

## CASE STUDY

### Backed by data, a community mobilizes to minimize idling at schools

The Pioneer Valley Asthma Coalition (PVAC) came together with other key community-based organizations in an effort to prevent a key asthma trigger for students – pollution from car and bus idling at Springfield area schools. Student asthma rates were particularly high in the Springfield schools, where one in five students have asthma – almost double the statewide rate. The impact of asthma is more heavily felt by the Latino and African-American population, who have significantly higher rates of asthma-related emergency room visits and hospitalizations. The mobilization of the community, bolstered by quantitative and qualitative data collection, led to the posting of anti-idling signs at public schools throughout Springfield and the district sharing educational materials with student families through newsletters, automated calls, and website content.

PVAC, which is convened by Partners for a Healthier Community, has a long history of involvement in advocacy to improve outdoor air quality. PVAC/PHC joined with Arise for Social Justice in the Springfield Community Air Mobilization Project. PHC, PVAC and Arise for Social Justice came together to conduct an assessment of the kinds of air pollution residents witnessed in their community. In addition, the groups worked together to document idling at five schools. A team including a UMass student intern collected data on car and bus volume, and presence of idling. Findings included:

- No schools had anti-idling signs or a person enforcing the state’s idling limit (see related resources below for state anti-idling law)
- Many parents in cars, and buses at some schools, exceeded the state’s idling limit
- There were opportunities for improved traffic flow at pick up and drop off that could lead to reduced idling as well as improved safety

The previous work of community partners had already created some awareness of the connection between air pollution and asthma. And while there was recognition of the problem at the school district level, and other indoor air quality efforts underway between the Springfield Public Schools and community partners, the nitty-gritty logistics of actually getting anti-idling signs produced and posted had not yet been resolved. This coordinated effort aimed to help address these final hurdles.

PVAC/PHC and ARISE came together to present data to the larger community. The community forum served as a platform for data sharing, raising awareness, and mobilizing the community in order to enhance enforcement of the state’s anti-idling law. The major action step that came out of the meeting was to actively engage the Springfield Superintendent and School Committee in reducing idling. The community partners wrote a letter to the School Committee outlining data findings and requesting that they all work together to limit idling, outlining actions the schools could take – particularly in posting anti-idling signs – and actions that community members could take. This request led to a planned press conference with the School Committee and Superintendent,



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which developed into an announcement by the SPS that the signs would be posted. In addition, Springfield Public Schools turned this into a learning opportunity by having students at Putnam Vocational Technical School produce the signs. These efforts were further supported by automated calls to Springfield families and educational materials distributed to parents.

Awareness of the negative effects of idling, and how that impacts individuals with asthma, requires ongoing communication and education efforts. Working with student designers, PVAC designed an idling “ticket” that offers idling drivers the information they need while prompting them to turn off their car. PVAC and Arise are seeking additional funding to support the production and widespread distribution of these “tickets.”

A strong relationship with key school facilities staff has helped Springfield continue to make advances in asthma-friendly environments in schools and beyond. Springfield is now a leader in green cleaning, and continues to work on initiatives to help manage outdoor and indoor air quality at schools.

### Related resources

#### **MA Regulation of Motor Vehicle Idling on School Grounds**

[http://pvasthmacoalition.org/540\\_CM\\_27\\_00\\_Anti\\_Idling\\_Regulations.pdf](http://pvasthmacoalition.org/540_CM_27_00_Anti_Idling_Regulations.pdf): Massachusetts state law requires schools to have an anti-idling policy to restrict idling time on school grounds. The law prohibits idling by vehicles that are stopping for more than five minutes by requiring that the engine be turned off.

#### **School Bus No Idling Policy, Asthma Regional Council**

<http://asthmaregionalcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/Model-No-Idling-Policy.pdf>: A model policy for any school to adapt, including rationale for the policy and guidance to reduce emissions.

#### **Idle Free Schools Toolkit, US Environmental Protection Agency Region 8**

[http://pvasthmacoalition.org/breathing\\_easy\\_school\\_iaq\\_resources](http://pvasthmacoalition.org/breathing_easy_school_iaq_resources): Resources and tools to gather data, create policy, and implement idle-free practices.

#### **Anti-idling Signs at Springfield Schools**

[http://pvasthmacoalition.org/advocacy/idle-free\\_schools](http://pvasthmacoalition.org/advocacy/idle-free_schools): Anti-idling signs used at all Springfield, MA schools.