



Advocacy: Tips for Getting Started

If you are concerned for your health or the health of others because of a practice or policy at your school or in your district, you can do something about it. Ideally, you can share your concern with those involved and propose a solution. Hopefully, they will listen respectfully and quickly take action to resolve your concern. If that happens, great! Please share your success story with us. However, sometimes addressing a healthy schools concern can feel uncomfortable, or even risky for your job or relationships with coworkers or your child's teachers. Here are some tips that may help:

- **Be prepared.** If your concern isn't an emergency, learn more about the issue before addressing it with others. For example, if your concern is about air fresheners at school that give you or your students headaches, you can learn air fresheners and other scented products often contain toxic chemicals that are harmful to everyone. If your concern is about students using disinfecting wipes at school, you can learn it's against federal law for children to use disinfectants, and all disinfectants are regulated as pesticides by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (U.S. EPA). Check out the resources at www.wyominghealthyschools.org to get started. If your concern is about a chemical product, you can also do an internet search for the product's Safety Data Sheet and read product information from its manufacturer to learn more.
- **Be respectful.** People listen best when they don't feel attacked.
- **Be constructive.** When you raise a concern, also suggest a solution if you can. For example, in the case of students using disinfecting wipes, you can suggest trained staff disinfect after school hours when needed. If students need to clean their desks during the day, they can use plain soap and water.
- **Be an educator.** Consider sharing some of the facts you've learned. People are more likely to take action and follow healthy school policies when they understand why it matters.
- **Be connected.** Consider gathering support from others, such as parents, students, teachers, other school staff, community members, agencies, and organizations. Administrators and school boards may take action faster if they know your concern is shared by a group.
- **Be brave.** When you speak up for healthier schools, you help everyone who visits, works, and learns in your school. The students and families are worth it. The staff is worth it. You are worth it.
- **Be understanding.** Most people who work in school systems have the same overall goal: To help kids learn. They might not know the same information you do, though. Working together and learning from each other can lead to the best solutions.
- **Be resilient.** Advocacy can be a marathon, not a sprint. Big changes take time. Keep trying!

Advocacy Resources

(links on the Wyoming Healthy Schools website)

Wyoming Healthy Schools

Information and resources on how to set students and staff up for success through healthier schools. Includes actions to protect indoor air quality, improve school food, and reduce the use of toxins. Join the Wyoming Healthy Schools public Facebook group or sign up for the free e-newsletter via this site.

<https://wyominghealthyschools.org>

Take Action to Improve Indoor Air Quality in Schools, U.S. EPA

Actions to improve school indoor air quality that can be taken by facility managers, school officials, teachers, staff, health professionals, parents, and students

<https://www.epa.gov/iaq-schools/take-action-improve-indoor-air-quality-schools>

Parents, Students, and Healthy Indoor School Environments, U.S. EPA

Signs that a health problem may be related to indoor air quality in school and actions you can take

<https://www.epa.gov/iaq-schools/parents-students-and-healthy-indoor-school-environments>

Protecting Vulnerable Students in “Sick” Schools, Healthy Schools Network, 2012

Explains special education and antidiscrimination laws to protect students with disabilities, such as those with chronic health impairments that may be impacted by the school environment

https://www.healthyschools.org/data/files/Protecting_Vulnerable_Students_in_Sick_Schools_Aug_2012.pdf

Four Strategies to Ensure District Leadership Buy-in for Green School Practices, Green Schools National Network

Green schools are healthy, equitable, and sustainable learning environments. The strategies in this article can be adapted to achieve buy-in for any of these areas.

<https://greenschoolsnationalnetwork.org/four-strategies-to-ensure-district-leadership-buy-in-for-green-school-practices/>

Strategies for Effective Health and Safety Dialogue, National Education Association, 2/28/2023

A video training teaching parents how to ask effective questions that lead to productive conversations with school officials about health and safety issues

<https://www.nea.org/resource-library/strategies-effective-health-and-safety-dialogue>

Resources for Parents, Families, and Other Child Health Advocates, Children’s Environmental Health Network

Articles and links to information about children’s environmental health

<https://cehn.org/resources/for-parents-families-and-other-child-health-advocates/>

Indoor Air Quality Knowledge-to-Action Professional Training Webinar Series, U.S. EPA

On-demand webinars including how to gain buy-in for projects that support healthy school indoor air quality

<https://www.epa.gov/iaq-schools/indoor-air-quality-knowledge-action-professional-training-webinar-series>

Advisory Committees for Healthy and Sustainable Schools Webinar, Center for Green Schools, 12/16/2022

Access to a recorded webinar and presentation slides about how to start a committee at your school district for healthy and sustainable schools. For free access, click the link below, and once on their site, click the links near the upper left in the header section (NOT the “Access or purchase this course” button)

<https://www.usgbc.org/education/sessions/advisory-committees-healthy-and-sustainable-schools-12854108>