



**Building Success, Leading Change:**

# **Stories of Healthy School Environments**



AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS



**The strong leadership of the superintendent and the collaborative nature of building staff form a durable foundation on which healthy school environments are built.** Having a proactive action plan in place, practicing preventive maintenance and communicating strategically across the district and the community hugely impact the well being and academic success of every student. The following school districts are examples of public school districts taking steps and encountering successes along the way to their ultimate goal – creating a healthy school environment where students and staff thrive.

## Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, Charlotte, N.C.:

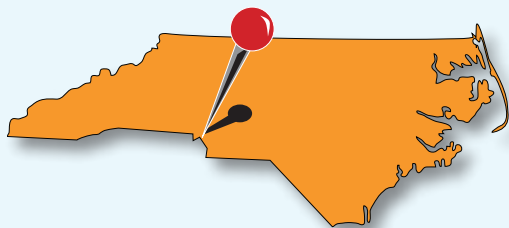
### *Reaching Further*

**Superintendent: Peter C. Gorman**

**Student Population: 130,000**

**# of School Buildings: 161**

**Classification: Urban**



### **Overview and Vision**

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (CMS) is one of the 25 largest districts in the U.S. CMS recognizes that its students are competing on a global stage, and wants them to learn more, experience more and achieve more. In terms of air quality, the district's vision is to provide excellent educational facilities for all stakeholders that are safe, clean, well maintained and environmentally secure.

### **Leading by Example**

Superintendent Peter Gorman has more than two decades of experience as an educator. He is always accessible and supportive as he understands the im-



portance of providing healthy school environments for children. His leadership and that of the school board have been pivotal in moving the district's innovative and strategic indoor air quality (IAQ) management plan forward. District leadership, a focus on prevention and a clearly defined mission with strategic goals, communication and teamwork are key to this district's progress. Practical yet innovative, CMS is making incredible strides in creating healthy school environments.

### **Approach to Healthy School Environments**

CMS views indoor air quality through a broad lens that encompasses environmental issues, preventive maintenance, safety and pest management and the effect of these environmental concerns on the academic achievement of students and staff in the building. Its multidisciplinary approach, rooted in the Environmental Health and Safety (EHS) office, requires departments to work together to reach their overarching goals. Its multilevel approach builds partnerships between health and maintenance staff to ensure the health of children in school buildings.

The district developed its initial IAQ response system in 1999 when a safety officer position was created. As district awareness and commitment grew, the EHS office was established in 2005 with committed staff positions, institutionalized investigations and reporting processes and a formal internal training program for building maintenance staff to create consistency in how environmental and safety matters were handled. The district initially worked with the Environmental Protection Agency

(EPA) and the University of Tulsa to create an IAQ management plan, which included the assessment of every building in the district.

The building services staff responds to all service calls with 24 hours. Using a computerized property management system, all service calls are directed to the appropriate maintenance shop or custodial services supervisor. As part of the strategic communication plan, written reports of surveys and annual reporting are distributed to stakeholders at various levels of the district.

## Prevention and Training

Prevention is highly regarded at CMS. Their Preventative Maintenance Program involves changing filters and HVAC components on a scheduled basis. They have high standards in regard to testing their potable water that go above and beyond government requirements. In addition to forming an IAQ task force and performing routine inspections and checklists, they perform audits with a focus on IAQ, practice green cleaning, use recycled playground materials, and have created environmental objectives on subjects ranging from HAZMAT to Radon to playground safety to asbestos.

Training is taken very seriously, which is a testament to the district's view of prevention and education. The EHS office has trained every property management employee — more than 230 maintenance and 700 custodial staff — in IAQ fundamentals via mandatory trainings. Building services staff also extends their knowledge to school staff, other districts and, ultimately, the community.

## Making a Difference

Establishing and maintaining healthy school environments as a core value of the EHS department as well as the entire school district have paved the way to success. The CMS IAQ program has led to an organizational understanding of the root causations of poor IAQ that result in premature deterioration of building

materials as well as increased energy costs. Through proactive diligence the district has increased their capacity to identify potential problems.

After the district implemented their summer Energy Management Program, mold work requests were cut in half — by 54 percent — the following year. The EHS staff heavily advocate for fresh air equity for all classrooms in the district with the understanding that it will increase student and staff attendance, improve student performance and reduce energy costs.

CMS prides itself on its IAQ response system. Of the 1,800 operational emergencies CMS responded to during the 2006 school year, only 12 missed the two-hour response goal. Staff takes pride in their work and finds it rewarding to hear teachers comment on the reduction in absences and illnesses. Students also say the quick, knowledgeable responses to their IAQ concerns have made a positive impact on how they feel in the classrooms.

CMS is a mentor and a model for healthy environment programs locally and nationally through the AASA Urban Healthy School Coalition. The district has provided IAQ training and consultation to 22 other districts in the state, networked with county health department to provide IAQ training to county nurses, and made several national presentations on their processes and progress. CMS has



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**“We are very proud of the collaborative work of our building services staff and applaud their efforts on behalf of the better health of our children, staff and community.”**

— Superintendent Peter Gorman

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also hosted community luncheons to raise awareness on this issue. The district has won several awards for its environmental work including the EPA Excellence Award.

## In a Perfect World

CMS has encountered its share of obstacles, many of which are common to all school districts. Funding and issues relating to costs are prevalent. While taking preventative measures is best, funding all preventative maintenance does not fit within the district's budget. There's been an increase in space and students without an increase in the budget and an increase in utilities costs have reduced operating funds. In a perfect world, CMS states that there would be higher prioritization of IAQ and mold response evidenced by additional staffing and that IAQ and energy management would cement their efforts to realize their full potential as change agents for the school environment.

## Milwaukee Public Schools, Milwaukee, Wisc.:

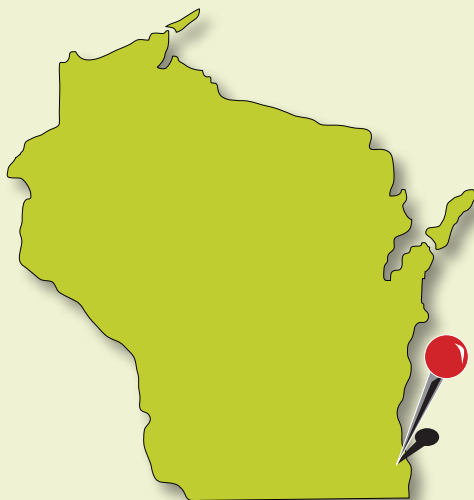
### *Working Together, Achieving More*

**Superintendent: William G. Andrekopoulos**

**Student Population: 105,000**

**# of School Buildings: 173**

**Classification: Urban**



## Overview and Vision

Located in southeastern Wisconsin on the shore of Lake Michigan, Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS) is the largest school district in the state. The district knows that children learn and achieve more when they are well cared for, safe and healthy. The district envisions that with school, community and family input, its students will become competent, responsible and generous adults and that its schools will be vital safe supportive havens that are the centers of community activity.



## Leading by Example

A veteran educator, William G. Andrekopoulos is in his sixth year as superintendent of MPS. The core beliefs he articulates put children first and recognize the multitude of support services, like health, that contribute to student success. Andrekopoulos, the school board and the Milwaukee Teacher's Education Association are highly supportive of district initiatives to improve the school environment and have recognized the facilities and maintenance department for its collaborative efforts in addressing healthy learning environments throughout the district. The way in which the district works on issues of indoor air quality (IAQ) and children's health attests to their belief that community partnerships add value to and increase the capacity of the district.

## Approach to Healthy School Environments

The foundation of MPS' approach to healthy school environments is shared accountability paired with in-house expertise. Until 1989, district staff worked in silos with operations, repairs, environmental offices and mechanical engineering



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**“We and the educational employees that we represent understand very much the importance of air quality and the key role that it plays in providing a safe and healthy environment for teaching and learning. We greatly appreciate the assistance that your department of environmental services has provided the schools and have valued a cooperative working relationship with your department.”**

— Sid Hatch, Assistant Executive Director, Milwaukee Teachers’ Education Association

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having different agendas. A turning point for MPS came when they grouped all these departments under one umbrella to become a cohesive force—helping them gain momentum in their campaign for healthy school environments.

This intra-departmental merger partnered people that could further the goal of fostering a healthy school district creating a staff of experts in their fields. Certified industrial hygienists, mechanical engineers and experienced maintenance staff and custodians reduced the need to use high-priced consultants to prevent or resolve environmental issues. Staff could now work together successfully as one dynamic unit.



Josef Roca, manager of buildings, grounds and fleets, teamed with Thomas Chojnacki, manager of environmental services, to create the district’s IAQ committee. The committee consisted of supervisors, maintenance staff and industrial hygienists who put in place a process for investigating air quality complaints. They implemented an integrated pest management plan, and initiated a chemical

hygiene plan in collaboration with the science curriculum educators from the schools. This committee meets on a monthly basis to continuously monitor and improve the district’s learning environment.

Roca and Chojnacki enhanced their work with a healthy schools champion from the county, Joe Davis. In Milwaukee, the school system and buildings are owned by the city and Davis, county supervisor at the time, was responsible for getting the “IAQ” ball rolling politically. Determined to improve IAQ and with the county supervisor’s backing, MPS started the process of acquiring broader community buy-in. MPS worked with Davis and the National Alliance of Black School Educators (NASBE) to organize health fairs to promote IAQ awareness. The school district engaged the children’s hospital, local health department, Citizens for a Better Environment and the city of Milwaukee to create a “buzz” in the community. Davis introduced MPS to EPA’s IAQ Tools for Schools program. The district’s environmental action plan was enhanced by the adoption of Tools for Schools, and they gained further support from EPA, receiving a grant to assist in their work.

## **Prevention and Training**

MPS has established a rigorous training schedule to orient new staff. They educate each new member of the maintenance staff through an initial two-week session about chemical dispensing and disposal, using green cleaning and general proper usage. Other activities that promote IAQ training and professional development includes:

- Walk-throughs and facility inspections
- Implementation of EPA’s Tools for Schools that staff can complete online

- Incorporation of an integrated pest management program
- Hiring more school nurses with additional funding and operating walk-in clinics. Coordination of school nursing and IPM staff facilitates the seamless transfer of information.

## Making a Difference

MPS has had many successes, but the improvements the district has made to ventilating systems and air delivery represent the most significant change. Staff is now consistent when making filter changes and eliminating cheaper filters. They have found that this single change has saved them time and money in the last few years and has been very effective.

## In a Perfect World

MPS' challenges include declining student enrollment and downsizing. Though they have made huge strides, they are not yet where they want to be in terms of healthy school environments. In a perfect world, MPS states that they would have the manpower necessary to identify the issues facing every school and develop an effective prevention and maintenance plan. They would also increase the number of school nurses in the district who could act as valuable partners in ensuring healthy environments for children throughout the district.

## Helpful Tips for School Leaders:

- ✓ Create an IAQ management plan! Seek assistance from your local health department and the EPA in your region.
- ✓ Create a list of short-term and long-term goals.
  - Sample short-term goals:** Respond within two hours for operational emergencies and within 24 hours for IAQ reports, or train all custodial and maintenance staff in IAQ fundamentals.
  - Sample long-term goals:** Implement Tools for Schools district-wide, or secure academic program support for the use of IAQ curricula in science classrooms.
- ✓ Build partnerships with others to tap into additional resources/ capacity to help your district be successful. Examples: local health department, county fire department, department of public instruction, AASA and EPA.
- ✓ Prevention is critical - this includes inspection and early detection. Student and teacher performance is affected by both occupant comfort and the quality of school environments.
- ✓ Preventive maintenance keeps HVAC equipment running smoothly and efficiently. Air delivery systems are a critical part of the classroom environment.
- ✓ Think green! Using green cleaning products, carpet cleaners, integrated pest management programming and low-flow plumbing fixtures make a healthy difference.
- ✓ Look at the big picture. Creating healthy school environments is about more than IAQ; it's also about risk management, safety, health, curriculum and achievement.



If you want to share your success story or would like to learn more about healthy school environments, contact Ericka Plater Turner, project director at **eturner@aasa.org**. AASA has resources available for school district leaders and is accepting applications for districts that want to join the AASA Urban Healthy Schools Coalition and the AASA Rural Healthy Schools Coalition — [www.aasa.org/focus](http://www.aasa.org/focus).



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**Additional copies of Stories of Healthy School Environments are available free of charge email [eturner@aasa.org](mailto:eturner@aasa.org) or call 703-528-0700.**

# AASA Urban Healthy Schools Coalition

The AASA Urban Healthy Schools Coalition is comprised of urban school districts ranging in size from 4,000 to 740,000 students. Its members are superintendents, assistant superintendents and other administrators, facilities managers, directors and school health personnel. This growing group of fourteen urban school districts meets annually to share resources and to discuss the unique needs of urban districts and the barriers and strategies to creating and maintaining healthy school environments.

Members of this coalition have produced exceptional projects as a result of their involvement. These range from pilot asthma programs to providing information for guides/publications to IAQ science projects to broadening district awareness to include nutrition, obesity and other student health awareness. Several member districts have received recognition from EPA for their IAQ initiatives and their commitment to the health of children and staff in their districts.

## Members of the Urban Healthy Schools Coalition are:

Baltimore County School District  
Towson, Maryland  
Joe Hairston, superintendent  
Student population: 108,604

Los Angeles Unified School District  
Los Angeles, California  
David Brewer III, superintendent  
Student population: 746,831

Bridgeport Pubic Schools  
Bridgeport, Connecticut  
John J. Ramos, superintendent  
Student population: 22,713

Memphis City Schools  
Memphis, Tennessee  
Carol Johnson, superintendent  
Student population: 123,000

Cedar Rapids Community School District  
Cedar Rapids, Iowa  
David Markward, superintendent  
Student population: 17,437

Milwaukee Public Schools  
Milwaukee, Wisconsin  
William Andrekopoulos, superintendent  
Student population: 95,600

Charlotte-Mecklenberg Schools  
Charlotte, North Carolina  
Peter Gorman, superintendent  
Student population: 126,903

Montgomery County Public Schools  
Rockville, Maryland  
Jerry Weast, superintendent  
Student population: 138,891

Detroit Public Schools  
Detroit, Michigan  
Connie K. Calloway, superintendent  
Student population: 156,568

Nashville Metropolitan Public Schools  
Nashville, Tennessee  
Pedro Garcia, superintendent  
Student population: 73,613

East Valley School District #361  
East Valley, Washington  
Christine Burgess, superintendent  
Student population: 4,522

Philadelphia City School District  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania  
Paul Vallas, superintendent  
Student Population: 209,500

Hartford Public School District  
Hartford, Connecticut  
Steven J. Adamowski, superintendent  
Student Population: 24,000

Spokane School District #81  
Spokane, Washington  
Nancy J. Stowell, superintendent  
Student population: 31,000