

Proposal: Collaborative Project to Implement the IAQ Tools for Schools Action Kit in Nova Scotia Schools

March 27, 2007

Project Objective

Through collaboration between CASLE, federal and provincial officials, other regional stakeholders, and local school boards and schools, set up a phased model school approach to implement Health Canada's Indoor Air Quality (IAQ) Tools for Schools Action Kit. Beginning with one Nova Scotia school board, introduce use of Tools for Schools to a limited number of model schools each year, expanding the network with each successive year of the project until the Kit is functioning board-wide. This would also serve as a model for future implementation across the Province and beyond.

Need

Studies show a strong link between school air quality and learning. Children's health and ability to learn suffer when schools have poor air quality, from problems with moulds, improper cleaning or maintenance practices, and so on. Consequences can be life long.

Across Canada there is a strong need for reliable, non-commercial information on creating healthier schools. A recent series of articles in the Toronto Globe and Mail highlighted the issue of sick schools across Canada. The articles illustrated the need for basic "how to" information for creating healthy schools and rectifying sick school problems.

Experience with the American IAQ Tools for Schools Kit has shown that most school IAQ problems are solvable with low-cost solutions. However, according to T. Nathanson of Public Works Canada, in a presentation to the Air and Waste Management Association, September 2004, studies of even higher-cost solutions have been found to be cost effective, with a pay-back time of less than two years in most cases.

For example, staff salaries is the single most expensive item for school boards. "We saw a significant decrease in the absenteeism rate...since we completed the IAQ upgrades." *P.Santiago, School Nurse, Little Harbour School, NH Tools for Schools Program*

CASLE, a Nova Scotia based registered charity is a recognized North American leader in this area. CASLE has a fifteen-year history developing and implementing practical, useful information on a wide variety of school health issues through their work addressing real problems in real schools in Nova Scotia, and in helping make Nova Scotia a recognized leader in healthy school achievements. Despite this progress, there is still much to be accomplished in school health and to sustain gains made to date.

Key Project Activities

- Use existing Nova Scotia model schools as well as new models as they are developed, to champion the expansion throughout the school board.
- Provide coordinated support including hands-on technical support to each school, and foster mentoring and modeling between schools.
- Target organizations that represent key decision makers, with the power to approve, institutionalize and fund IAQ management in school systems. This would include school board officials such as superintendents, school principals and chief financial officers. Engage these leaders in positive, proactive ways that encourage an enthusiastic exchange of ideas to create success that, ideally, fosters champions for the overall Tools for Schools program.
- Integrate the Kit with the existing operations and maintenance systems within the school board and government departments.
- Invite champions or leaders of one or more successful US EPA IAQ Tools for Schools programs to present their success stories and lessons learned. Foster partnering between our new program and schools and these champion programs and schools. The well-organized and supported American program has over 30 thousand schools now using the American Kit, and the EPA is working toward implementation in 30 thousand more in the next few years.
- Make the program efficient in one board to act as a model for others.
- Create a case study that outlines what we did, how it worked, and lessons learned.

Sustainability

- Adopt a model similar to the Connecticut model where superintendents are part of the Tools for Schools team. They are encouraged to start off each school year with a meeting of school IAQ coordinators and their teams to review procedures, compare notes, identify aspects needing improvements, and prioritize recommendations. Superintendents are also strongly urged to continue communicating with their schools, school communities, and Kit coordinators and to keep their IAQ teams “staffed”. In this state, regional US EPA staff members coordinate this work, train new members each year, and provide ongoing, specialized and refresher training for custodial and facilities staff. In our Nova Scotia project, these tasks will be divided during the set-up phase of the program and adjusted as needed.
- Develop videoconference training, as is done in Kansas where nearby university training facilities for distance and continuing education are used to deliver regional technical support
- Work toward developing leadership from within the collaborating departments and organizations based on the successful EPA model.

Project costs

To be determined by the collaborating departments and CASLE.

Time frame

A three to four-year phase-in to include the entire school board, depending on the size of the board chosen.

Appendix 1

Letter of support from the Executive Director of Facilities Management, Nova Scotia
Department of Education

Appendix 2

Letter of encouragement from a Nova Scotia school principal who used the Kit
successfully in one school and has carried it with her to her new school.

Project director

Karen Robinson is president and CEO of Citizens for a Safe Learning Environment (CASLE), a registered charity based in Nova Scotia. Under her leadership, CASLE has won national recognition for its work in protecting children's environmental health. Robinson has received several awards for her work, including a commendation by the NS Provincial Legislature for her groundbreaking work on healthy schools, and has been recognized with the Queen's Golden Jubilee Medal for this work. Robinson is primary author of Healthy School Design and Construction, presently used as the model for building new schools and public buildings in Nova Scotia. Robinson has been an invited speaker at national and international conferences, and an invited participant at federal, provincial and local public policy forums

About CASLE

CASLE is an internationally respected, volunteer-run, registered charity based in Nova Scotia. CASLE has received several awards for its work, including, in 2005, the Health Promotion and Innovation Award of Excellence from the Canadian Institute of Child Health. Since its formation fifteen years ago, CASLE has collaborated with parents, school boards and government officials to achieve innovative, cost effective solutions to school health issues. CASLE is a national leader in the field of healthy schools. CASLE also has a long history with the IAQ Tools for Schools Action Kit, having introduced the US EPA's Kit to Nova Scotia in 1997, served as a reviewer of the Health Canada version, and served on two of Health Canada's research projects on the Kit's proposed application and effectiveness. CASLE has encouraged and assisted Nova Scotia schools to implement the Kit with some success. Currently, Karen Robinson, of CASLE, is assisting four schools with implementation. It is apparent that a broader organizational support structure is necessary to achieve real success

Citizens for A Safe Learning Environment (CASLE)

287 Lacewood Drive, Unit 103, Suite 178, Halifax

Nova Scotia, Canada, B3M 3Y7

Phone: 902-457-3002

Email: am077@chebucto.ns.ca

www.chebucto.ns.ca/Education/CASLE