



**MAYOR'S INTERAGENCY TASK FORCE
ON TRUANCY, CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM
AND SCHOOL ENGAGEMENT**

ASTHMA-FRIENDLY SCHOOLS CAMPAIGN

□ BACKGROUND

Asthma-related school absences total more than six million per year across the country. In New York City, over 53,000 students suffer from active asthma, and our high-need communities are the hardest hit. Asthma is one of the top reasons for school absenteeism in elementary and middle schools – and the most common reason that children are hospitalized.

There is clear evidence that hospitalizations and school absences can be reduced by better disease management. Both appropriate professional care and self-management are needed to minimize the consequences of asthma. To improve asthma prevention and treatment efforts and boost achievement in high-need communities, the Mayor's Interagency Task Force on Truancy, Absenteeism and School Engagement – in collaboration with the Departments of Education and Health and Mental Hygiene – is launching an innovative new campaign to promote *Asthma-Friendly Schools*.

The campaign was piloted at four elementary schools and selected Tier II shelters in the spring of 2011, and will expanded to 18 schools in the fall.

□ GOALS

The primary goal of the campaign is to heighten awareness about asthma in NYC schools and help students reduce asthma symptoms and unnecessary school absences. In addition the campaign will:

- Strengthen the partnership between school leadership, school health teams, and community-based organizations to manage student asthma
- Heighten awareness within schools and shelters about how to control asthma for students
- Educate families about available school resources and how to work with the school to manage their child's asthma
- Work with families and community physicians to improve the medical care of students with asthma
- Increase the number of students receiving medically appropriate medications in schools

To achieve these goals, the Task Force will launch Family-School Asthma Summits; promote asthma awareness around schools with informational posters; enhance targeted outreach to families of children with asthma; create a fact sheet for 311 with information on asthma and schools; develop in-school staff trainings; and establish the Asthma Ambassador Corps at schools to provide additional support to students with asthma and their families.



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□ IMPLEMENTATION

- **Strengthen Communication among School Leaders, CBOs, and School Health Staff:** School health nurses and physicians will have a forum to meet regularly with key school leaders, representatives from the school's community-based organizations, and the Success Mentors who have been assigned by the Task Force to reduce chronic absenteeism. At the meetings, they will discuss ways to reduce the impact of asthma on students with an emphasis on: 1) identifying at-risk students 2) informing the nurse of asthma-related absences and 3) developing methods to improve communication with families.
- **Create an Asthma Ambassador Corps:** At each pilot school, a trained internal or external Success Mentor will devote a portion of his or her time to promote asthma awareness and assist the school nurse in reaching out to families of asthmatic students. Asthma Ambassadors will connect with students who have asthma at their schools in order to ensure that they are linked to support services and to provide additional support to maximize attendance. They will also assist the school nurse when needed in reaching out to families school-wide to help them complete and return Medication Administration Forms, connect them with local health resources, and provide them with information on asthma management. The Asthma Ambassador will also help the principal and school nurse organize family summits and staff trainings.
- **Host Family-School Asthma Summits:** The pilot schools will organize Family-School Asthma Summits, targeted at families of students with asthma and open to the entire school community. At the summits, representatives from the Departments of Health and Education will join the Administration for Children's Services' Community Partnership Program Liaison, the school health team, the Asthma Ambassador, and key school leadership to provide information on support systems in the school and the ways families can help manage their children's illness more effectively.
- **Develop Staff Trainings:** Office of School Health (OSH) staff will attend the Principals' Student Success Summits on request and provide information on asthma prevention and management. Principals at pilot schools will also be encouraged to set aside time for staff-wide trainings at least once a year. OSH staff will also train Physical Education teachers about asthma with an emphasis on how to pre-treat exercise-induced asthma and respond to an acute asthma attack.
- **Expand Student Education Programs:** Principals will work with their school nurse to enroll all eligible students in the Open Airways program, the American Lung Association's school-based curriculum that empowers 3rd, 4th, and 5th graders to manage their asthma.
- **Launch Asthma Prevention Education at Tier II Shelters:** The Task Force will launch Asthma-Friendly School Summits at selected shelters for parents and students. Additionally, the Task Force will make it easier for DOE liaisons at Tier II Shelters to return asthma surveys to NYC ASSIST, the office dedicated to providing services to students with asthma who are living in temporary housing, by supplying postage paid and pre-addressed envelopes. These surveys are a critical way that nurses and physicians are able to identify students with