



Asthma and Allergy  
Foundation of America

Joan Wade  
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Association of Educational Service Agencies  
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March 24, 2021

Dear Ms. Wade:

On behalf of the Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America (AAFA), the leading patient organization advocating for people with asthma and allergies, and the oldest asthma and allergy patient group in the world, I am writing to ask your assistance related to the recent passage of the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA).

As you know, ARPA includes \$122.8 billion for K-12 schools to address a variety of challenges presented by the COVID pandemic. This money will be distributed to state education agencies, which in turn will subgrant to local educational agencies (LEAs). The bill includes a number of eligible uses on which the money may be spent, including:

*"Inspection, testing, maintenance, repair, replacement, and upgrade projects to improve the indoor air quality in school facilities, including mechanical and non-mechanical heating, ventilation, and air conditioning systems, filtering, purification and other air cleaning, fans, control systems, and window and door repair and replacement."*

The bill does not specify how much of the \$122.8 billion should be spent for this purpose. It is among a long list of eligible activities.

Given that your organization represents educational service agencies across the country, we are asking for your help to inform schools and school districts about the importance of making a significant investment to improve clean air in schools. We would welcome an opportunity to partner with you to share information about the importance of clean air in schools and to encourage schools and school districts to use a significant amount of these funds for this purpose.

Since children spend most of their time outside their homes and within the school environment, school indoor air quality can directly influence their respiratory health. According to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), approximately 53 million children and 6 million adults in the United States spend a large portion of their days in schools.<sup>1</sup> Research links key environmental factors to health outcomes and students' ability to perform. Improvements in

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<sup>1</sup> Environmental Protection Agency. Indoor Air: Improve Indoor Air Quality in Schools. [http://www.epa.gov/airquality/community/details/i-schools\\_addl\\_info.html](http://www.epa.gov/airquality/community/details/i-schools_addl_info.html)



school environmental quality can enhance academic performance, as well as teacher and staff productivity and retention.

Specifically, poor indoor air quality can be a severe health concern for those with asthma and allergies and increases the risks of severe asthma attacks and allergic reactions.<sup>2</sup> Nearly 1 in 13 children of school-age has asthma, which is the leading cause of school absenteeism due to chronic illness. There is substantial evidence that indoor environmental exposure to allergens (such as dust mites, pests, and molds) plays a significant role in triggering asthma symptoms. These allergens are common in schools.<sup>3</sup> Other factors that contribute to poor indoor air quality in schools include:

- **Poor Ventilation & HVAC Systems** - Inadequate ventilation results in high levels of harmful airborne particulates and carbon dioxide levels. It also leads to mold and bacteria growth.
- **Aging Buildings** – The structure of many schools have not been updated for decades. As a result, many schools have problems with leaks, water damage and excessive moisture – which lead to dust, mold and other airborne allergens that contribute to poor indoor air quality.
- **Schools Located Near Sources of Pollution** – Schools that are located in busy cities or near highways face significant fumes from exhaust and gases like carbon monoxide.

I would welcome an opportunity to talk further with you about how we might encourage schools and school systems to prioritize improving the air in schools.

Sincerely,

Kenneth Mendez  
President and Chief Executive Officer  
Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America

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<sup>2</sup> Environmental Protection Agency. Questions about your Community: Indoor Air. <http://www.epa.gov/region1/communities/indoorair.html>

<sup>3</sup> Environmental Protection Agency, About IAQ Schools. <https://www.epa.gov/iaq-schools/about-iaq-schools>