

Creating Healthier Classrooms Through Practical Solutions

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It goes without saying, every parent wants their child to be healthy and safe. And teachers too, always have the best interest of our kids at heart. But sometimes what we don't know can hurt us.

My little sister is a teacher, and in one of her first positions, she was the aid in a kindergarten class. She called me one day to complain about how “totally ungreen” her classroom was. “It doesn't even have windows,” she bemoaned. A few months later, I had the opportunity to visit her classroom. When I walked in, I exclaimed “Bess, your classroom does have windows, but your teacher has stacked all of her supplies and books to the ceiling!”

The lead teacher in Bess' classroom undoubtedly had the children's best interest at heart. She had a tiny classroom with no storage space, and thus, no place to put all of her supplies. But perhaps, had she known the benefits of a daylight classroom, or providing children with views to the outside, she would have chosen a different way to organize her classroom materials. In fact, [studies](#) show that the access to daylight in a learning environment is one of the most crucial building aspects to design properly since children depend heavily on sight in the learning process.

Today, we're thrilled to launch our [Green Classroom Professional Certificate](#), an online course and evaluation designed to educate teachers, parents, principals and other school staff – like nurses and custodians – what they themselves can do to improve their current instructional environments. It's packed with practical suggestions and solutions like “what are the three questions you should ask your custodian or building manager about where fresh air comes in and stale air goes out of the classroom,” or why it may not be a good idea to purchase an air freshener to cover up that funky mold smell (because that can actually keep us from identifying the problem).

My mom just retired after 22 years of service to a Maryland school district. A few years ago, she walked into a portable classroom, or, as the school district prefers you call them, “learning cottages.” Portable classrooms are some of the biggest offenders of where indoor environmental quality is concerned. They often are made of cheap materials that emit unhealthy toxins, they usually have poor ventilation and abysmal acoustics. And, as was the case with this particular classroom, are hotbeds for mold. My mom suffers from asthma, and is particularly sensitive to poor air quality. Within a few minutes of being in the classroom, she was coughing and wheezing and could scarcely breathe. When my mom approached the teacher to explain her symptoms, the teacher was elated. Not of course, because she was glad my mom had fallen ill in her classroom, but because for months, she had been trying to get someone to pay attention to what she intuitively knew was an ongoing issue in her classroom.

Like so many teachers that I've met, this teacher had good instincts about how the physical environment was not only impacting student learning, but their health and wellbeing. Turns out, that portable was infested with mold, hidden to the naked eye. In reviewing class attendance records, absenteeism was through the roof. To the school district's credit, as soon as the problem was identified, they took immediate action, and today, students in that community attend a newly modernized LEED-certified school.

The [Green Classroom Professional Certificate](#) aims to arm our educators and caretakers with the knowledge to identify environmental and health challenges, and appropriate strategies for addressing them. As a parent, you too can make a difference. In earning your Green Classroom Professional Certificate, you'll know to suggest a friendlier alternative to the bleach wipes that teachers request for you to donate, or how small shifts like turning off lights and computers and unplugging the mini-fridge over vacation can save precious school dollars.

To encourage teachers and administrators alike to sign up, we are offering the course at a promotional rate of \$75 until April 1, 2012. [Sign up today](#) or forward this along to a teacher in your life who wants to make his or her classroom into a healthier, safer place to inspire great learning.

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