

# Green Cleaning Advocacy Handbook

**5 Steps to Green Cleaning in Schools**

Green Clean Schools · [greencleanschools.org](http://greencleanschools.org)

**HEALTHY SCHOOLS  
CAMPAIGN**

## Getting Involved

You understand that the school environment impacts your child's health and ability to learn. And you also understand that the chemicals we bring into our schools can have a direct impact its environment. Like most concerned parents, you want to make sure your child's school is as healthy as possible.

This guide will help you take steps toward changing that school environment once and for all. You'll learn how to help create a green cleaning program that supports health for all students and staff. You'll also learn how to help change policies in your school district and even your state.

### Why Advocate?

Children's health and learning are shaped by the laws and policies that define schools today, whether they be policies about testing or laws that restrict the use of certain cleaning chemicals. That's why we have a responsibility to raise our voices for sensible, health-promoting policies. We know that decision-makers will continue to implement policies that affect schools—from curriculum to cleaning practices—whether or not we are at the table.

As parents, advocates and cleaning industry leaders, we have experience in this field and knowledge of the ways that green cleaning can shape children's experiences at schools. We know that how green cleaning protects the health of children and school staff, that green cleaning products are effective and cost-comparable and that the marketplace is ready to support widespread adoption of green clean schools policies. But without our input, policymakers will not necessarily have that information. It is up to us to help legislators understand the importance of green cleaning in schools and craft policies that support student well-being.

### Getting Started

Whether you advocate with a group or as an individual, your efforts will benefit from a little planning. How much planning? It all depends on your circumstances. Taking action may be as simple as briefly researching the issue and picking up the phone to call your policymaker. When you have more time or are part of a larger group, you should consider some other steps, such as communicating with your allies, setting your goals, and developing an action plan. Whatever level of planning you decide to pursue, effective advocacy will involve developing relationships with policymakers and allies who can help promote green clean schools laws.

### Researching the Issue

Information is the key to effective advocacy—especially when that information comes from policymakers' constituents. Elected officials care about what their constituents have to say. And, they often rely on advocates to provide background information and bring forward the individuals who have personal experiences with the issues at hand: the custodian who helped his school save money by going green, the school nurse who can provide information about rising asthma rates, the cleaning product distributor who can show that green products are widely available.

To really make a difference as an advocate, you should be informed and engaged. You do not need to understand everything there is to know about green cleaning, school procurement rules or day-to-day operations of a school. All you need to do is provide insight about the local impact of the issues. Tell your representatives about how the issues will affect individuals in the communities they represent, and let them know why green cleaning is important. If you are honest and accessible, you can help your elected officials understand policies that will make a difference for schools and students.

## What is Green Cleaning?

Green cleaning is defined as cleaning programs that protect health without harming the environment.

Green cleaning protects student, teacher and staff health, while ensuring that buildings are maintained in an efficient and cost-effective way. Many traditional cleaning products contain chemicals that can contribute to poor indoor air quality, trigger asthma and other respiratory illnesses and contribute to long-term health problems such as cancer, reproductive disorders, major organ damage and permanent eye damage. Green cleaning reduces these health risks and can also be a strategy to boost attendance and productivity at school.

## Why Should I Care?

Each school day, some 56 million students and six million staff attend our nation's schools; half of this population may be exposed to polluted indoor air, chemical fumes, pesticides, molds and other toxins. The consequences of this exposure, a great deal of which can be attributed to the use of conventional cleaning products, affects the health of the students, staff and teachers. This directly hinders the students' ability to learn and the schools' ability to provide the quality of education it should. If we want our children to reach their potential, we need to support cleaning products that allow our students to thrive and protect the safety of our students and staff.

- Green Cleaning Helps Students Stay Healthy and Learn: Research shows a clear link between indoor air quality and student academic performance. Because children's immune systems are not yet fully developed, they are more vulnerable to being negatively affected by these chemicals. According to the EPA, children miss more than 14 million school days each year due to asthma exacerbated by poor indoor air quality, which disproportionately affects low-income and minority students. Using

green cleaning products in schools would allow students to spend more days in the classroom, learning at their full capacity.

- Green Cleaning Protects the Health and Safety of Custodial Staff: Because of the custodial staff's close daily contact with these chemicals, they are even more susceptible to health problems than the students. Six out of every 100 custodial staff are injured on the job each year, leading to increasing amounts of Workers' Compensation Claims. Choosing safer and healthier products, along with providing the proper training, can reduce the number of injuries caused by these chemicals, allowing our staff to remain healthier and our schools to remain cleaner.
- Green Cleaning Preserves the Environment: Traditional cleaning products contain harmful chemicals that are routinely washed down the drain. These 6 billion pounds of chemicals will eventually find their way into drinking water, lakes, streams and other waterways, negatively impacting both the environment and humans, threatening public health and adding to pollution. In addition, many of these products are made from non-renewable natural resources like petroleum.

## What Can I Do to Bring Green Cleaning to My State?

Bringing a green cleaning program to your state is no small task, but it can be very rewarding. So let's get started.

### *Build your coalition*

As you talk to people engaged in green cleaning, you will find allies who support what you are doing and want to help. By working together with a group that shares the same goals, you can show your elected officials how important those goals are to their constituents. The more constituents a policymaker hears from who share the same view, the more influence those constituents will have.

It is a good idea to consider working with people who approach green cleaning from diverse perspectives. Parents, health professionals, businesspeople, labor union representatives, educators, environmentalists and religious leaders are just some of the people in your community who may be affected by green cleaning policy changes. That means they might be interested in joining a coalition to promote green cleaning in schools.

Elected officials will be more responsive when they recognize that you represent a cross-section of their constituencies. Taken as a whole, a diverse group represents a community movement and cannot be dismissed as an isolated viewpoint. Bringing together a coalition that includes the education, public health and business communities as well as environmentalists is a powerful strategy to advocate for change.

Coalitions are particularly useful when they:

- Bring together different constituencies with a common goal.
- Build support and legitimacy for the issue.
- Raise the profile of your issue or group.
- Show a number of people with shared goals.
- Bring people together to share the work.
- Rally resources for supporting the cause.

There are many excellent organizations that have an interest in promoting green cleaning policy and have resources or expertise that they are able to put toward the effort. These are excellent groups to reach out to for coalition building. Such organizations include:

- Labor unions (American Federation of Teachers; National Education Association; Service Employees International Union; Association of Federal, State and Municipal Employees)
- Public health organizations (American Lung Association, American Public Health Association)

- Educational organizations (National Association of School Nurses, National Association of Educational Facilities Planners, School Nutrition Association)
- Professional associations (ISSA)
- Parent organizations (Parent Teacher Association, Parents for Public Schools)
- Environmental organizations (Sierra Club, Educational Defense Fund, PIRG)

Establishing a network of advocates doesn't stop when members are identified. To build a strong coalition, you will need to develop effective means of communication.

The first step is to gather accurate contact information and identify individuals within each organization who will be point people for communications. With each new contact, keep a record of addresses, phone numbers, e-mail addresses and any other information you think will be useful.

Each group has its own unique communication needs. Depending on the size and formality of your network, you will want to consider developing newsletters, fact sheets, a web site, and other vehicles for sharing information among members. You may want to meet in person on a regular basis, meet by conference call, or simply keep each other up-to-date by email. Regardless of the method you choose for communication, remember that keeping your allies active and involved depends on keeping them well-informed.

Healthy Schools Campaign offers many resources, such as fact sheet templates, and can provide technical support for coalitions interested in developing web sites, electronic communication and other vehicles for outreach.

With a solid understanding of green cleaning and a network of allies, you're ready to set goals for your advocacy efforts.

At this point, you will need to assess the current climate for green cleaning in your state. To begin, you may want to ask:

- Do you have state or district level green procurement guidelines?
- Does the state government encourage its own agencies and departments to purchase environmentally preferable products?
- Is there a state agency tasked with greening your state?
- Which non-profit or business leaders developed green cleaning programs or services?
- Which legislators who have a history of working on environmental health legislation?
- Who are the distributors and manufacturers of green cleaning products in your state?
- What groups in your state will likely oppose green clean schools legislation?

Although some of this information can be gleaned from the media, it is also beneficial to ask decision makers, legislators, and their staff members for information about what issues they are working on and what issues they would like to pursue. Asking these questions helps you develop key relationships with legislators and community leaders, and tells decision-makers that you are serious about wanting to help them. Consider asking policymakers or their staff members to speak briefly at your planning meeting.

After you have examined the green cleaning environment in your state, what can you do? What groups do you need to reach out to in order to facilitate policy change? Developing general policy recommendations will be an important step in getting coalition members to share your vision. Consider the most practical policy for your state, in light of the existing climate.

As you develop your policy, remember to evaluate

the likely opposition your legislation will face and consider ways that small adjustments might contribute to its success. For example, consider limiting the scope of your efforts: focusing only on schools only rather than on multiple arenas (day care facilities, government buildings, hospitals, etc.) can limit your opposition. Remember, you cannot accomplish anything if you try to do everything at once.

### **Green Cleaning Policy Framework**

After you evaluate your state's situation and outline general policy ideas, you'll need to outline a framework for the policy you are proposing. What are the key elements of a strong green clean schools policy? The following are key points to discuss while developing and reviewing your policy. The first four points are areas that Healthy Schools Campaign believes are core to the development of an effective policy; the next are options that your group should consider in the policy development process.

A. Requirement. A green cleaning policy should require—not suggest or recommend—that schools to go green. The green cleaning market is mature enough that affordable, high-quality products are available for implementation. In our work, we have seen many school administrators that express that they knew about green cleaning but never had the opportunity to make it a priority until their states put requirements in place. With so many competing demands on their time, school leaders are often not able to pay attention to issues such as green cleaning until the solutions become mandatory, no matter how simple and cost-effective the options may be.

B. Multiple certifications. Today, states with green cleaning requirements take different approaches to identifying green products. While some rely on a single certification, we believe that looking at multiple third-party certifications is a stronger approach. By identifying multiple credible third

party certifications, you are supporting innovation in the certification marketplace as well as ensuring better product availability for your schools.

C. More than just chemicals. A policy should be broad in scope so that it encourages more than just green chemical purchases. It should also recognize the importance of sustainable equipment and paper purchases as well as prioritizing improved procedures.

D. Procedures and training. While it may be impractical to require specific training, it is important to recognize training as a significant component of a green cleaning program. HSC believes that a well-paid and properly-trained staff is an important part of every green cleaning program.

Once you have these four key elements in place, additional components of your policy need to be addressed. Decisions on how to handle the points below will vary based on the specific situation in your state.

A. Education sector definition. What schools will your policy apply to through legislation? Much of this discussion will be based on the political realities in your state. You will need to consider the inclusion of public vs. private schools or even preschools and daycare centers.

B. Exemption process. Will your policy allow schools to request an exemption? If so, what will be the basis of granting that exemption? While some state laws have no exemptions, others states allow schools to request an exemption based on cost. You may want research the ways that schools are able to request exemptions from other policies in your state.

C. Enforcement options. How will the requirement be enforced? No one wants to punish schools, so the issue of enforcement poses a big question. Enforcement in most states is limited to annual reporting. Some have considered placing the responsibility of selling green on the vendors rather than the schools.

D. Additional categories. Beyond cleaning products, how extensive will requirements be for different categories? For example, will the green cleaning guidelines for your state touch on vacuums, carpet extractors and microfiber products?

E. Regulatory process. Who will lead the process of developing and maintaining green cleaning guidelines for your state? Though many stakeholders will contribute to the process, it is important to establish a single body or agency to serve as the lead. This can be tricky because state agencies may be unwilling to take on that additional responsibility without extra funding. The key relationships you have been developing with legislators and other decision-makers may come in handy as you seek to identify this lead group.

F. Ongoing review and evaluation. How will the green cleaning guidelines be adjusted as new technologies are developed? How can school leaders request adjustments to the policy after a year of implementation? Your policy should include a mechanism for ongoing evaluation and updates to your regulations. Surveys can be conducted on an annual basis or another system can be developed to open up guidelines for comments on a periodic basis.

### **Sample Green Cleaning Bill Language**

One of the best ways to start discussions about the specifics of a green clean schools law is to review a sample. The following sample is based on the Illinois policy, with updates based on lessons learned through the regulatory process. While every state is different and will be best served by different policies, this example can serve as a template that is modified based on specific circumstances and needs.

### **Sample Bill Language**

AN ACT concerning education.

Section 1. Short title. This Act may be cited as the Green Cleaning Schools Act.

Section 5. Legislative findings. Children are vulnerable to and may be severely affected by exposure to chemicals, hazardous waste, and other environmental hazards. The Federal Environmental Protection Agency estimates that human exposure to indoor air pollutants can be 2 to 5 times and up to 100 times higher than outdoor levels. Children, teachers, janitors, and other staff members spend a significant amount of time inside school buildings and are continuously exposed to chemicals from cleaners, waxes, deodorizers, and other maintenance products.

Section 10. Green cleaning guidelines and specifications. The LEAD STATE BODY HERE (Department of Education, EPA, Public Health or other department) shall, in consultation with the Department of Public Health, the State Board of Education, the state Environmental Protection Agency, and a panel of interested stakeholders, including health organizations, environmental organizations, cleaning product industry representatives, and others, establish and amend on a biennial basis guidelines and specifications for environmentally preferable cleaning and maintenance products, equipment and paper, for use in school facilities. Guidelines and specifications

must be established after a review and evaluation of existing research and must be completed no later than 180 days after the effective date of this Act. Guidelines and specifications should include implementation practices, including inspection and evaluation recommendations. The completed guidelines and specifications must be posted on the LEAD AGENCY HERE's website.

Section 15. Use of green cleaning supplies. By no later than 90 days after implementation of the guidelines and specifications established under Section 10 of this Act, all elementary and secondary public schools and all elementary and secondary non-public schools with 50 or more students shall establish a green cleaning policy and exclusively purchase and use environmentally preferable cleaning products, equipment and paper pursuant to the guidelines and specifications established under Section 10 of this Act. However, a school may deplete its existing cleaning and maintenance supply stocks and implement the new requirements in the procurement cycle for the following school year.

Section 20. Dissemination to schools.

(a) Within 30 days of completion of the guidelines and specifications under Section 10 of this Act, the LEAD AGENCY HERE shall disseminate to each elementary or secondary non-public school with 50 or more students in this State with the guidelines and specifications. The LEAD AGENCY shall provide on-going assistance to schools to carry out the requirements of this Act.

(b) In the event that the guidelines and specifications under Section 10 of this Act are updated by the LEAD AGENCY HERE, the LEAD AGENCY HERE shall provide the updates to each school and school district in a timely manner. Additionally, the LEAD AGENCY HERE shall post all updated materials on its website.

## **Key Resources Checklist**

While planning your campaign, take stock of what resources that you already have. Even if you personally don't have access to of the resources listed below, your coalition members may be able to help, or know the right person to contact. Always ask.

Some key resources that can help you promote green cleaning at the district, local and state level include:

### **1. Advocates.**

Remember, every group that joins your coalition includes at least one person who is interested in green cleaning, and most likely many. These advocates will be a huge resource for you; remain in contact with them, get them involved and ask for help!

### **2. Communications**

- a. Email list of coalition members
- b. Email distribution of broader supporters
- c. Shared listserv from each coalition group
- d. Website for your campaign (domain names and hosting services are cheap!)
- e. Online petition
- f. Newsletter and print publications

### **3. Lobbying support.**

You will want lobbying support to pass a state bill. Remember that many of your partners, including state labor unions, often have excellent lobbyists that can provide support.

### **4. Business support.**

Business supporters can play a significant role with advocating for policy and making the case for going green. Identify leaders who are willing to talk to press, opposition groups and legislators. In our experience, businesses have been excited to get involved in legislative activities and discuss the business opportunities for expanding green cleaning programs.

### **5. Thought leaders.**

Do you know a facility operator who implemented green cleaning for the right reason and can talk about it? The successful facilities manager or school administrator is an important voice who can be looked to as a leader. This individual can play an important role in communicating the importance of green cleaning.

## **Develop a Plan and Take Action**

Your action plan should first take into account your target audience: the elected officials, media professionals and community leaders you intend to influence. For each audience, you may need to tailor your message and your communication techniques. The following sections of this guide present a range of communication strategies you may consider as you develop your plan.

### **Working with Policymakers**

The goals of your advocacy efforts are likely to require action by a decision-making body. Working with elected officials requires persistence, strong listening skills and a compelling message.

Do your homework. To be an effective voice, it helps to know where policymakers stand on related issues. If you or your organization is new to state advocacy, you can partner with like-minded organizations that have a history with state policy efforts. By partnering, you can leverage resources including existing communication networks, lobbying expertise or knowledge of your state legislative process.

Establish relationships. Legislative staff members are a vital part of your elected official's team, so it's important to build good relationships with them. Staffers advise their legislators on education issues and can be a key ally in influencing your elected official. They have power and can help you with their knowledge of the process, other legislators and general strategy. Turn to them with questions about what legislation the policymaker is focusing

on, what information they need you to provide, and what others who might oppose your cause are saying. In turn, you can help them write their bills and offer support for their work. More often, you will work with and through them, as they are the direct link and key voice for your elected official.

Think locally. As an advocate, you have the greatest leverage with your own legislator. In other words: Legislators are much more likely to listen to someone who can vote for them. Find members of your coalition to reach out to their legislators individually, rather than reaching out to legislators from other districts yourself.

Begin the process early. Whether advocating for a new bill or a bill already introduced, advocacy should start as early as possible. If working on a new bill, it's best to start between legislative sessions when members are in their district.

Know your key messages. When the opportunity to speak with a legislator, journalist or decision-maker arises, you will not always have a lot of time to make your case. It will be rare that you will be able to make more than three good points, so it pays to choose your most important points in advance. HSC has developed key messages for green cleaning policy that can be used as a basis for your messaging.

Get your issue on the record. Ask your legislator to cosponsor or support your issue. When legislation is introduced, ask your legislator to submit a statement for the record explaining why the law is necessary. Work with your legislator and supply information on how you can help make the legislation most effective.

R-e-s-p-e-c-t. As common sense as green cleaning is to you, there will be policymakers who vehemently disagree with your position. Remember, you can still communicate an understanding of other points of view. Respect and differing views are

a fundamental ingredient of effective advocacy. To gain it, you must give it. Demonstrate it by taking the time to understand diverse opinions and trying to address these concerns.

### **Tools for Communicating with Policymakers**

As an advocate, you can choose among several techniques for communicating with policymakers, including:

- Meetings and hearings
- E-mail letters
- Telephone calls
- Personal visits
- Fact Sheets
- Testimony

Many of these techniques work well in combination. After a telephone call or visit to an elected official's office, you should send a follow-up letter or e-mail of thanks.

### **E-mails and Faxes: The Write Stuff**

E-mail letters to elected officials are a key tool for advocates. Given current security concerns, postal mail can be significantly slower than in previous years. Many constituents find it faster and more convenient to contact their policymakers through e-mail and fax correspondence.

HSC can provide sample e-mails and talking points that advocates can personalize and send to their representatives. When writing to representatives, use your own words whenever possible, and explicitly state if you are their constituent in the subject line and first paragraph. The more positive and substantive your e-mail is, the more influential it is likely to be. But keep in mind that policymakers and their staff members do not have a lot of time. Be brief, clear and specific. Keep your letter short and always state your purpose in the first sentence.

Follow these tips to improve your communication to

elected officials:

- Stress that you are a constituent in the subject or first line of the letter.
- If your letter refers to a specific bill or amendment, identify it in the subject line (e.g., “Constituent Who Supports H.R. 1” or “Support Education Funding in the Budget Resolution.”).
- Personalize the letter by including the name of your local school or school district and explain how the policy will affect your community.
- State your opinion and your specific request within the first few sentences.
- Avoid confusing education jargon.
- Demonstrate respect and courtesy, no matter what.
- Include your address; your elected official will want to know that you are his constituent.
- Enclose an article or two that are related to the issue, or enclose a copy of the ASCD Legislative Agenda or position statement on the issue.
- If you have any personal association with policymakers, remind them. Nothing is more effective in getting a policymaker’s attention.

### **Constituent E-mail / Phone Blasts**

When working in a coalition, many members will have member lists or databases of individuals signed up to receive advocacy alerts. It can be highly effective to send e-mail alerts to these lists asking them to make phone calls or send e-mails to their representatives. Simply including information on how a member can send an e-mail to their representative, or providing a web-based tool that does this automatically, can increase the reach of your message.

An excellent example of the influence these lists of individuals can have occurred in Illinois. Right before HSC helped to push through statewide green cleaning legislation, there was a committee hearing

and vote on the bill. The Illinois Association of School Nurses sent out an e-mail to school nurses in the districts where the identified six undecided voting representatives were. After the vote, one of the key undecided representatives told the bill sponsor, “A school nurse in my district called and told me this was important. That convinced me that this was worth supporting.” His vote then assured that three others would support the bill. The bill got out of the committee with a vote of eight in favor and three against.

Do you need help setting up an e-mail campaign? Look to your coalition partners. Probably one of them subscribes to a service to provide e-advocacy services. If not, contact the Healthy Schools Campaign and we’ll be happy to offer support.

### **Telephone Calls: Convincing Conversation**

Telephone calls are a mainstay of education advocacy efforts. Follow these simple steps to effectively advocate by phone.

**Preparation.** Before you lift the receiver, jot down a few talking points. Be prepared to leave a voicemail message if necessary.

**Conversation.** At the state level, many representatives are limited in the number of staff they have working for them. It’s not uncommon for a representative to answer the phone him or herself. When you telephone a legislator’s office, let them know that you’d like to speak to someone regarding your green cleaning policy. If there is no one to talk to, leave a clear message, including your name and address. You might begin by saying, “I’m Jane Adams calling from Anytown, and I’d like to leave a message for Congressperson Smith.” State the issue you are calling about and what you want your representative to do. Be as brief as possible, recognizing that legislative offices are very busy.

**Follow-up.** Be sure to thank elected officials and their staff members for their time. A follow-up

letter is a good opportunity to restate your position and include additional materials, such as a position statement or relevant articles. It also helps to establish a relationship with the office.

### **Meetings and Hearings: The Power of Presence**

One tried-and-true way to make certain your voice is heard as an advocate is to attend meetings and hearings, from school board meetings to face-to-face meetings with your legislator. You may want to travel to your state capital to meet with your representative, but you do not necessarily need to. Members are often interested in meeting with constituents when they are in their home district.

When you are going to meet with a policymaker, consider bringing copies of your position statement, fact sheet and any relevant materials (including your business card) to share with contacts you may make. A personal visit can be an effective method of getting the attention of legislators. Remember to follow these basic rules:

- Determine the purpose of your visit. Perhaps you just want to deliver materials and introduce yourself informally. In this case, you may not need to make an appointment, but you should still remember to dress and act professionally.
  - For a more formal visit, call ahead and request an appointment with the legislative or staff aide responsible for education issues. Every state has different norms for face-to-face meetings, but all legislators want to meet with their constituents.
  - Although the ostensible purpose of the meeting may be to focus on your particular bill, remember that the long-term connections you are making are equally important.
  - Carefully consider the materials you leave with the legislator or aide. Position statements, letters, research articles and policy briefs may all be appropriate. Be sure to include a description of your advocacy network and contact information.
- Always send a thank-you letter as a follow up to a personal visit. This will help you develop regular contact with elected officials.
  - If you meet with staff members, make sure you reference their helpfulness and competency in your thank you to the representative.

### **Fact Sheets: Making Your Case**

Fact sheets are concise statements that describe how you and your supporters stand on an issue backed up by factual information. Generally, a fact sheet should be no more than one page and should convey the key messages in bite-sized pieces. The back side of a fact sheet is often used to list the supporting organizations and show the breadth of support of the issue. Effective fact sheets...

- State your position up front.
- Clearly communicate what you want done.
- Are short and easy to read - no more than one double-sided page.
- Do not use small or hard-to-read fonts.
- Identify your group and why the position is important to you.

Let's identify the important messages for a green cleaning fact sheet (note: you can see HSC's green cleaning fact sheet and even download it from the web and adopt it for your own campaign. Visit [greencleanschools.org](http://greencleanschools.org)). And remember, the key when developing your fact sheet is keep it short and to the point.

1. What is green cleaning?
2. Why is green cleaning important?
3. What will this green cleaning policy do?
4. Who is already using green cleaning?
5. What is the cost?
6. Who supports green cleaning? (Answered on the

back side of your sheet)

### **Effective Testimony: A Window of Opportunity**

For green cleaning advocates, testimony before a committee, board of education, public hearing or legislative commission is a powerful opportunity. While the anticipation of preparing for testimony often seems to take weeks, the time allocated for testimony is often no more than five minutes.

Using that brief window of time to your best advantage is critical. In a short testimony, advocates should include the following points:

- Appreciation for the individual or group hosting the hearing.
- An introduction of you (the speaker), including your interest in the issue.
- A brief definition of the issue.
- A statement and explanation of your position on the issue.
- Rationale for your position and recognition of alternatives.
- Request for support of your position.
- An offer of assistance and a thank you.

When given the opportunity to testify for an issue, some things you should consider include who else is going to testify? If you are planning on testifying along with a group of other supporters, you should coordinate your speaking points and focus your testimony on your strengths. For example, in Illinois, at one hearing in the Illinois Senate, HSC brought the following individuals to testify: an HSC staff person to discuss the specific points in the legislation, a school nurse to talk about the health effects of exposure to toxic products and a distributor who discussed availability and cost effectiveness of green cleaning programs. By covering these points, and by keeping each speaker to their areas of expertise, the credibility of the overall presentation was enhanced.

Remember to use plain language that can be understood by people outside your industry. And bring multiple, printed copies of your spoken testimony that include your contact information and any supporting graphs or charts. Share these copies with all present as well as the media. Often legislators will want printed copies so they can follow along with your oral testimony.

The questions you most dread may be the first ones you are asked. Prepare answers for the most likely questions and rehearse them in advance. Do not shy away from questions; use them to elaborate on your key messages. Always be honest and positive, even in the face of negative questions. “I don’t know, but I’ll get back to you” is a perfectly acceptable answer. Let me repeat that... “I don’t know, but I’ll get back to you” is a perfectly acceptable answer. However if you do say I’ll get back to you, make sure you follow through.

### **Objections to Green Cleaning**

While green cleaning policies seem like a logical idea to many, you will incur opposition to your efforts. It is of great value to think through the common objections and be able to address them quickly and coherently. In our experience there are seven primary objections, but by no means is this a complete list. Below are common objections and a concise reply for each.

#### ***Green Cleaning will cost schools too much.***

In reality, green cleaning does not cost schools more. In fact, green cleaning can be a significant savings to a school in two areas: chemical purchases and labor. A green cleaning program allows schools to purchase fewer varieties of chemicals and less chemicals overall, and to manage a much smaller inventory of cleaning products, saving schools money. But the real savings is in the labor. New technologies that use fewer or no chemicals are more efficient and allow janitors to clean more space with the same amount

of labor. When investing in new equipment, whether it is microfiber mops or powered floor scrubbers, staff will have increased capacity and can simply clean more with the same labor budget.

***Schools will have difficulty converting to a green program.***

In reality, green cleaning programs are not difficult to implement, and all distributors offer training programs for their cleaning supplies. Additionally, many publications are readily available, including Healthy Schools Campaign's Quick and Easy Guide to Green Cleaning in Schools and ISSA's Green Cleaning for Dummies.

***We don't need a mandate for schools to implement green cleaning programs. This is a local issue.***

While it is true that dozens of schools across the U.S. have begun implementing green cleaning programs, it is difficult for green cleaning programs to cut through the "clutter" for many well-intentioned school administrators. A state law will require schools to take the issue seriously and implement cost-effective, easy-to-administer programs. This will immediately reduce the risk of toxic chemical exposure for millions of students and thousands of staff across all states.

***Schools already have contracts and their distributors won't have green products.***

While most schools already have existing contracts with cleaning chemical distributors, most already have green products available, and all distributors have the flexibility to add new products. Every major product manufacturer makes a variety of green products. In fact, in our experience, many schools are already using 'green' products and they don't even know they are!

***This is a new issue. We need to phase this in slowly so we can learn more about this issue. We should have a pilot project.***

Reducing toxic chemical exposure is not a new issue, but in recent years the cleaning industry's

green programs have matured to become cost competitive and equally effective as traditional programs. Green cleaning procurement laws have been passed in more than 20 states including a statewide school requirement in 10 states. Slowing down implementation of a statewide green cleaning program will only mean that we will unnecessarily expose millions of children to toxic chemical agents when it could be easily and cost effectively prevented.

***Green products can't clean.***

When green products were first introduced 15 years ago, many questioned their efficacy — and in many cases rightly so. However, the technology of today's green cleaning products has led to products that are equally effective but are less toxic or totally non-toxic compared to current "standard" cleaners. Green cleaning does not compromise the health or the cleanliness of a building.

***What is green? It's too complicated.***

The purpose of this legislation is to create a single place to look to for a definition of "green." The legislation will identify a single state agency to identify our green cleaning program, alleviating the need for each school to interpret and create their own (and inconsistent) definition of green.

***Working with the Media***

Working with the media is an opportunity to spread your message beyond your usual network. You can communicate through the media in a number of ways, some of which you will be able to control, but many that will put your message at the mercy of others.

***How to Talk with the Media***

Keep the following general tips in mind when you have a conversation or interview with any member of the media.

***Before the interview***

• If a reporter calls to interview you, find out what

the reporter is looking for (e.g., in-depth analysis, a few quotes, or background information) and the deadline.

- Become familiar with the media outlet and the reporter's style. If possible, review past coverage by the reporter and the outlet in general.
- Develop and review the two or three key messages or points you want to make.
- Anticipate and prepare responses for both easy and tough questions.

### ***During the interview***

- Use plain English, avoiding education jargon. Answer questions clearly and concisely. Think in 10-second sound bites.
- Remember that you are speaking to the interviewer's audience (viewers or readers) and not the interviewer.
- Stay on message, even if the questions don't directly address the points you want to make. Answer the questions you have the knowledge to answer, but find a way to bridge the conversation back to your main points.
- Use anecdotes, analogies, human interest details and so forth to connect with the audience and make your points interesting.
- Be honest. It's OK to say, "I don't know."
- Assume that nothing is off the record.
- If the interview is about to end and you have not made an important point, tell the reporter you would like to make one last point and offer it.

### ***After the interview***

- Thank the reporter for his time.
- Promptly follow up with additional information or quotes if you promised to do so during the interview or if you forgot to mention something important.

## **Tools for Communicating With and Through the Media**

A variety of tools are available to help you get your message out there, but the message is always your top priority. These tools are simply a means to share your message with the appropriate media and spread the news to a wider audience. In this section, we will consider the following communication vehicles:

- News releases
- Media advisories
- Information packets and fact sheets
- News conferences
- Individual briefings with reporters or editors
- Op-ed articles and letters to the editor
- Radio and television news appearances
- The Internet

### **News Releases: Inviting Coverage**

A news release, or press release, is a basic component of communicating with the media. At its best, a news release provides a standard format for relatively quick and efficient dissemination of time-sensitive information about important situations or events. Nonetheless, it's important to consider whether the information you are communicating is genuinely newsworthy. If an editor has seen 10 unusable releases from the same group in the last six months, she may not bother to read the headline of number 11. There is no value in sending a news release when there is no real news.

To editors, all that matters is whether they are reasonably sure the news they cover will be exciting or important to their audience. Keeping this in mind will increase the odds that your message will actually make it to print. Ask yourself: "Does this pass the 'who cares and why' test?"

### ***Tips for writing news releases:***

- An editor should never have to search for your main point.
- Use the “inverted pyramid” structure for your release: put the most compelling information at the top with your paragraphs in descending order of importance. If it needs to be shortened, you should be able to cut it from the bottom.
- News releases should be clear, clean, concise and correct. Write your release like a news story. Keep sentences and paragraphs short. With rare exceptions, keep it to two pages or less.
- Think of the news release as a teaser to lure the editor to want to know more; you do not need to tell everything.
- Focus on providing the who, what, where, when, why and how. If you can, also provide the reporter with leads for more resources.
- When initiating or responding to a press call, first find out the reporter’s deadline. Pitching a story a half hour before deadline will not be successful.
- Deadlines can vary widely. Daily papers may need only a matter of hours for late-breaking news. Local TV and radio stations may need two or three days. Monthly magazines often ask for several months’ lead time. If you don’t know, ask.
- Contact information should appear at the top of every release. Include at least an office phone number. Consider including a second contact person or a home or cell phone number.
- The release must be dated. Use the date when the media will receive your release, unless you want the information to remain unpublished until a later time. In that case, indicate that the information is “embargoed until December 10, 2015.”
- Don’t try to grab attention with an unusual paper color or font.
- The headline should be succinct and should convey the “hook” or the most salient point.

- Number your pages. Write “-more-” centered at the bottom of each page. At the end of the release, a few lines below the text, include “-end-” Below that, add a final paragraph of boilerplate information about your group or organization.

Many options are available for disseminating news releases today—mail, fax, e-mail—and at least as many theories as to which one is best. If you have the luxury of contacting each name on your mailing list and asking for preferences, do so. If not, research indicates many reporters prefer to receive news releases via e-mail. E-mail is also the least expensive and fastest alternative for getting your news out. Contact your coalition partners to see if anyone has good media lists that they can share. If not, there are numerous online resources to help you jumpstart a list of media outlets who would be interested in your releases. However, the best list is always one that you have created through developing relationships with individual reporters.

### **Media Alerts: The Five W's**

When time is of the essence, it might be more appropriate to send a media alert than a news release. Similar in style to a news release, the alert is limited quite literally to a bulleted list of the who, what, when, where and why of your event. Whether you use e-mail, mail or fax, this format is always appropriate when sending information to daybook editors. Daybooks are listings of the major news events scheduled for a particular day. You might call the editor the day that your media alert arrives at his office, but don’t bother the editor again until the day before your event, when it is perfectly legitimate to call again to learn if your information will be published.

### **Fact Sheets and Information Packets: Takeaways for Busy Reporters**

Any time you meet a member of the media, whether at an event you’ve hosted or a quick one-on-one meeting, it will help if you have prepared

information for them to take with them. Copies of fact sheets, annual reports, news releases and policy briefs will give the reporter additional information to refer to when writing a news story or looking for sources later on.

**Fact sheets.** One-page fact sheets are useful for focusing on the key points of a complex issue or as an introduction to an organization or program. The fact sheet, like the media advisory, gives just the facts. It may be written in a standard bullet format with a minimum of explanation preceding it, or it may take the form of short, journalistic paragraphs. This fact sheet can be a simple variation of the legislative fact sheet described earlier.

**Information Packets.** More comprehensive public information packets and media kits are useful for disseminating a variety of information about your program, organization, event, or cause. You may wish to invest in heavy stock folders with inner pockets and your group's name or logo on the front. Components of the packet, which can also serve as stand-alone information tools, can include background information, fact sheets, an annual report or executive summary, newsletters, news releases, biographical information about key speakers or leaders in your group and any visual elements available, such as a poster or photograph.

The key point about these tools is that they are meant to make it easy for reporters to cover your event or cause. You want the media to use your well-chosen words verbatim.

### **Op-Ed Articles and Letters to the Editor: Getting Your Opinion in Ink**

Op-ed articles and letters to the editor are two ways to showcase your opinion in the press. Unlike providing an interview to a reporter for a story she is writing, op-eds and letters to the editor are stand-alone pieces that focus on your point of view. Of the two, an op-ed carries the prestige of placement opposite the editorial page and includes a byline.

However, letters to the editor, if written well on a carefully chosen and focused topic, are often easier to get published than an op-ed piece.

**Op-ed articles.** The purpose of an op-ed is to persuade the reader, generally in the form of either a direct commentary on a current situation or of a rebuttal of a previously published article or op-ed. An op-ed is most effective when it takes a strong, focused stand on a single issue. It's a short piece (generally about 750 words for a daily paper, but keep track of the length and style in your target publication to be more precise). It should be both succinct and clear about what it wants to persuade the reader to do.

Op-eds, as a rule, are not written by "Jane Q. Public." They tend to carry the voice of authority or expertise and are usually attributed to presidents, executive directors, CEOs and the like. A good op-ed concisely and unemotionally examines and refutes the main opposing point of view. It also provides a clear connection between the writer's view and the best interests of the reader. It tells your audience what's in it for them.

At the end of the article, it is appropriate to add one or two sentences identifying the writer and the source of expertise. For example, a piece written by Rochelle Davis might note that "Rochelle Davis is the founding executive director of the Healthy Schools Campaign."

You should submit op-eds to the editorial editor of the publication and include a self-addressed, stamped envelope if you want to be sure you're notified about rejection or if you have materials you want returned.

**Letters to the Editor.** Although experts and important titles may still have an edge in getting a letter to the editor published, the letters to the editor section of a paper is more open to ordinary citizens on a local level. Generally, these letters are

based on a reaction to a recent news story, feature article, editorial, op-ed, or letter that appeared in the same publication. They may be written to inform or to convey emphatic agreement with previously published information, but they are often used to present a different point of view or perspective or to correct misrepresentation or factual errors. Letters to the editor tend to be short (brevity is a virtue; one-paragraph submissions are definitely acceptable) and highly focused. If they refer in any way to a previously published piece, that article should be identified parenthetically—by title and publication date, if possible.

There are many local news outlets that are eager to print letters from their constituents. This can be a powerful way to get your message out to your legislators.

### **Television Appearances: A Visual Statement**

From community cable access programs to interviews on regional news, television appearances offer an unparalleled opportunity for advocates to communicate their messages to wide audiences with a sense of immediacy. On television, you essentially become the embodiment of your message. Your words and appearance will be associated with your cause. Make sure you hone your message to a simple phrase and practice answering any questions that might arise with that phrase. Television magnifies images, so consider the following tips:

- Dress in a subtle manner. Loud colors, patterns, or accessories will distract viewers from focusing on your key message. Wear solid-colored clothing and simple accessories. If you want to be viewed as a knowledgeable professional, make certain you convey that image visually.
- Before you go on the air, practice how you will deliver your key points. A mirror or critical friend may be quite helpful.

- It's OK to pause briefly before you respond to a question.
- Saying "no comment" is a comment.
- Remember a top strategy that politicians use: It's not what they ask, it's what you want to answer. Redirect the question to include your key messages.
- If you don't know the answer to a question, it's acceptable to say, "I'm not certain. I'll need to look into that."
- Be aware of your nonverbal communication, particularly your gestures. Assume you are on camera at all times, from all angles. Make an effort to appear to be a good listener when other people are speaking.
- Smile!

### **Radio Programs: Making Yourself Heard**

Whether you are being interviewed or are calling a talk-radio show program, your words—and your voice itself—assume great significance. On the radio, for example, a nervous laugh may sound to listeners as if you are taking a serious question lightly. Consider recording yourself in a practice conversation to learn your nervous habits and how to combat them, or consider taking a class in public speaking.

**Call-In Shows.** Radio call-in programs, particularly syndicated ones, are an excellent tool for activists. Your local newspaper will probably have listings for the major radio programs in your area. Tune in to on several occasions to become familiar with the style, format and political views of the program's host. Before you call in, jot down your key points. Remember to identify your role at the beginning of your message and to keep your points brief.

**Radio Interviews.** As with television appearances and political testimony, carefully practice delivery of your message before you enter the radio

studio. Once in the studio, watch your language; microphones are sometimes accidentally switched on. If you are a featured guest on a call-in program, listen carefully to callers and refer to them by name when responding to questions. Have your network or others who share your viewpoint also call in.

### **The Internet: Reaching Out to a Broader Audience**

In communicating with the media and disseminating information, your contacts should include online publications, electronic mailing lists and blogs. Many publications that have both a print and online version also have separate staff members responsible for each version. Research online organizations as you would any other media contact—know their content in advance and post your news releases only to appropriate publications, lists and blogs.

Blogs are important vehicles for communicating online. You may wish to establish your own blog to communicate with your audience, or you may simply want to read and take part in discussions on existing blogs.

Whether they are hosted by an organization or individual, remember that blogs serve a variety of purposes. Some, like the HSC blog allow users to comment and join in on the discussion. Others allow only the author of the blog to comment. Blogs also vary in the objectivity and balance of the information posted. Always consider the experience and objective of the author.

#### ***Tips for communicating your message on blogs***

- Consider the experience, objective and focus of a blogger when deciding which blogs to follow and contribute to.

- Become familiar with a blog before communicating your message to its author. Regularly read the blogger's posts and comment when appropriate.
- Do not "spam" blogs by submitting comments that push your message but do not add to the online discussion or the focus of the blog. Your comments should be a valid contribution to the conversation.
- When appropriate, e-mail bloggers with interesting and relevant news and information. If you send a press release, preface it with a short note about why you think the news is relevant to the blog.

Social media, such as Facebook and Twitter, are a good way to push out information and messages to your target audience. Just remember that you'll get the most value from social networking tools if you work hard to deliver fresh content and build your online audience. People won't regularly visit your page or become engaged if you build a Facebook page but never update it. HSC can support your efforts by using our networks to help get your message out.

If you have a website, include the web address in your correspondence when appropriate. It's also a good idea to include easily accessible information for the media on your website. This information should include key contacts, current and previous press releases, newsletters, fact sheets and a list of your coalition members.

## **Sample Fact Sheet**

Support the Green Clean Schools Act | HBXXXX

### ***What is Green Cleaning?***

Green Cleaning simply means cleaning to protect health without harming the environment.

### ***Why is Green Cleaning important?***

Indoor air at schools is often polluted. According to the U.S. EPA, half of all students, teachers and school staff are exposed to polluted indoor air that may be five to 100 times more polluted than outdoor air.

Many conventional cleaning products contain harmful chemicals that are a source of indoor air pollution.

Children, especially those with asthma, are at a high risk from polluted air and chemical exposures from conventional cleaning products; if children are sick, they cannot learn.

A Green Cleaning program can reduce chemical exposures and yield important benefits, including:

- Protecting children's and teachers' health, thereby putting children in a better position to learn;
- Protecting the health of custodial staff who work closely with the cleaning supplies; and
- Protecting the environment.

### ***What will this act do?***

This act will require all elementary and secondary schools in XXX to purchase only environmentally preferable cleaning supplies.

### ***Who is using Green Cleaning now?***

Schools throughout the state are using Green Cleaning practices. School cleaning programs vary from schools such as XXX High School that have complete green cleaning programs to others that are substituting a few products.

Since 2006, 10 states have adopted requirements for schools to implement green cleaning programs. Let's make sure XXX is among the leaders in supporting student health.

### ***What is the cost?***

Environmentally preferable cleaning products are cost-competitive and widely available, as the market has now matured. Findings in schools across the country are showing this to be the case.