

KATY INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

Turning Crisis into Opportunity...and Thriving

Katy Independent School District (KISD) launched their *IAQ Tools for Schools* Program to respond to a mold crisis that led to the closing of one of their schools and the sudden relocation of over 700 students in the spring of 2002. The community voiced disapproval and expressed distrust that the district could maintain healthy buildings for their children. The district learned some powerful lessons during that crisis and put those lessons to work immediately: a comprehensive IAQ program is essential; it costs less to prevent IAQ problems than to fix them; IAQ management has to be integrated into the culture to be successful; continuous improvement, not just remediation, is the goal; and open and honest communication with the public is essential.

Organize for Success — Empower an IAQ Leader: KISD's IAQ Program is led by an assistant director inside the Maintenance and Operations (M&O) Department. This level of authority lets the IAQ coordinator hire staff, set policies and apply funds as required to meet the IAQ challenges. *"The IAQ Tools for Schools Program has become a part of the KISD culture and the 'way we do business.' The expectation is that we will provide a clean, healthy environment for our students and staff, and the IAQ Tools for Schools Program allows us to do just that. As time passes, we continue to instill those lessons in our employees and see buy-in at all levels; it has become an integral part of our day-to-day operations."* — Peggy Caruso, Assistant Director, M&O Department

Assess Your Environments Continuously — Determine a Baseline: The IAQ team recorded baseline environmental conditions at all facilities by conducting walkthrough assessments in the first year of the program. The baseline has provided a way to measure progress over time and continuously motivate staff to take effective actions. And ongoing assessments show continuously improved facility performance over time.

PROGRAM RESULTS

KISD tracks baseline facility conditions and improvements over time based on their walkthrough assessments and the number of reported IAQ concerns from work orders.

- ▲ Walkthrough assessments of all schools show continuous improvement from baseline.
- ▲ Decrease in reported IAQ concerns.
- ▲ Improved student, teacher and staff comfort, performance and satisfaction.
- ▲ Decreased absenteeism and reduced number of nurse visits for asthma.
- ▲ Turned once negative publicity into positive publicity for the district.
- ▲ Ongoing public support for major facility investments, including facility upgrades.
- ▲ One of 12 schools internationally to win Facilities Masters Award from the Association of School Business Officials International.

ORGANIZE FOR SUCCESS: Secure Senior Buy-In

KISD continues to ensure program sustainability by obtaining support from new administrators.

"I believe ensuring we have skilled technicians and managers able to respond to any feedback or concern from the end user is critical to our success."

— Tom Gunnell,
Chief Operations Officer

"Providing a safe and orderly working and learning environment is essential to the district's performance."

— Alton Frailey,
Superintendent

Plan Your Short and Long-Term Activities — Prioritize Actions: KISD prioritizes IAQ activities in at least two ways: after the assessments, supervisors in the M&O Department review their action lists and rank priorities according to risk; and before any money is spent on major facility upgrades, the department prioritizes sealing building envelopes, windows and doors to prevent moisture intrusion and manage mold risks.

Communicate with Everyone, All the Time — Be Transparent & Inclusive: KISD began an aggressive and open communications campaign when the crisis hit and since then, has never stopped engaging their community. The IAQ team shares their IAQ plan, continuously updates the community on its progress, and willingly opens their facilities to community tours. This openness and the team's follow-through on their commitments built trust and significant support for the program in a once-doubting community.

Act to Address Structural, Institutional and Behavioral Issues — Educate Staff About IAQ to Change Behavior: KISD saw a change in the principals' reactions from Year One to Two of the assessment process. At first, principals hardly noticed their reports, but by Year Two, they paid close attention. The district-level staff's reaction to the reports demonstrated that "this IAQ stuff" must be important. When the assessments were quickly followed by M&O activity in their schools, the principals took notice. The IAQ team continues to train administrators and staff on key IAQ issues and appropriate occupant behaviors.