



Back to School in Extreme Heat Toolkit

*It's been too hot to learn and too hot to play —
we need more people talking about it!*



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Campaign Introduction

Our Back to School in Extreme Heat messaging campaign will achieve four goals: increase awareness around extreme heat and heat's impact on students, school staff, and parents; share steps schools/parents can take today; collect anecdotal data on challenges and wins from students, parents, teachers, and others through social media; and direct audiences to the State and Local Heat Policy Agenda.

Given the lack of reporting on heat in schools and its impacts, our call to action during this Back to School campaign is to encourage parents, students, teachers, schools, etc. to share stories about heat. Through this campaign, we will collect more data on impacts while we work toward the necessary policy and practice changes to better track and address the problem.

Week of Action: August 24-28, 2026

The entire week, we will be collecting stories on what extreme heat is like in today's schools and child care facilities using #HeatAgenda to tag these stories. Scripts that messengers can use for inspiration for videos and posts can be found in [Sample Scripts for Messengers](#).

Organizations can participate in the week of action by focusing their messaging on the following topics each day (found under [Week of Action Socials for Organizations](#))

- Monday - Describe the problem of extreme heat in schools and child care.
- Tuesday - Describe the unique health and wellbeing vulnerability challenges for children, including the added risk for the most vulnerable children.
- Wednesday - Talk about heat impact in schools across non-student groups
- Thursday - Share what parents and schools can do today to help protect children
- Friday - Emphasize the policy gap, and the need to collect more data and stories to influence change.

Week of Action Socials

Sample social media posts:

Below are messages you can use on social media platforms (X, BlueSky, LinkedIn):

FOR THE WHOLE WEEK - Take Action to Track Extreme Heat

- All week long, we've shared how heat is impacting schools. Now, we need you to help us track the data! This school year, keep an indoor temperature sensor or thermometer in your classroom. When you and your students are feeling like it's too hot, measure the indoor temperature, take a photo of it, and share it on socials with #HeatAgenda. Let's show what we mean by too hot to learn!
- Cooling a school isn't a mystery. What's missing is the data, reporting mechanisms, and individual voices necessary to call for solutions. Share your story all year long with #HeatAgenda on socials and help us learn more about how heat is impacting our schools.
- You can't count what no one's there to see. Many schools don't have a full-time nurse — so on the hottest days, our tracking might miss which kids are getting sick from the heat. But you can help us! Track how often your children are coming home dizzy or queasy, overheated and sweaty, or worn out, and share it with your parent association or PTA, principal, superintendent, school district, and us on socials with #HeatAgenda.
- Heat-related school closures mean lost instruction, wages, and productivity — and are currently uncounted. Parents and teachers can help us track this data and share it with your PTA, school district, or us on socials with #HeatAgenda.
- We count snow days. We plan around them. Heat closures? No warning, no record, no number anywhere. So the wages families lose when a building can't stay cool just vanish from the ledger. Help us count the closures by sharing when your child's school closes due to heat with #HeatAgenda on socials.

MONDAY - Describing the Problem

Challenge of Heat in Schools and Child Care

- Cooling a school isn't a mystery, but currently [one in three](#) lack adequate cooling to keep children safe. Learn about this challenge and the solutions we have to tackle it at [HeatAgenda.US](#).
- More than half ([57 percent](#)) of child care providers reported experiencing at least one extreme weather event in the past two years, with [45% of facilities](#) reporting they have been physically or financially strained due to extreme weather. Let's solve this challenge together. Join us at [HeatAgenda.US](#) if you want to be a part of the solution.
- Is your child's school prepared for back-to-school extreme heat? [One in three](#) schools isn't. Let's solve this challenge together. Join us at [HeatAgenda.US](#) if you want to be a part of the solution.
- Overheated classrooms and hot unshaded playgrounds are often concentrated in the communities least equipped to fix them. However, we can invest where it's needed most, ensuring all kids are healthy at school. Join us at [HeatAgenda.US](#) if you want to be a part of the solution.
- We're allowing for a childhood spent trapped indoors, with recess canceled and playgrounds too hot to touch. Kids need to move. Join us at [HeatAgenda.US](#) if you want to be a part of the solution.
- Did you know that even on a mild, 65-degree day, unshaded asphalt can reach [120 degrees](#)? This increases to 140 degrees or more on sunny days, around 90 degrees F, and rubber surfaces can reach between 155 and 165 degrees. Join us at [HeatAgenda.US](#) if you want to be a part of the solution.
- Is your school in a High Heat Zone or have a high proportion of students with asthma? Extreme heat is a growing problem — but what schools are suffering the most? That's the data we need. Help us learn more by sharing your story with #HeatAgenda.
- As school starts back up, is your school facing a Heat Risk? Extreme heat is a growing problem, and if you want to learn about your community's unique risk, you can visit <https://www.wpc.ncep.noaa.gov/heattrisk/>. If you want to be part of the solution, you can join us at [HeatAgenda.US](#).
- [for California audiences] By 2045, [research](#) estimates more than 1 in 3 California students will be going to school in communities facing 120+ days of extreme heat a year. This isn't a distant problem — it's a reason to act on cooling now. Join us at [HeatAgenda.US](#) if you want to be a part of the solution.

Children's vulnerability and the increased risk for most vulnerable students

- Did you know that children have a higher risk of heat-related illness, including in overheated classrooms? Their bodies heat up 2 to 3 times faster than adults, and take longer to sweat, acclimatize, and regulate body temperature. Children are also more prone to dehydration because they spend more time outdoors and depend on others

to provide them with cooling and water. Join us at HeatAgenda.US if you want to be a part of the solution.

- Not every child faces the same risk on a hot day. Kids with asthma, obesity, or heart conditions, and children with disabilities or who can't easily move or cool themselves, are more vulnerable. As kids go back to school, talk to your teacher and school administration to ensure your child is staying safe and has the accommodations they need.
- Did you know certain medications can raise a child's heat risk? They impair sweating, interfere with body temperature regulation, or reduce the sense of thirst. As kids go back to school, talk to your child's health care provider, your school nurse, teachers, and school administration to ensure your child is staying safe and has the accommodations they need.
- Heat affects the medications that kids are taking. Inhalers can burst in extreme heat, EpiPens may malfunction or deliver less epinephrine, and insulin degrades if it isn't kept cool. Schools can implement safe medication storage through heat planning. Join us at HeatAgenda.US to learn more solutions to addressing heat in schools.

TUESDAY - Impacts of Extreme Heat on Children

Impacts on K-8 Students

- On hot days, does your kid come home queasy, dizzy, cranky, wiped out, done? An overheated classroom and hot schoolyard may be to blame. We know the steps to address heat in classrooms and schoolgrounds. Join us at HeatAgenda.US if you want to be part of the solution.
- When classroom temperatures rise, test scores drop. We know how to improve school infrastructure that enables strong learning environments. Join us at HeatAgenda.US if you want to be a part of the solution.

Impacts on 9-12 Students

- A hot classroom isn't just a rough afternoon. For high schoolers, overheated rooms lower test scores, which follow students into college and careers. We're letting extreme heat quietly tax our kids' futures. If your child's school is too hot, tell us with #HeatAgenda.

Impacts on Vulnerable Students

- "Safe for most kids" isn't safe enough. The kid with asthma, the kid on certain meds, the kid with impaired mobility, and the kid with no AC waiting at home deserve to be protected too. Join us at HeatAgenda.US if you want to be a part of the solution.

WEDNESDAY - Impacts of Extreme Heat on Personnel and Parents

Impacts on Teachers and Staff

- We've decided how hot is too hot for adults on a worksite. But the teachers in a classroom with no AC? A coach on a hot playground with no shade? No such protection. A school is a workplace. Join us at HeatAgenda.US if you want to be a part of the solution.
- We're already struggling to keep teachers. Asking them to spend August in a building that hits []°F is one more reason good people walk. Protecting teachers from heat is how you hold onto the adults who make school work. Join us at HeatAgenda.US if you want to be a part of the solution.
- It's not just teachers. Cafeteria workers next to hot equipment, custodians, and coaches keep a school running and are exposed to heat all day. They deserve cool schools as well! Join us at HeatAgenda.US if you want to be a part of the solution.

Impacts on Parents

- School let out early for heat again today. When kids are too young to stay home alone, parents have to take off work early. That's real money quietly draining out of working households. Join us at HeatAgenda.US if you want to be a part of the solution.
- Open schools are economic infrastructure. When heat shuts them down, parents can't work, shifts go uncovered, paychecks shrink. Keeping classrooms cool is workforce policy. Join us at HeatAgenda.US if you want to be a part of the solution.

THURSDAY - Actions Parents/Schools can take today

- The youngest kids can't always tell you they're overheating, and heat-related illness can move fast in a child. Recognize the signs: heavy sweating or a child who stops sweating; flushed skin, headache, dizziness, nausea, cramping, or a kid who suddenly seems confused, irritable, or wiped out. When in doubt, cool the child down and get help ASAP.
- Parents, did you know that certain medications — like allergy medications like antihistamines, ADHD stimulants, SSRIs, and diuretics — can raise your child's heat risk? Keep your child safe at school by informing the school about their medications.
- Teachers, did you know that certain medications — like allergy medications like antihistamines, ADHD stimulants, SSRIs, and diuretics — can raise your students' heat risk? Help protect students by keeping track of the students most at risk.

- Simple steps to keep kids safe when it's hot: Staying safe in the heat comes down to knowing your options — inside and out. Inside: find the coolest rooms, keep air moving, and make sure cool drinking water is always within reach. Outside: know where the shade is, take breaks from the sun, and hydrate before kids feel thirsty. Preparedness can make school safer.
- Coaches, how are you helping your athletes stay safe during the heat? Simple steps include practicing indoors or in the shade, instituting mandated hydration breaks, and providing cooling towels.

FRIDAY - Importance of Policy and Practice Action

Make it Clear What's Too Hot in Schools

- Overheated classrooms and unshaded playgrounds concentrate in the communities least equipped to fix them. By setting a standard for everyone, and counting who's furthest from it, we can invest where it's needed most, ensuring all kids are healthy at school. Join us at HeatAgenda.US if you want to be a part of the solution.
- We're allowing for a childhood spent trapped indoors, with recess canceled and playgrounds too hot to touch. Kids need to move. Let's design playgrounds for outdoor heat, and have protocols for indoor play so "too hot to play" stops being the default. Join us at HeatAgenda.US if you want to be a part of the solution.

Collect Better Data to Guide Decision-Making

- Heat-related school closures mean lost instruction, wages, and productivity — and are currently uncounted. Without this data, we can't make informed investments to help our kids be happier and healthier. Be part of the solution at HeatAgenda.US.
- Extreme heat is a growing problem — but which schools are suffering the most? That's the data we need. By investing in the reporting systems, we can ensure every dollar lands in the right place. Join us at HeatAgenda.US.
- Decades of underinvestment have left schools serving low- and moderate-income communities more likely to have aging buildings and failing HVAC systems, making them far less prepared for extreme heat. This spring, [heat waves forced early dismissals at 52 Philadelphia schools without adequate cooling](#) — and Black students and students in low-income communities lost more learning time due to those closures than their peers. Help us count what's uncounted: share your story with #HeatAgenda.

- Want to know where heat is disrupting schools in your community? Check out this interactive map tracking school closures, delays, and early releases caused by extreme heat and other severe weather. www.undauntedk12.org/lostlearningtime If you don't see your school's story reflected, that's exactly the gap we're trying to close. Share it with us using #HeatAgenda.

Fund Cooling Solutions

- We often hear “cooling every school is too expensive.” But inaction costs more — in the form of closures, the learning lost every hot August and September, and parents’ missed wages. We know how to cool schools. Join us at HeatAgenda.US.
- When a [school in Minnesota](#) upgraded its HVAC system, fewer students needed to come to the nurse’s office. Cooling solutions mean healthier and happier kids. Work with us to make that possible: HeatAgenda.US.
- 40% of schools [can't keep kids adequately cool](#). This isn't a few unlucky classrooms; it's a nationwide infrastructure gap, and it falls hardest on the communities least able to fix it. All kids deserve cool classrooms to learn and thrive. Join us at HeatAgenda.US if you want to be a part of the solution.
- Planting trees can create shady places for students on hot days.
- Child care providers are already strained due to a lack of resources. [61% of Head Start](#) centers require physical infrastructure upgrades. All of our youngest and most vulnerable children deserve safe and cool child care to give them the best start in life. Join us at HeatAgenda.US if you want to be a part of the solution.

Sample Scripts for Messengers

Below are messages you can use as inspiration for short videos (TikTok, Instagram Reels), in public forums (like a school board meeting), or in meetings with policymakers:

Parent (about their kid):

There's a temperature rule for the cafeteria fridge but not for my child's classroom. On [date] it hit [__°F] in that room. There should be clear standards for how hot is too hot inside our schools. My child deserves better!

Parent (about themselves):

I work [hourly / a job I can't do from home], and this past [month] I lost [X] days of pay because school kept closing early or shutting entirely for heat. My kid's too young to leave home alone, so when the building can't stay cool, I'm the backup plan. Heat closures hit with no warning and no record. Nobody's tracking them, so the wages families like mine are losing don't show up anywhere. There should be clear standards for how hot is too hot inside our schools. Parents deserve better!

Teacher (K-8):

I teach [grade] at [school]. On the hot days this past [month], I watched my classroom fall apart by mid-morning, heads down, hands stopped going up, and kids getting short with each other because they were miserable. And then we'd lose recess on top of it, because it wasn't safe to play in the sun. Six- and seven-year-olds can't always name what's wrong with how they are feeling and can't fix it themselves; that's my job. And right now I don't have the tools, rules, or resources to do it. My students deserve better!

Teacher (9-12):

I teach [subject] at [school]. On the hot days this past [month], I watched students who'd studied hard stop being able to think, and it showed in their work. I need clear standards for how hot a classroom can get before it's no longer somewhere kids can learn. Second, I can document which days of heat cost us instruction; this should influence change. My students deserve better!

Physical Education / Coach (K-12):

I coach [sport] and teach PE at [school], so I'm the one standing on a [__°F] field deciding whether it's safe to send kids out. I'm making that call by feel, every single day. Some afternoons that's fine. Some afternoons I've got a kid with headaches and another dizzy, and no rule telling me where the actual line is. That's not a call any one adult should be making alone. My players/students deserve better!

Student (9-12):

I'm a junior at [school]. I want to tell you what a hot classroom actually does to a school day. By the afternoon in a room that's [__°F], I'm not learning anymore. I'm just enduring it. I've read the same paragraph three times, and none of it sticks. And in May I took an end-of-year exam in a room like that, and I know I lost points, not because I didn't know the material but

because I couldn't hold a thought in that heat. There's real research now showing hot classrooms impact how much high schoolers actually learn and how we score. I deserve better than this!

Student Athlete (9-12):

I'm a junior at [school], and I play [sport]. In August, we practice in the worst of it — full gear, full sun, the hottest part of the afternoon. I've finished practices so dizzy I couldn't see straight, and I've watched teammates go down and have to get walked off. And here's the part that gets me: whether we keep going or stop is basically a judgment call at the moment. Some days a coach pulls us early. Some days nobody's sure, so we just keep pushing. There's no line, no rule that says *this* is the point where it's not safe to be out here. I'm not asking you to cancel my season. I'm asking you to help us know how to stay cool.

Health Professionals (Pediatrician):

I'm a pediatrician here in [community], and I want to be clear about something as the doctor who sees these kids: heat is not a discomfort issue; it's a health issue. In my practice, the kids who land in trouble on hot days aren't random — they're the ones with asthma, the ones on certain medications, the ones whose bodies or circumstances give them less margin. Those are exactly the children a classroom with no temperature limit or outdoor recess without safeguards fails first. Our kids deserve better — they need us to take action.

Health Professionals (School Nurse):

I'm a school nurse, and on hot days I'm the one kids get sent to: headaches, dizziness, the girl who nearly passed out at the end of PE last [month]. Heat illness moves fast, faster than most people realize, and by the time a child reaches my office it's already advanced. Our kids deserve better — they need us to take action.

Child Care Provider

I care for babies and toddlers, and I know how important time outside is to their health and development. Outdoor play gives young children opportunities to move, explore, build confidence, and connect with the world around them. But on increasingly hot days, I'm forced to choose between something children need and keeping them safe. Infants and toddlers are especially vulnerable to heat, and they can't tell me when they're too hot, find a cooler place, or make decisions about when to stop playing. I need safe, healthy spaces where young children can learn and play—even on the hottest days. Our youngest children shouldn't have to sacrifice their health, development, or time outdoors because we haven't given their caregivers the tools and resources to protect them.

Partnerships and Additional Resources

Who can you be in touch with on the issue of heat in schools?

- Parent-Teacher Associations
- Teachers' Unions
- Local school boards
 - Sample actions: [Los Angeles United School District](#), [School District of Philadelphia](#), [Boulder Public Schools](#), [Chicago Public Schools](#), [Austin Independent School District](#), [Deer Valley United School District](#), [Boston Public Schools](#)
- Athletic Trainers' associations
- School Nurses' associations
- Nurse Health Consultants who work with child care providers
- State department of education
 - Sample actions: [California Department of Education](#)
- State public health departments
- State legislative education committees

Recommended resources to learn more about heat in schools and child care

- [Heatagenda.us](#)
- [NY State Department of Health Presentation on Extreme Heat in Schools](#)
- [Climate Mental Health Network Extreme Heat Tips](#)
- [Child Care Professionals Are on the Front Lines as Climate Change Risks Children's Health and Development](#) (see recommendations)
- [Building Child Care Resiliency in the Face of a Changing Climate](#)

Guidance for State and Local Health Departments

Messages you can be sharing this back-to-school season include:

- Spotting heat-related illness in young children: Heat illness can move fast in a child, and the early signs are easy to miss: heavy sweating or, worryingly, a child who stops sweating; flushed skin, headache, dizziness, nausea, cramping, or a kid who suddenly seems confused, irritable, or wiped out. Younger children often can't name what they're feeling — so the adults around them have to know the signs and act early. When in doubt, cool the child down and get help. Heat exhaustion can become heat stroke, a medical emergency, quickly.
- The kids most at risk: Not every child faces the same risk on a hot day. Kids with asthma, obesity, or heart conditions, and children with disabilities or who can't easily move or cool themselves, are more vulnerable to heat-related health impacts.
- Extreme heat and children's medications: Some [everyday medications](#) raise a child's heat risk. These include allergy medications like antihistamines, ADHD stimulants, SSRIs, and diuretics. They can work in different ways — impairing sweating, interfering with the body's temperature regulation, or reducing the sense of thirst. Parents should inform their school about the medications their child is taking, and teachers and school officials should keep track of kids that could be at greater risk.
- Extreme heat and children's medications: Heat affects the medications themselves that kids are taking. Inhalers can burst in extreme heat, EpiPens may malfunction or deliver less epinephrine, and insulin degrades if it isn't kept cool. Schools need to think about safe medication storage as they plan for heat.
- Simple steps to keep kids safe when it's hot: Staying safe in the heat comes down to knowing your options — inside and out. Inside: find the coolest rooms, keep air moving, and make sure cool drinking water is always within reach. Outside: know where the shade is, take breaks from the sun, and hydrate before kids feel thirsty. Preparedness can make school safer.
- Long-term consequences: Children spend their days in buildings that were never designed for the heat we now get. High heat in schools makes it harder to learn, and consequences follow kids into their long-term health and earning power, since

education is one of the strongest predictors of lifelong well-being. Protecting kids from heat at school is public health, upstream.

Other ways to support schools, teachers, and families in their response to heat include:

- **Be the trusted source on child heat-health.** Produce and push out plain-language guidance on spotting heat illness in kids, who's most vulnerable, and what to do — so schools, childcare providers, and families aren't piecing it together themselves. Produce the posters and graphics that districts and partners can use.
- **Translate protocols the education system doesn't have.** Adapt athletic-trainer and sports-medicine heat standards down to recess, PE, and everyday operations, and help define the indoor and outdoor thresholds a district can actually adopt.
- **Support the counting.** Help schools and the education agency stand up heat-condition and heat-illness monitoring, advise on collecting health impacts safely and in aggregate, and feed that data into the case for investment. Most schools lack full-time nursing, so build reporting tools that don't depend on clinical staff being present
- **Convene and connect.** Bring school health, environmental health, and emergency preparedness to the same table to problem-solve around protecting kids from heat.

Guidance for State Education Departments and School Districts

What school staff can do to avoid overheating:

- Manage solar gain. Close blinds and shades on sun-facing windows during the day; external shading (awnings, exterior shades) blocks far more heat than interior blinds.
- Flush heat overnight. Where security and air quality allow, ventilate in the cool of night to purge heat from the building's mass, then close up early before the day heats — a well-established passive-cooling practice for buildings without adequate AC.
- Use fans — within reason. Fans help cool people by supporting evaporation from the skin. They help only up to a point: above a certain air temperature, moving hot air can *add* heat stress for vulnerable kids if they are not sweating or have water on the skin.
- Cut internal heat loads. Turn off unneeded lights, screens, and equipment; they're small furnaces in a packed classroom.
- Map and use the coolest spaces. Identify the naturally cooler rooms (ground floor, north-facing, near existing cooling) as relocation/refuge spaces before you need them. Determine who goes, how long, and how to resume operations.
- Cool water, always. Guaranteed access to cool drinking water protects kids when the room can't be cooled.
- Schedule around the heat. Move recess, PE, and high-intensity activity to the coolest windows of the day, with clear go/modify/move-indoors rules tied to your thresholds.

Heat-related closure monitoring in practice for facilities managers:

- Track sustained classroom temperature above 80F, a threshold that has shown impacts to students' learning and health.
- Log it. Track heat-driven early dismissals, relocations, or closures.
- Surface it publicly. Report to the state and the public to drive accountability.

- Aggregate it into the ask. Which buildings breach most, how many learning days are lost, and what it would cost to stop it. The funding case, built from real numbers.

Heat-related data collection best practices:

- Standardize what's collected and how. If one school logs "it was hot" and another logs a time-stamped 91°F reading, you can't aggregate them. Set a common method, common metrics, and common reporting format statewide (or district-wide) so a room in one school means the same thing as a room in another.
- Where possible, combine objective sensors with human reporting. Sensors give you consistent, unarguable readings and can trigger real-time alerts; staff reports capture a kid sent home, a canceled practice, or an incident.
- Collect at the building and classroom level. The disparities that matter, like the schools that breach most, the communities least equipped to fix their buildings and schoolgrounds, only appear at school and classroom granularity.
- Measure conditions *and* consequences. Temperature alone undersells the problem. Capture what they caused: recess/PE adjusted or moved indoors, learning impacts, and heat-illness incidents.

What else can education officials be doing to address extreme heat?

- Identify the most vulnerable schools to heat in your school district or state.
- Make explicit the physical accommodation needs of children with asthma, obesity, taking medications, or with special needs.
- Create sample school district plans on how to cool schools in the short term.