

HARTFORD PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Using IAQ Management to Address Asthma in an Urban District

PROGRAM RESULTS

The city of Hartford has the sixth highest child poverty rate of any large city in the United States. In 2001, a study of Medicaid eligible, school-aged children in Hartford revealed an asthma prevalence of 19 percent. The city council declared an asthma emergency and called on the school district to help manage asthma. Hartford Public Schools (HPS) was challenged by old buildings and limited resources. Two dedicated champions used the *IAQ Tools for Schools* Program to create a wellness program for the district. They recruited collaborators from across the community and established a network of Health and Safety Teams in the majority of schools linked through the district-level nursing and building and grounds functions. Although recent changes in upper management have resulted in new challenges, bundling *IAQ Tools for Schools* with the Health and Safety Teams has maintained a sustainable structure to address school wellness. A more targeted focus on training and education has empowered building occupants to be stewards of their environments.

Organize for Success — Develop Systematic Approach: In 2001, HPS applied the *IAQ Tools for Schools* Framework to create a district-wide wellness program and address rising rates of asthma. They didn't add IAQ activities to a to-do list; they used *IAQ Tools for Schools* to create a systemic solution. They recruited teams at each school site and partnered with health and environmental organizations from across the city (universities, non-profits, local and state government, etc.). These Health and Safety Teams remain intact despite shifting priorities in the district.

Assess Your Environments Continuously — Listen to Occupants: HPS trained the site-based Health and Safety Teams with the tools and information they needed to assess their facilities. The teams gather detailed information from building occupants about facility history, health trends and comfort issues and use that information to develop a list of priority activities; prompt response to improvement requests from Facilities and Nursing Services provides positive reinforcement. By allowing school staff to assess their facilities and prioritize their own IAQ needs, the district empowers school-based teams to be facility experts and stewards.

ORGANIZE FOR SUCCESS: Develop Systematic Approach

“From our very first pilot project... we were driven by the question, ‘what are we going to do about asthma?’ The fact that *IAQ Tools for Schools* provides support for asthma management was a major selling point for us and our administrators.”

— Pam Clark,
Hartford Public Schools

Plan Your Short and Long-Term Activities — Work in Stages: HPS put together the components of success over time. At first, there was a single pilot project. But, they used that example to build momentum and support; used the support to build a training program; used the training program to create school-based Health and Safety Teams; used the teams to assess the facilities; and so on. And now, they are ensuring sustainability by reinforcing the program with *IAQ Tools for Schools* on Health and Safety Team agendas and active outreach to administration and principals that emphasizes the relationships among IAQ management, student health and student performance.

Communicate with Everyone, All the Time — Make IAQ Meaningful: The IAQ program champions in HPS marketed the program by describing their goals for it in the terms that were most relevant to each audience: for administrators, it was a solution for asthma and attendance; for school-based teams, it was the key to achieving “safe, clean and healthy” schools.

Act to Address Structural, Institutional and Behavioral Issues — Train Occupants to Address IAQ Risks: HPS keeps IAQ management front and center by continually communicating the importance of IAQ to various groups within the school district, from focused training for custodians throughout the district, to annual staff training on asthma and the environment, to regular meetings with the principals, and even educating teens on asthma in high school. No one person or group is overwhelmed by the workload because the responsibility for good IAQ in the schools is spread and shared across the district, the schools and the community. “Although many programs compete for attention at HPS, the IAQ initiative is sustained because health leadership continues to see the value of *IAQ Tools for Schools* in supporting a healthy learning and teaching school environment.” — Paula Schenck, University of Connecticut Health Center

HPS monitors IAQ Tools for Schools implementation at the District's schools, and the nursing staff tracks asthma outcomes.

- ▲ Decrease in asthma visits to school health rooms over the initial three years of systematic data collection.
- ▲ Sustainable and active health and safety teams in the majority of schools.
- ▲ Greatly enhanced staff commitment, involvement and stewardship of facility health.
- ▲ Widespread staff awareness of how and why to report IAQ concerns; *IAQ Tools for Schools* recommendations used in renovations and new buildings.
- ▲ Proactive approach ensures IAQ problems are addressed in a systematic and timely manner.