



the work and family legal center

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## BACK-TO-SCHOOL “IDEAS-TO-ACTION”

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### Paid Sick Time and the New School Year: Ideas for Public Education and Organizing Actions

As families across the United States prepare for a new school year, work-family advocates have a timely opportunity to draw attention to the need for paid sick time. This document includes ideas for back-to-school actions concerning paid sick time, as well as examples from the New York City Paid Sick Time Campaign.

#### What are some examples of back-to-school actions regarding the need for paid sick time?

- **Enlist the Support of Key Groups Concerned with Healthy Schools:** The start of a new school year provides an opportunity for paid sick time advocates to enlist the support of **elected representatives, school nurses, and parent-teacher associations.**
  - The National Association of School Nurses has called paid sick time a legislative priority for 2011.<sup>1</sup> School nurses can be powerful messengers of the public health and education rationale for paid sick leave.
- **Use Paid Leave Research and Fact Sheets to Gain Media Attention:** Many media outlets will be covering the start of the 2011-2012 school year. Paid sick time advocates can use op-eds, letters to the editor, press releases, and paid sick time events to draw attention to the link between paid sick time and healthy schools.
  - For A Better Balance’s fact sheet geared to parents of school-age children, see <http://abetterbalance.org/web/images/stories/Documents/sickdays/factsheet/school.pdf>.
  - The New York City Paid Sick Time Coalition has used the "education case" concerning paid sick time to gain media attention. For two examples, see: <http://cityroom.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/09/08/chronicling-the-first-day-back-to-school/> and [http://articles.nydailynews.com/2010-10-08/news/29441703\\_1\\_sick-days-sick-workers-councilwoman-gale-brewer](http://articles.nydailynews.com/2010-10-08/news/29441703_1_sick-days-sick-workers-councilwoman-gale-brewer).
  - For additional public education materials regarding paid sick time, please visit the websites of A Better Balance ([www.abetterbalance.org](http://www.abetterbalance.org)) and the National Partnership for Women & Families ([www.nationalpartnership.org](http://www.nationalpartnership.org)).
- **Speak at PTA (Parent-Teacher Association) Meetings:** Paid sick time advocates can speak briefly on the importance of paid sick time at PTA meetings, distribute public education materials, and offer parents concrete ways to get involved (examples: collecting signatures, making calls to public officials, organizing actions, etc.).
- **Organize Public Education Events in Front of Schools:** The New York City campaign has successfully brought together public officials, school nurses, parents, and teacher representatives to collect signatures on petitions supporting paid sick time and to distribute paid sick time materials outside of city schools. School-related actions can be timed with school drop-off and pick-up hours.



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- To increase the reach of any public education efforts, campaign materials on paid sick time should be translated into Spanish and other relevant languages.
  - The New York City Paid Sick Time Coalition has planned successful actions outside of schools. It was particularly important to have City Council representatives join the events, enhancing media coverage and energizing their support for paid sick time. For an example of the media coverage of one school event, see [www.observer.com/2010/politics/city-council-members-blanket-city-schools-tomorrow-paid-sick-bill](http://www.observer.com/2010/politics/city-council-members-blanket-city-schools-tomorrow-paid-sick-bill).
  - Get creative at school-related actions! When creating materials and slogans, consider tying in issues of concern to many school parents: flu shots, “emergency contact” paperwork, packing school lunchboxes, etc.
  - Consider creating videos of school rallies that include interviews with concerned parents, their children, and public officials. These videos can then be distributed via YouTube and other social media outlets.
- **Hold a Rally at City Hall, the State Legislature, or the Department of Education:**
    - The New York City campaign held a demonstration outside of the Department of Education featuring a prominent school nurse. For an example of the media coverage of this event, see [http://articles.nydailynews.com/2009-09-08/local/17932675\\_1\\_sick-days-swine-flu-low-wage-workers#ixzz0QVv5jxUK](http://articles.nydailynews.com/2009-09-08/local/17932675_1_sick-days-swine-flu-low-wage-workers#ixzz0QVv5jxUK).
    - To view a flyer for a rally at City Hall that is addressed to parents, see [http://abetterbalance.org/web/images/stories/Documents/sickdays/general/to\\_parents.pdf](http://abetterbalance.org/web/images/stories/Documents/sickdays/general/to_parents.pdf).
  - **Organize a Parent “Speak Out” on the Need for Paid Sick Time:**
    - To build on the outreach and public education actions described above, paid sick time advocates can organize parent “speak outs” to engage parents, school community members, and public officials on the need for paid sick time.
    - In March 2011, the New York City campaign organized a successful parent “speak out” in Brooklyn. To view a flyer from the event, see [http://abetterbalance.org/web/images/stories/Documents/sickdays/general/speak\\_out.pdf](http://abetterbalance.org/web/images/stories/Documents/sickdays/general/speak_out.pdf).
    - A parent “speak out” is another excellent setting for a paid sick days campaign video. For a video from the parent “speak out” in Brooklyn, see [www.facebook.com/video/video.php?v=570843957013](http://www.facebook.com/video/video.php?v=570843957013).
  - **Use Social Media (facebook, twitter, blogs, youtube, flickr) to Amplify Your Message and Draw Attention to the “Education Case” for Paid Sick Time!**

**For more information on the campaign for paid sick time in New York City and throughout the country, visit [www.abetterbalance.org](http://www.abetterbalance.org).**

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<sup>1</sup> National Association of School Nurses, “NASN Legislative Priorities for 2011,” June 2011, [www.nasn.org/portals/0/legislation/2011\\_06\\_leg\\_priorities.pdf](http://www.nasn.org/portals/0/legislation/2011_06_leg_priorities.pdf).