pets have dander. Plants have spores and their soil breeds mold. These are allergens.

Limit food in the classroom and **store it well in lid tight containers.** Have students' clean out desks weekly. Crumbs and liquids attract pests.

Reduce classroom clutter such as paper and classroom materials that you aren't using. They collect dust and harbor pests.

Report water leaks as soon as they appear. Mold can grow if wet places don't dry within 48 hours.

Healthy School Highlight: Trotter School

Much progress has occurred at the Trotter since 2008 and a big reason for the successes here are the determined efforts of the school nurse, Margaret VanCleeve-Rocchio whom we interviewed just last month about her experience being part of that committee.

Why is an environmental committee at the Trotter so important and how does it help you, your students and staff?

When I arrived at the Trotter 2 1/2 years ago I didn't know there was a committee and was not even aware there was a problem with the environment. I was overwhelmed by the number of children with asthma even though parents said that their children were fine when they were at home. I knew there had to be something else because one of my most severe asthmatics graduated from the Trotter in 2008 and enrolled at another BPS school. I kept in contact with her mom. There were no changes at home (cat/rodent issue) so the only change for this child was school. She did not have any ER visits/major exacerbations in the year after she left the Trotter. The committee helped me make the connections between conditions in the school and the large number of asthma exacerbations. I was able to work with BPS and community agencies to get services and appropriate action from the BPS Facility Department.

What do you think has made the most impact since creating an environmental committee there? The school clean up this summer when 40 years of "junk" was removed from the classrooms and closets. Our mouse infestation has been greatly improved and vents are now cleaned. I have also noted an improvement in the number of children coming to my office for asthma exacerbations and

Is there any advice you would share with teachers/staff who are trying to get their school on board to adopt some of the strategies being used at the Trotter? People need to work together. I think we were able to accomplish a lot because there was not a lot of blaming going on. My principal was very open to letting "outsiders" in on the process. She also recognized the importance of getting our students asthma under better control. Working closely with the custodians understanding the Pest Control/IMP process key to controlling the mouse problem.



Students at Trotter sitting on washable mats (replaced rugs which triggered asthma)

Q & A: Green Cleaners are Better for our Health



Did you know that all of the Boston schools are cleaned with healthier "green certified" cleaners? Green cleaners can improve indoor air quality because they have fewer harmful chemicals compared to regular cleaners. They are safer and better for students and staff with asthma and work as well as any other cleaner. The City-wide Healthy Schools Taskforce worked with custodians and school staff to approve a "green cleaning" policy.

Do "green" cleaners kill germs? Studies have shown that a general purpose "green" cleaner can effectively remove 99.9% of microbes. Disinfectants are not "green cleaners" because they have toxic ingredients that destroy bacteria and germs which should only be used for targeted cleaning (ex. bathrooms, cafeterias, etc.) and for special cleaning for infectious outbreaks. Many teachers may be using products that are respiratory irritants or have unnecessary toxic ingredients. **Hand washing Kills Germs too!** Germs and infectious diseases are not just on surfaces in schools. They are also on us! Frequent hand washing is one of the most effective ways to protect against germs that get picked up from other people, or from contaminated surfaces.

What products can I use to do some cleaning in my classroom? The BPS Green Cleaning Policy states that teachers are not to bring any of these products to school. Ask the Principal for a bottle of the "approved" green cleaners for your use. Let us know if you are unable to get that.