

Making Change at Your School

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HEALTHY SCHOOLS
CAMPAIGN

As a parent, caregiver or school community member, you have the power to make a significant impact on student health, well-being and achievement by advocating for greener, healthier school cleaning. It's not always easy to affect your child's education positively or to feel heard amid the complexities of the school system. By advocating for a green cleaning program, you can help promote a simple, cost-efficient and healthy change that makes a real difference for health and learning.

You can have an impact on your school's cleaning program by speaking up for change at different levels: at the school level, at the district level or even through change in state policy. This guide is designed to support change at the school level. For more information on advocating for change at the district level, please see Step 1: Getting Started. For information about speaking up for state-level green cleaning policy, please see our [Green Cleaning Advocacy Handbook](#).

Implementing green cleaning in schools has many benefits, and chief among them is helping students stay healthy and ready to learn.

Start the Conversation

Start by identifying and meeting with like-minded parents, teachers and community members to understand others' concerns. Does your school have a green team in place? Have other parents or school nurses raised concerns about this issue? If so, do others' concerns focus on chemical exposures? Dirty buildings? Elevated levels of asthma? Reach out to your contacts at school and to your personal network, and consider leveraging existing parent networks such as a local school council or PTA.

Create a Green Team

After talking with other concerned individuals, it's time to create your team. A green team of school stakeholders can provide the needed input and support to successfully create and sustain health-promoting change. Consider inviting members of

the following groups to meet about your school's cleaning program.

- **Teachers** play a strong role because they often determine the daily cleaning routine within their classrooms.
- **Administrative staff** include all administrative and support personnel. The staff have control over areas that may have specific cleaning requirements, such as kitchen areas, and are likely to be affected by changes in cleaning policy.
- **Facility operators and custodians** have direct technical responsibility for cleaning procedures in the school, and their health is directly affected by cleaning products and procedures. The support of these staff members is crucial in furthering a green cleaning plan. Green cleaning offers many additional benefits to these important stakeholders.
- **Health officers and school nurses** are very knowledgeable about how cleaning practices can impact the health of students and staff, and can serve as great allies and resources when persuading additional stakeholders to support your goals.
- **Contract service providers** need to be informed and active members of your efforts because their activities can have a direct and substantial impact on what types of cleaning chemicals are used within your school. Examples of these activities include clean-up after renovations, construction projects or specialized cleaning procedures.

Making Change

Assess your needs. When your team is in place, assess your school's current needs. What are the most pressing challenges for the school facility? Outline what outcomes you want (for example, reducing chemical exposures) and what barriers you might face trying to get there. Think about the opportunities that currently exist and the strengths you can find in your community. Educate yourself about the cleaning environment of your school.

Develop a plan. Now that you've identified your goals, write them down. Identify the strategies and milestones you can use to measure progress. Outline the step-by-step activities that will take you to success. Give members of your team responsibility for specific steps.

Take the first step. Remember that you don't need to do everything at once. Depending on your goals, a pilot program may be the best way to gain acceptance for your efforts, work out any logistical problems and test different methods.

Rate your progress. Regularly review the measurable outcomes you identified in your plan. Identify which steps have been taken, which milestones have been accomplished and what else you hope to achieve. If you've received any feedback, consider that in your progress report. Take time to review the lessons you're learning along the way.

Give high fives. Celebrate your progress! To keep your team engaged and motivated, it can't be all work and no play. Take time to recognize the steps you take successfully and the people working hard to make it happen.

Plus: Consider institutionalizing your gains with a green cleaning policy. One of the most effective ways to make sure your progress continues over time and survives any change in personnel or other transitions is to support the school or district in adopting a green cleaning policy. If you are interested in taking this next step, we recommend that you work closely with school facility staff to advocate for, and support the development of, this policy. See [Step 1: Prepare Your School](#) for more. If you are interested in advocating for a state-level green clean schools policy, see our [Green Cleaning Advocacy Handbook](#).

Green Cleaning at School vs. at Home

When we talk about a green cleaning program for schools, we are not talking about cleaning the school with vinegar and baking soda. While natural alternatives can be appropriate choices in the home, the institutional setting requires more. Schools districts are governed by health codes, and the cleaning industry adheres to a standard for cleaning schools and other public spaces. Green cleaning programs are built on using cleaning products that don't contain toxic chemicals and limiting exposure to all cleaning solutions.

In essence, green cleaning in the school environment is about cleaning for health—which includes factors such as reducing chemical exposures while controlling the potential spread of infection—without harming the environment.

Structuring Your School Cleaning Program

Every school and community is unique in some ways, even when it comes to keeping schools clean and healthy. Some school districts manage their own cleaning programs, while others contract with a company to manage the cleaning. Your school or district may already make some environmentally preferable purchases or may have contracts in place with vendors. To learn more about how school cleaning programs are structured and the issues to consider in a large-scale audit, see [Step 1: Prepare Your School](#).

Reaching Out to Your Principal

We have developed a [sample letter](#) inviting your school's principal to meet with a few members of your parent group.