

American Lung Association Tip Sheet

Recruiting an AFSI Coalition: Know Your Audiences and Benefits

Recruiting and building relationships with key individuals and organizations are critical to successful planning and subsequent project implementation. Consider any potential members of your AFSI coalition and other collaborators “customers.”

Your customer groups are anyone with whom you need to work to implement AFSI locally. You may be considering individuals from any of these groups as potential coalition members, and some will become partners in the actual implementation of the project.

AFSI customer groups include:

- administrators/school boards
- school nurses
- teachers/coaches/physical education teachers
- bus drivers
- building/facilities personnel
- parents
- state, county, and local health and education departments
- community health professionals
- students with asthma
- classmates of students with asthma
- civic/business leaders
- additional community partners

Understanding how each audience or customer group will benefit from the asthma-friendly schools initiative will be a key to success. Just as few people would buy a product without believing they will benefit from it personally, individuals within the school and civic community will not “buy into” the asthma-friendly schools initiative without understanding how the program (and/or specific activities) will benefit them directly.

When working with each customer group or audience, focus your communication on key benefits or “selling points” for that particular audience. Incorporate these in specific written materials, as well as group presentations and small meetings. The following are lists of baseline benefits per audience. As you work with different groups and learn more about them and their perspectives, add specific benefits to these lists.

Administrators/School Boards

Superintendents, principals and school boards or board of education members should support elements of asthma-friendly schools activities—not only in setting policy, but also in supporting the concept, providing staff direction and budget support. Asthma-friendly schools activities benefit school administrators because these activities:

- are evidence-based
- may greatly reduce or eliminate asthma crises in schools
- may reduce student absenteeism and improve the student learning environment
- may increase school income as absenteeism rates decline
- may enhance the well-being of members of the school community and increase teacher productivity
- include strategies for low-cost and no-cost indoor air quality management
- provide resource and potential partnership links within the community, including funders
- include education for faculty and staff to improve the school’s asthma management, responses to asthma emergencies and facilities management
- can help minimize potential liability issues

- can increase the school's medical/health resources, which can help with management of other chronic illness
- can improve faculty/staff productivity and performance

School Nurses

School nurses are the core of the school health services, pivotal in responding to health issues and emergencies. Asthma-friendly schools activities benefit school nurses because these activities:

- may decrease the number of acute care visits to the school nurse or clinic
- may improve indoor air quality, thereby decreasing the potential for asthma episodes and other building-related illnesses by students and staff
- include specific asthma training for all school staff
- support strengthened roles and expanded resources for school nurses
- support expanded school health structures, such as creation of a school health council and introduction of a consulting physician or other health care professional into the school
- include more coordinated use of Asthma Action Plans by school staff
- may reduce student absenteeism, enhance well-being of members of the school community and improve student learning environment
- clarify communications among school nurses and all other school staff about the needs of students with and without asthma, as well as those students with other chronic health conditions

Teachers/Coaches/Physical Education Teachers

These individuals are the first line of response during a student's asthma episode. Their involvement is critical, as is their understanding of both the broad and specific issues of asthma management.

Asthma-friendly schools activities benefit teachers and coaches because these activities:

- include specific asthma training for all faculty and staff, including effective and appropriate responses to asthma episodes and other respiratory emergencies
- may improve IAQ, thereby decreasing the potential for related student and staff asthma episodes, and improving work environment, which potentially reduces teacher absenteeism, enhances well being and increases teacher productivity
- include more coordinated use of Asthma Action Plans by school staff
- may reduce student absenteeism and improve the student learning environment
- clarify communication among school staff about the needs of students with asthma
- include strategies to coordinate efforts between administration and school employees

Bus Drivers/Transportation Company Staff

Without bus driver training in asthma response skills, students who ride buses to and from school may be left with a void during the time—up to two hours per day—between their homes and school.

Asthma-friendly schools activities benefit bus drivers/transportation company staff because these activities:

- include asthma training for bus drivers, including effective and appropriate responses to asthma emergencies
- include strategies to improve communication between school and transportation staff
- may improve air quality inside buses, thereby improving drivers' work environment and the well-being of drivers and student passengers

Building/Facilities Staff

Because environment plays such a critical role in asthma management, building/facilities staff must understand their vital part in asthma-friendly schools activities. Asthma-friendly schools activities benefit building/facilities staff because these activities:

- can help save money through indoor air quality (IAQ) management, including integrated pest management (IPM)
- include strategies for involving faculty and staff in IAQ management
- include IAQ training for staff and focus on IAQ management, which can reduce physical plant and equipment deterioration
- include activities that rely on facilities staff, who are recognized as valuable participants in the school's work to ensure students' health and well-being
- can improve facilities staff working environment and enhance their well-being

Parents

Involving parents will be critical to supporting specific student education, educating parents themselves, and assisting parents in accessing additional community resources. Asthma-friendly schools activities benefit parents because these activities:

- include education about asthma for all students, and specific asthma management education for students with asthma
- may reduce student absenteeism and improve the student learning environment
- may greatly reduce or eliminate asthma crises in schools
- prepare school personnel to respond to asthma episodes and other respiratory emergencies by providing specific asthma training for all school staff
- may improve IAQ, thereby decreasing the potential for related asthma episodes by students
- include strategies for better communication between nurses and other school staff, including a coordinated use of Asthma Action Plans
- include strategies for improving communication among home, school, and health care providers
- may improve air quality, increasing teacher well being and increasing productivity, thereby minimizing disruptions to student learning
- are based on programs, documents, and research conducted by medical and public health experts and members of professional organizations

State Education & Health Departments

Asthma issues should and must be on these departments' agendas, whether or not they are currently focused on asthma. These organizations' employees can provide resources and information and benefit from direct involvement in asthma-friendly schools efforts. Asthma-friendly schools activities benefit state education and health departments because these activities:

- are based on programs, documents and research conducted by education, medical and public health organizations, including American Lung Association, CDC, American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), National Association of School Nurses (NASN), National Education Association (NEA), National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute (NHLB) and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)
- may greatly reduce or eliminate asthma crises in schools
- may reduce student and teacher absenteeism and improve student's learning and teacher's working environments
- incorporate community-wide collaboration among the school community, healthcare providers, community-based organizations, civic/business leaders, and insurance providers
- help minimize potential liability issues
- increase the school's medical/health resources which can help with management of other chronic illnesses
- maximize resources

Healthcare Providers and Clinicians

Local health departments, hospitals/clinics, and individual primary health care providers can and should play important advisory and hands-on roles in asthma-friendly schools activities. Asthma-friendly schools activities benefit community health professionals because these activities:

- improve compliance with prescribed asthma management
- improve the quality of adults' observation and the validity of history that doctors receive regarding a child's symptoms
- address two significant health issues—asthma and air quality
- focus on a holistic, community-wide approach
- include opportunities for professional development, such as consulting services, volunteer medical services, and advisory activities (school health council, etc.)
- may result in decreased asthma episodes and emergencies by students and school faculty and staff
- provide positive community relations/public relations opportunities for organizations and individuals
- are based on programs, documents, and research conducted by education, medical and public health organizations, including American Lung Association, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), National Association of School Nurses (NASN), National Education Association (NEA), and Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)

Students with Asthma

Benefits to children with asthma will reflect the benefits and results of specific asthma and healthy indoor environmental education, such as Open Airways For Schools and IAQ Tools for Schools, from which students may receive the following:

- specific asthma self-management skills
- fewer symptoms
- improved self-esteem
- opportunity to participate more fully in activities they enjoy
- opportunity to relate feelings about asthma and interact with others with asthma
- positive reinforcement
- focused attention from teacher or asthma education instructor
- improved school performance

Additional benefits of improved/expanded school health services as a result of asthma-friendly schools activities include:

- more asthma management support by teachers and other school staff
- better access to asthma medications
- greater referral to and use of medical and other community resources
- better IAQ management

Classmates of Students with Asthma

Classmates of students with asthma may include individuals who have not yet been diagnosed with asthma. Those individuals will benefit from asthma-friendly schools activities by:

- increased faculty and staff awareness of signs and symptoms of asthma and appropriate responses to the student
- improved IAQ at the school
- their awareness of other students' asthma in general and the warning signs of an asthma episode
- having increased empathy for those with asthma
- learning to assist peers with asthma management
- possibly earning service-learning credit for their involvement in school-based or community-focused asthma awareness activities

Civic/Business Leaders

These include individuals and organizations who may become involved in an asthma coalition, fund specific activities, or become involved in awareness campaigns and programs. Asthma-friendly schools activities benefit civic and business leaders because these activities:

- address two significant health issues that affect the entire community—asthma and air quality
- focus on a holistic, community-wide approach, which provides networking opportunities
- provide positive community/public relations opportunities for organizations and individuals
- involve a range of prominent local professionals and organizations
- can save public funds and maximize resources
- positively affect students' and school staff's health and well-being

Additional Community Partners

These include community-based organizations that may or may not be related to general health issues or asthma, specifically, or individual professionals who contribute needed skills and/or resources to your initiative. Examples may include: community foundations, community development associations, youth organizations, minority business organizations, community housing advocates, environmental justice advocates, attorneys, epidemiologists, university professors, and public relations professionals.

While these organizations and individuals may not at first be priority partners, keep in mind that they offer a variety of resources, including education and leadership training and social and support services. These additional partners will be valuable in both planning and implementing your initiative and their experiences may tap into existing resources. They are another link to parents and are often trusted by community members. They provide the home and community component of a community-based strategy, as well as professional skills/services that will strengthen implementation and program outreach. Asthma-friendly schools activities benefit these organizations and individuals because these

activities:

- provide individual referrals between programs
- promote community programs/resources
- ensure a continuum of community services to a target population (including and beyond asthma services)
- support resource networking and may minimize duplication of effort
- create joint/increased funding opportunities
- provide opportunities for individual contributions to a community health issue