



June 22, 2021

Juan Mireles, President
National Council on School Facilities
1816 12th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20009

Dear Mr. Mireles:

The American Lung Association is the oldest voluntary public health organization in the United States. As the leading organization working to save lives by improving lung health and preventing lung disease, the Lung Association has been a champion for healthy, asthma-friendly schools for over twenty years, and is also committed to ending the COVID-19 pandemic through research, education and advocacy. I am writing to you today to express our concern for the health and well-being of the school community now and looking ahead.

As the nation emerges from the worst of the pandemic, institutions across the country, including schools, are working hard to prepare for full reopening. The Lung Association recognizes that school professionals take their responsibility to provide a safe and healthy environment for students and staff very seriously. According to the guidance for schools issued by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the essential elements for safe operations include maintaining healthy facilities, including adequate ventilation for good indoor air quality.¹ Unfortunately, we know that schools around the country have long struggled with tight budgets and deferred maintenance. A 2020 study from the U.S. Government Accountability Office shows 40 percent of schools need to update or replace their ventilation systems.²

Between the relief bill passed in December 2020 and the American Rescue Plan passed on March 11, 2021, the Federal government has approved \$176 billion in emergency COVID-19 relief aid for K–12 schools, and facility-related expenditures are among the allowable uses for these funds. This influx of federal funding represents a wonderful opportunity to invest in our schools, our children and their future. The one-time nature of these funds makes them an excellent fit for much-needed durable investments in facilities that will provide long-term health benefits and financial savings.

The need for schools to make prompt and sweeping changes to their facilities in response to the pandemic, together with the availability of new funding, has attracted the attention of a wide range of commercial interests hoping to sell their products and services. School districts and the media have reported a bombardment of unsolicited pitches for the latest air and cleaning technologies. Unfortunately, not all these products have been proven effective in real-world settings such as school building and classrooms. Some of them even produce harmful by-products such as ozone, a powerful respiratory irritant that can trigger asthma episodes and increase a person's susceptibility to respiratory infections.

¹ Operational Strategy for K-12 Schools through Phased Prevention. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Updated May 15, 2021. Accessed at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/operation-strategy.html>.

² K-12 Education: School Districts Frequently Identified Multiple Building Systems Needing Updates or Replacement. US Government Accountability Office. June 2020. Accessed at <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-20-494.pdf>.

Indoor air quality (IAQ) experts at universities, the American Society of Heating, Refrigeration and Air-Conditioning Engineers (ASHRAE), the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the CDC are in agreement that the best, healthiest and most sustainable approach to improving indoor air quality and protecting the school population from COVID-19 are to 1) improve ventilation to increase the circulation of fresh air, and 2) improve filtration of circulating air. Portable air cleaners using HEPA filters to help enhance air cleaning may be beneficial in select areas of higher risk such as the nurse's office and isolation rooms, but they must be sized properly to handle the volume of air in the room, and they should not release any by-products.^{3,4}

The Lung Association strongly encourages schools to take advantage of this moment to invest in the future, drawing on best practices and proven effective strategies that will result in sustainable improvements in the school infrastructure and your students' health, well-being and ability to learn. In addition to the CDC and EPA, the Lung Association stands ready to help our nation build a healthier future and protect our children's lungs. For more information about indoor air quality and health in schools, please visit [Lung.org/afsi](https://lung.org/afsi), or contact Katherine.Pruitt@lung.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Harold Wimmer". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Harold" being more prominent than the last name "Wimmer".

Harold P. Wimmer
National President and CEO

³ Reopening Schools and Universities COVID-19 Guidance. ASHRAE Epidemic Task Force. Accessed at <https://www.ashrae.org/file%20library/technical%20resources/covid-19/ashrae-reopening-schools-and-universities-c19-guidance.pdf>

⁴ Ventilation in Schools and Childcare Programs. CDC. Updated Feb. 26, 2021. Accessed at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/ventilation.html>.