

◆ **Recommended Component: Educate Parents of All Students**

The need to educate parents rests on two principles. First, it will raise their level of understanding of asthma, whether they are parents of a student with asthma, a family member of someone perhaps with undiagnosed asthma or a parent not currently affected by asthma.

Second, education throughout the school community will build support for a local asthma-friendly schools initiative, as more individuals—both decision-makers and the “general public” of the school community—realize the depth of the problem and its affect on virtually everyone within the schools. Additionally, parent education will provide another opportunity to reinforce the link among parents, schools, and providers to support the child with asthma.

Educate Parents of All Students Checklist

- Tap into existing opportunities for parent interaction
- Understand needs
- Plan materials/messages to reflect identified needs
- Create partnerships to increase your reach

► **Tap into existing opportunities for parent interaction.** Involving parents will be a challenge. Approach parents “where they are” by taking advantage of existing school-based meetings and other opportunities for intervention with parents. Work with school contacts to tap into the following:

- incorporating asthma education and other asthma management issues as a topic in parent/teacher conferences
- adding an asthma overview and/or specific asthma education information to a PTA/PTO meeting or newsletter
- discussing exercise-induced asthma and other exercise-related issues during athletic department or team parents’ meetings

Additionally, look for avenues to announce the beginning of, and milestones during, an asthma initiative within a given school or school district, such as:

- sending letters to parents to explain the work underway, how it will impact students directly, and how parents can become involved
- placing articles in school, district, or PTA newsletters

As always, be sure to focus messages on how the program or initiative will benefit parents and students specifically. Also provide an avenue for parents to request more information about asthma in general or the initiative specifically. See the Letter to Parents about Asthma Education, included with this hand-out.

LESSONS LEARNED!

Special events for parents are time-intensive to plan and manage and are not often well-attended, warn AFSI pilot sites! Even in sites where parents requested an asthma education event via a needs assessment, the education events were sparsely attended.

- ▶ **Understand needs.** If this is your first asthma awareness effort for parents of students of a particular age (elementary, middle, or high school), be sure you take time to understand the needs of that group of parents. Consider meeting with PTA leaders to assess needs and general level of asthma awareness, or create a parent focus group. Include a range of parents in a focus group, reflecting those with and without children with asthma, socioeconomic and cultural diversity, and those who are and are not already involved in school-sponsored activities.
- ▶ **Plan materials/messages to reflect identified needs.** When selecting programs and focusing on messages, consider your learner outcomes. What critical skills and/or concepts do you want parents to learn? Be sure to focus presentations, communications, and programs on those critical elements. Draw upon existing materials and programs (listed in the Resources section of this Toolkit). Also research resources for parent education through the National Education Association Web site and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Allies Against Asthma.

Consider using existing short fact sheets and flyers as handouts for parents. These include:

- American Lung Association facts sheets available at www.lungusa.org such as:
 - ◆ Asthma & Children
 - ◆ Home Control of Asthma & Allergies
 - ◆ Indoor Air Quality
 - ◆ Air Quality Index (AQI)
 - ◆ Asthma Medications Chart
 - ◆ Peak Flow Chart
 - ◆ Peak Flow Meters
- National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences patient flyers. Topics include:
 - ◆ Asthma & Allergy Prevention: Dust Mites
(<http://www.niehs.nih.gov/airborne/prevent/mites.html>)
 - ◆ Asthma & Allergy Prevention: Pets & Animals
(<http://www.niehs.nih.gov/airborne/prevent/pets.html>)
 - ◆ Asthma & Allergy Prevention: Cockroaches
(<http://www.niehs.nih.gov/airborne/prevent/roach.html>)
 - ◆ Asthma & Allergy Prevention: Mold Spores
(<http://www.niehs.nih.gov/airborne/prevent/mold.html>)
 - ◆ Asthma & Allergy Prevention: Cigarette Smoke
(<http://www.niehs.nih.gov/airborne/prevent/smoke.html>)
- ▶ **Create partnerships to increase your reach.** Combine efforts with existing organizations and informal groups to expand your efforts. Consider involving:
 - community-based organizations that already provide school-based programs that also may link to asthma
 - community-based programs through which home environmentalists conduct home assessments to identify and mitigate triggers (for example, American Lung Association's *Master Home Environmentalist Program*)
 - local/state school nurse organizations, such as the state affiliate of the NASN
 - local/state chapter of Society of Public Health Educators
 - PTA/PTO chapters
 - parent leaders, who may already be involved in other health education or community-focused projects at their children's schools

- local United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Cooperative Extension Service staff (visit <http://www.reeusda.gov/1700/newcsrees.htm> for local contacts)

REFERENCE MATERIALS

- ❖ Sample Letter to Parents Announcing Asthma Education

Sample Letter to Parents Announcing Asthma Education



Dear Parents:

The _____ (district name) will begin an asthma education program to reach everyone throughout our schools during the coming school year. While this is required under a new policy, it is part of our school's ongoing efforts to provide a safe educational environment for all students, faculty, and staff.

Asthma is a chronic illness that is a growing problem in America. In a classroom of 30 students, two are likely to have asthma.¹ Asthma can be life-threatening; it causes breathing problems called asthma "attacks" or "episodes" that range from mild to serious.

_____ (district name) is providing asthma education that will help minimize asthma episodes among students. We are also working to prepare all students and staff to respond to asthma emergencies, should they occur.

The new education program will include the following:

Staff education—All staff will learn the basics of asthma, managing asthma, and responding to asthma episodes.

Student education—All students will learn the basics of asthma, how it can affect their schoolmates, how to recognize signs of an asthma episode, and how/when to seek help. All students diagnosed with asthma will participate in focused asthma education programs. Elementary students will participate in the American Lung Association's *Open Airways For Schools*; middle and high school students will participate in the Asthma & Allergy Foundation's *Power Breathing*. Parents of these students will receive further information about these specific programs.

Parent education—The _____ (name) PTA will present the American Lung Association's Asthma 101 during its next monthly meeting. Our faculty and staff will talk to you individually and as a group throughout the year, to highlight asthma management issues as needed.

Thank you for your support of our asthma education program throughout the school district. Please contact us if you have any specific questions.

Sincerely,

¹ Akinbami LJ, Scheendorf, KC. Trends in childhood asthma: prevalence, health care utilization, and mortality. *Pediatrics*, 2002; 110(2):315-322.

