

School Policy Templates: Heat and Air Quality

SCHOOL HANDBOOK ADDITIONS

How to Use This Document

The sample language below (text in black, non italics) is meant to offer a template for schools who want to include extreme temperatures and days with elevated levels of air pollution. The template offers a practical approach to addressing the current and emerging impacts of climate change on our school environments.

The template uses the following structure:

- *Text in blue italics* denote guidance
- Text in black is sample language that may be used directly in policies
- [Text in red that is bracketed] denotes sections that are intended to be modified to fit a specific school's context and preference
- Text in blue boxes includes mitigation best practices

School Handbooks are widely distributed and are an effective way to provide information to parents and guardians directly. The school handbook can be a method to institute school-specific policies and procedures as opposed to district-wide policies and procedures. For example, if some schools have central HVAC and others do not. In those instances, the district-wide approach should not change, but each individual school can lay out their individual protocols in the handbook.

Additionally, the sample policy language provides examples for protocols that a district can use to mitigate elevated levels of air pollution and extreme temperatures. This is not a one-size-fits-all policy, and a district can add or subtract measures based on their individual preferences.

This template was developed in partnership with the Massachusetts Association of Health Boards as part of the Massachusetts Asthma Action Partnership (MAAP) [Healthy Environments Advance Learning](#) project. **This information is provided for educational purposes only and is not to be construed as legal advice. Legal advice can only come from municipal attorneys.**



Extreme Temperature Mitigation Tactics

The School District recognizes that the indoor temperature of classrooms can affect the health of our school children and impact the performance of our teachers and other staff.

The Massachusetts Bureau of Environmental Health Indoor AirQuality Program recommends maintaining indoor air temperatures between 68 and 78 degrees F to provide for the comfort of the building occupants.

If indoor temperatures exceed 78 degrees F, then the practices recommended within this document should be used to increase the thermal comfort of the building.

As a general policy, in the event that a classroom temperature exceeds 78 degrees Fahrenheit, action will be taken to mitigate the effects of extreme temperature.

Each school should institute a clear reporting and decision-making tree to ensure swift responses to any concerns. This is not a one-size-fit all approach, so add or subtract measures and responsible parties based on school context and preference.

[School administrator/their designee] is responsible for monitoring the forecast for heat index concerns. [Staff/Faculty/School administrator/their designee] will use thermometers and barometers to monitor the thermal comfort of occupied rooms. Faculty and staff must be informed at the beginning of each semester, and as needed thereafter, about the school's program for preventing heat stress and the most efficient methods for reducing heat and maximizing ventilation in classrooms.

If the heat index is forecasted to be above 90 degrees [School administrator/their designee] will task staff and faculty to begin mitigation tactics.

The table below lists practices to increase the thermal comfort of the building and those who are responsible for instituting them. These include: [list/table of mitigation tactics]

Triggering Event	Responsible Staff Member	Specific Responsibilities
Temperature above 78 degrees	[School administrator/their designee]	Monitoring the forecast for heat index concerns
Temperature above 78 degrees	[School administrator/their designee]	Monitoring building temperature for thermal comfort of occupants
Heat index above 90	[Staff/Faculty]	Monitor students and staff for signs of heat stress or illness and relocate them to cool rooms.
Heat index above 90	[Staff/Faculty]	Limit outdoor recess to 10 minutes or less. Provide and encourage fluids and shade during.
Heat index 98-104	[Staff/Faculty]	Indoor recess

What to Include as an Extreme Heat Mitigation Tactic

Below are examples of best practices for reducing exposure to heat that could be included in this section. There are a variety of steps that schools can take to reduce heat stress among students and staff by addressing environmental factors such as humidity, air circulation, classroom temperature, and supporting protective behaviors. Consider which tactics are most relevant to your school and context.

Explore the MAAP [Clearing the Air](#) toolkit for additional information, best practices, and resources.

Best Practices

- Take preventative actions such as limiting outdoor recess and sports practices, rescheduling events and sports matches, or moving strenuous activities to cooled, indoor environments.
- Open designate ‘cool rooms’ in schools. These spaces should be equipped with air conditioning and made open to all students and staff on days of high heat. Monitor students and staff for signs of heat stress or illness and relocate them to cool rooms. Nurses’ offices should not be used for cool rooms.
- Adjust conditions to reduce heat in classrooms without air conditioning.
 - Use opaque, heat-absorbing curtains to block heat transmission or close windows and blinds during the hottest part of the day. *Note, this reduces ventilation, and may increase the need to adjust other ventilation systems or use portable air filters if available, to maintain healthy air quality.*
 - When temperatures are cooler outside than inside the school building (usually early in the morning), consider opening windows and using a window fan facing inside if available to increase the intake of cool air.
 - Increase air flow in the school building by keeping windows and any appropriate doors open 1-2 inches and using window fans facing outside to create cross-ventilation.
- Make water easily accessible and encourage students and staff to drink water throughout the day. Consider increasing the number of water fountains or water coolers available.
- Provide heat health education for students and families. Use existing online materials to help plan in-class activities for students to learn about extreme heat and climate readiness. Educate families about the health effects of heat and symptoms of heat stress to look out for.



If after attempting to control the temperature, it is not possible to provide a healthy learning environment, [School administrator/their designee] may decide to dismiss students early. Parents and guardians will be notified in the same manner as prescribed in the Extreme Weather Policy for Cancellation.

Can note the method of alerts here as well, most districts will use a combination of automated phone calls and emails.

In the case of a cancellation or early-dismissal, [School administration/their designee] will provide a summary of any extreme temperature conditions and mitigation efforts at the school to parents and guardians.

School can note the method of alerts here, most districts will use a combination of automated phone calls and email.

Air Quality Mitigation Tactics

The School District recognizes that the indoor air quality in classrooms can affect the health of our students and staff.

[School administrator/their designee] is responsible for monitoring local air quality alerts and weather forecast for air quality index (AQI). If necessary, action will be taken to reduce children and staff's exposure to poor indoor and outdoor air.

Mitigation actions include: [list/table of mitigation tactics] *(Use the Clearing the Air toolkit to List practices that are most relevant to your school and context, tactics could include indoor recess, moving students and teachers to an area with an acceptable level of air quality, installation of a portable air filtration unit, and if necessary, early dismissal).*

What to Include as an Air Quality Mitigation Tactic

Below are examples of best practices for reducing outdoor exposure to air pollution and improving indoor air quality that could be included in this section. Schools or School Districts can adopt a variety of = practices to address concerns about exposure to outdoor air pollution and improve indoor air quality.

When considering which tactics are most relevant to your school and context, it is important to consider what the primary sources of outdoor air pollution are in your community. Explore the MAAP [Clearing the Air](#) toolkit for additional information, best practices, and resources.

- Modify school activities based on days with high AQI. Keep windows and doors closed and reschedule strenuous outdoors activities such as sports and recess.
- Open an indoor alternative space to promote healthy indoor physical activities – particularly in instances of extreme heat or poor outdoor air quality.
- Participate in the EPA’s AirNow Air Quality Flag Program. The Flag Program uses brightly colored flags based on the daily AQI, flown by participating organizations, to create awareness of outdoor air quality conditions.
- Reduce sources of indoor air pollution such as mold spores, dust, and fragrances.
- In school buildings with central heating, ventilating, and air conditioning (HVAC) systems, ensure thermal comfort and ventilation needs are met and that the system is using high-efficiency filters (MERV 13 or higher).
- Where a central system to provide filtered air is not available, use portable HEPA filters in each classroom.

Faculty and staff must be informed at the beginning of each semester, and as needed thereafter, about the school's program for reducing exposure to poor indoor and outdoor air and education on identifying potential indoor air quality concerns. This will include, [details on training/classroom requirements]

Can include information about best practices to reducing indoor air pollutants such as keeping portable HEPA filters turned on throughout the day or identifying other indoor air quality concerns like mold/leaks, pests, etc. Depending on the building's HVAC (heating, ventilation, and air conditioning) system, it may also be helpful to provide information on how to read CO₂ monitors and keep air vents clear of clutter that may block airflow.

In the event of a concern about indoor air quality, the staff will report to [school administrator/their designee] for evaluation.

Note the relevant decision-making body here, each school should institute a clear reporting and decision-making tree to ensure swift responses to any concerns.

If it is determined that it is not possible to provide a healthy learning environment, [School administrator/their designee] may decide to dismiss students early. Parents and guardians will be notified in the same manner as prescribed in the Extreme Weather Policy for Cancellation.

Can note the method of alerts here as well, most districts will use a combination of automated phone calls and emails.

In the case of a cancellation or early-dismissal, [School administration/their designee] will provide a summary of any air quality conditions and mitigation efforts at the school to parents and guardians.

School can note the method of alerts here, most districts will use a combination of automated phone calls and email.