

# GREENWorks

## Ideas for a Cleaner Environment

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### **Create and Maintain a Healthy Classroom**

As the long days of summer start to dwindle our children's teachers start to focus their attention on going back to school and setting up their classrooms for the next school year. Here are a few ways teachers can help keep their classroom's air clean and healthy.

#### **1. Make a map of your classroom**

- a. Work with the custodian to identify the air supply and return vents and any heating or cooling units. Understand how they work, make sure they are not blocked and are working properly in your room. Proper ventilation is important for clean air. Don't put anything on top of the ventilation or heating/cooling units!
- b. Look for stained ceiling tiles, wet/damp windowsills, and leaks under sinks. If you find evidence of moisture, report the problem to the custodian. Unreported leaks can lead to potential mold issues.
- c. Identify the different stations/work areas you want to create (i.e., reading area, sitting area, etc...) and map where they will go. Make sure these areas will not hinder the heating, cooling, and ventilation systems. After you set up your classroom, have the custodian check to see that your stations/work areas aren't blocking the ventilation system.

#### **2. Design your classroom so that it is easy to clean**

- a. Store as many materials as possible in clear plastic bins that can be easily wiped off and labeled.
- b. Avoid having too much clutter. As you put things back in your room consider whether or not you've used the item in the last year. If you haven't, then recycle it or loan it to a teacher who may be able to use it. Clutter can have a negative impact on your mood and ability to concentrate; the same is true for your students. More isn't always better. If you inherited something from a previous teacher, it doesn't mean you have to keep it!
- c. Allow only vinyl covered stuffed chairs and sofas in your classroom. These can be easily wiped down. Fabric furniture and pillows collect dust, harbor dust mites, collect germs and are hard to clean.
- d. Store all food in plastic containers to keep any critters out.

#### **3. Organize your materials**

- a. Use clear plastic bins for storing items.

- b. Use three ring binders to store papers according to theme/subject or better yet scan materials and only keep electronic files.
- c. Avoid having piles on your desk or other areas of your room. Identify where you will keep homework assignments.
- d. Consider setting up a schedule to rotate what is available to students. For example, if you have a story corner only put  $\frac{1}{2}$  or  $\frac{1}{3}$  of the books out and then switch them 2 or 3 times a year. This gives you an opportunity to clean this space a couple times a year and will rejuvenate interest. Do this with games, toys, and bulletin boards as well.

#### **4. Ordering supplies**

- a. Use only non-toxic markers and art supplies.
- b. Check with custodians to see if cleaning supplies are approved for use during school hours. Microfiber cloths are your best choices if cleaning needs to take place during school hours. Avoid any type of spray, even when kids are at lunch or recess because they stay in the air long after they are used. Do not bring cleaning chemicals from home.
- c. When you buy something new for your classroom, try to get rid of something. For example, when you buy new markers, get rid of the old ones.

#### **5. Set a cleaning schedule**

- a. Daily clean up - Have students stack chairs, pick up large pieces of paper and other debris, and put the trash cans by the door. This will help ensure your room gets properly vacuumed and cleaned in the evening.
- b. Dusting - Typically, maintenance budgets will not support regular dusting of classrooms. Try to wet wipe excessive dust from classroom surfaces at least once a week. Encourage students and/or parents to assist in this effort to reduce allergy “triggers” that could impact health. Again you don’t need to use chemicals. Try using microfiber cloths or a damp cloth.
- c. Laundry - If you have stuffed animals, curtains, or other fabric in the classroom, set a schedule for washing them. These items collect dust, dust mites, and can harbor germs. Depending on their use you may want to wash them weekly or monthly.
- d. Wall and ceiling decorations – Student art and decorations should not have an opportunity to become dust collectors. Try not to leave these items in the classroom for more than a month.
- e. Just prior to winter and spring break have your students help you thoroughly wipe down your classroom (you don’t need to use chemicals just a damp cloth or microfiber cloth).

If you follow these tips, you will create a clean, healthy, clutter-free classroom. For more information please visit the NH Partners for Healthy Schools website at [www.nhhealthyschoolenvironments.org](http://www.nhhealthyschoolenvironments.org).