

# Mothers & Others for Clean Air

## Resources for Georgia Schools

Air pollution is linked to serious health problems including respiratory and heart diseases, cancer, premature death, and reduced lung function growth in children. Children are more vulnerable than adults because they breathe at a faster rate, they spend more time being active outdoors, they take in more air in relation to their body weight and their young lungs are still developing. Greater metro Atlanta and Macon fail current federal air quality standards and with stronger standards on the way more mid-sized Georgia cities, including Athens, Augusta and Columbus, may violate federal air pollution limits.

### Monitoring Air Quality & Protecting Student Health

In 2007, Mothers & Others for Clean Air united a group of air quality, public health and medical experts to develop clear guidelines for schools that explain how to adjust outdoor activity when air quality is poor to reduce health risks to students. Fact sheets and full-color posters are available free of charge, and Mothers & Others for Clean Air gives presentations for PTAs, faculty and staff, and coaches to help them implement the recommendations.

**Air Quality Index (AQI) Flag Program:** Many school nurses and principals are concerned about high rates of asthma among students and faculty. Schools participating in the Mothers & Others for Clean Air AQI flag program fly a flag that corresponds to the day's air quality index—green, yellow, orange or red. This program makes daily air quality highly visible to the entire school community, including parents, faculty, staff and students. While taking precautions when the flag is orange or red, teachers and coaches also can use the green flag as a visual cue to encourage outdoor physical activity when air quality is good.



### Cleaning Up Dirty Diesel School Buses



While school buses are, in many ways, a good option for children traveling to school, harmful diesel exhaust can build up in the cabins of school buses, putting children at risk. Diesel soot contains particulate matter, black carbon, sulfur dioxide, nitrogen oxides and more than 40 hazardous air pollutants. The good news is that all 2007 and later bus engines are required to come equipped with special filters that make the exhaust more than 90% cleaner. In addition, federal funding is available to cover the cost of retrofitting pre-2007 buses with pollution control devices to give students a healthier ride to school without having to replace expensive buses. Mothers & Others for Clean Air works with the Georgia Environmental Protection Division, school staff and parents to encourage transportation directors to apply for funding for these devices and also to fully implement and enforce Georgia Department of Education school bus idling guidelines.

### Supporting Green & Healthy School Siting Decisions

A school's location within a community affects transportation options, air quality and public health. In 2010 the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) released for the first time comprehensive guidelines for school siting that are designed to help school system planners and other decision-makers evaluate all environmental health implications of alternative locations for new or repurposed school buildings. Mothers & Others for Clean Air, its partner organization Georgia Conservancy, and the U.S. Green Building Council-Georgia Chapter are working together to develop tools and workshops to help school administrators interpret and implement the new guidelines.



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