As of 2006 edition of Putting the Pieces Together detailed what it takes to develop and sustain a healthy learning environment in urban schools. Using feedback from district leaders, AASA has revised the Putting the Pieces Together publication by expanding its applicability to include rural and suburban school districts, as well as urban. In addition, the seven challenges identified in 2006 have been re-grouped into six that apply to all-size school systems. Our work over the last few years with our Urban and Rural Healthy Schools Coalitions pointed to the similarities in the challenges they face – ancient facilities, disadvantaged children, tight timelines and even tighter budgets. We learned from them that the need for high quality indoor air quality management programs in all-size school systems is great and growing.

In addition to expanding the geography in the scope of the publication, terminology has also been shifted to reflect the multi-dimensional characteristic of indoor air quality. Therefore, indoor environmental quality (IEQ) will be used to describe the indoor environment (i.e. air, materials, lighting, built environment, etc.) and factors that impact the quality of various media (i.e. chemicals, energy usage, waste management, etc.). IEQ is a term that includes several factors: indoor air quality, odor quality, lighting quality, sound quality, vibration quality, thermal comfort quality and the ways in which pollutants affect indoor quality.

Putting the Pieces Together is an interactive document that introduces the school community to six common challenges that may be encountered when implementing and sustaining a healthy indoor environmental plan/program: 1) Maintaining strong leadership, 2) Dealing with overcrowding, 3) Increasing awareness and prioritizing IEQ, 4) Implementing effective communication strategies, 5) Overcoming financial barriers, and 6) Creating networking opportunities.

The document is organized by challenge, and for each stakeholder there is further explanation on how to address this challenge. Stakeholders include: superintendents, school boards, health staff, facilities staff and school building staff. AASA will further analyze each challenge into a “Superintendent’s Issue Brief”, detailing the challenge, presenting data on its effect on schools, and providing resources to address the challenge.

Using EPA’s Tools for Schools (TFS) or similar program to strengthen an existing healthy school environment plan is a critical piece of creating healthy school environments where children can learn academically. These plans allow a district to address the six challenges through preventive management and effective response to IEQ issues. This document can be used as an outline for your district to address IEQ and related health effects. Its content is based on AASA’s experiences, feedback from our members, expertise from district leaders who have overcome some challenges, and recommendations found in the EPA’s TFS kit.

If your district has an IEQ success story to share, please contact AASA’s Healthy School Environments Program at children@aasa.org.

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Acknowledgements
The American Association of School Administrators is grateful to the Healthy Schools Coalition members who shared their expertise and suggestions for this publication.
Implementing Effective Communication Strategies

To ensure thorough and consistent communication of IEQ program goals, create a cross-functional team that includes district leadership, building level staff and parents.

- Focus on building level staff and parents.
- Implement a school-wide plan for communicating the program.
- Use social media, newsletters, and school board meetings.
- Engage in ongoing communication with stakeholders.

School Board
- Communicate to the public and stakeholders the importance of improving IEQ.
- Ensure all district staff and students are aware of the program.

Superintendent
- Communicate via email, letters, and newsletters.
- Hold town hall meetings for staff and parents.

Implementation Strategies

Success Story

Adam’s City School District is an urban area that has had significant challenges with IEQ. The district leadership team recognized the importance of addressing IEQ issues and implemented a comprehensive communication strategy to improve IEQ.

- The district's IEQ initiative.
- Involve district leaders in the planning and implementation of the IEQ initiative.

Overcoming Financial Barriers

School districts across the nation are facing daunting budgets and increased mandates. Overcoming financial barriers is essential for implementing IEQ initiatives.

- Identify potential funding sources, such as grants or state funding.
- Create a financial plan for addressing IEQ issues.

School Board
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Superintendent
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Implementation Strategies

Success Story

Montgomery County Public Schools addresses the IEQ challenges at partner schools by implementing energy-saving strategies, maintaining indoor air quality, and conducting energy audits.

- The EPA and private sources to fund IEQ initiatives.
- Share data, research, and best practices with other districts.

School Board
- Identify priority IEQ initiatives for immediate action.
- Provide adequate funding for IEQ initiatives.

Superintendent
- Communicate via email, letters, and newsletters.
- Hold town hall meetings for staff and parents.

Implementation Strategies

Success Story

Spokane’s East Valley School District (EVSD) joined the EPA’s Energy Star Program and revolutionized its energy use.

- Use AASA resources to educate students, teachers, and administrators.
- Share school data with stakeholders.

School Board
- Identify priority IEQ initiatives for immediate action.
- Provide adequate funding for IEQ initiatives.

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- Communicate via email, letters, and newsletters.
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Implementation Strategies

Success Story

Auburn City School District is an urban area that has had significant challenges with IEQ. The district leadership team recognized the importance of addressing IEQ issues and implemented a comprehensive communication strategy to improve IEQ.

- The district's IEQ initiative.
- Involve district leaders in the planning and implementation of the IEQ initiative.

Increasing Awareness and Prioritizing IEQ

School leaders must continuously make visible the importance of IEQ in their districts to drive improvements and prioritize IEQ initiatives. In conjunction with maintaining a focus on IEQ, it is important to establish partnerships that will continue to bring change to schools.

- Identify priority IEQ initiatives for immediate action.
- Provide adequate funding for IEQ initiatives.

School Board
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Creating Network Opportunities

Although duties bring little time to sustain ongoing communication, IEQ efforts can be sustained through ongoing relationships.

- Establish a network of district leaders to collaborate on IEQ initiatives.
- Use professional organizations to network and share best practices.

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Dealing with Overcrowding

As the number of students enrolled in public schools continues to grow, space becomes increasingly limited or nonexistent.

- Engage in strategic planning to address overcrowding.
- Prioritize the use of existing space to meet student needs.

School Board
- Identify priority IEQ initiatives for immediate action.
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Maintaining Strong Leadership

Strong leadership is critical for successfully implementing integrated environmental programs, policies, and strategies and for prioritizing the health and well-being of all stakeholders.

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