



April 8, 2014

National Healthy Schools Day

Springfield Public Schools School Committee
1550 Main Street
Springfield, MA 01103

Dear School Committee members:

We are writing to ask your support and partnership in our efforts to reduce idling at Springfield Public Schools. Last week, Pioneer Valley Asthma Coalition, Partners for a Healthier Community and ARISE for Social Justice held a Community Meeting to discuss air pollution and its impacts in Springfield. At that meeting we reported on an air monitoring assessment project done at five Springfield elementary schools – Rebecca Johnson, Lincoln, German Gerena, Mary Pottenger, and Indian Orchard.

The assessment project was initiated because of: 1) community concern expressed to us about idling at Springfield schools, 2) high asthma rates among Springfield school children, 3) reports that idling at Springfield Schools may exceed limits in the state law, and 3) reports that anti-idling signage required on school grounds by state law were not posted.

Our assessment of the five schools found that:

- None of the schools had anti-idling signs or a person enforcing the state's idling limits
- Many parents in cars were exceeding the state's idling limit
- Buses at some schools were exceeding the state's idling limit
- Improving traffic flow at pick-up and drop-off times, as evidenced by two of the schools examined, improves safety and can reduce idling.

The consensus from the community was that we should contact the Springfield School Committee to work with us to take action to reduce idling at schools.

Idling at the school causes a deterioration of indoor air quality because the exhaust fumes and pollutants are drawn into school building through air intake systems. There is a clear link between poor indoor air quality, increased student illness and poor school performance.

Research shows that traffic based air pollution causes asthma attacks and has been linked to other health problems including

- the onset of childhood asthma
- impaired lung function
- premature death
- heart disease, stroke and other cardiovascular disease

(For more details, please see the attached handout “Air Pollution and Health” which includes links to the research data.)

Springfield has an exceptionally high rate of asthma in students with 20% of students having asthma alerts. In addition, Springfield faces tremendous disparities in health outcomes based on race/ethnicity—Latino and African-Americans have much higher rates of hospitalization for childhood asthma as well as cardiovascular disease. It is critical that we address any factors that contribute to these health disparities. This is why we are launching this Idle Free Springfield anti-idling campaign and asking for your support.

Specifically, we request that Springfield Public Schools take the following actions:

- 1) install or commit to install anti-idling signs for the following school year by May 6, 2014, World Asthma Awareness Day
- 2) ensure that school bus drivers are trained on the anti-idling law and monitored to ensure compliance
- 3) work with school staff, parents and community leaders to improve arrival/dismissal processes and enforce anti-idling law
- 4) work with us to implement educational efforts to ask parents to stop idling

At the same time, we will begin an educational effort with parents and community members asking them to:

- 1) turn off their engines while waiting for their children
- 2) respect the designated arrival/dismissal process

Large sections of Springfield meet the Pioneer Valley Metropolitan Planning Organization’s environmental justice community designation, which means that they have been identified as having vulnerable populations that often experience disproportionate exposure to environmental hazards, such as air pollution. The children and adults who live in environmental justice areas deserve extra protection, beyond adherence to existing laws.

Coming into compliance with the commonwealth's anti-idling ordinance will bring additional benefits for all residents of Springfield, not only by improving our air quality, but also by reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Our community is showing increasing interest in seeing that a climate change plan is developed for Springfield. By taking the lead in implementing an anti-idling campaign, the School Department will set an example for the entire city.

The SPS Facilities and Nursing Departments have been working for five years with the Pioneer Valley Asthma Coalition to improve indoor air quality (IAQ). An anti-idling campaign will be an additional way we can work together to improve air quality—which has been shown to improve children’s academic performance and reduce absenteeism.

http://www.epa.gov/iaq/schools/student_performance/index.html)

We have been pleased to work together with Springfield Public Schools staff in the past to reduce environmental triggers for asthma and we urge your support of this new initiative.

Tuesday, April 8, is National Healthy Schools Day, when we recognize the importance of creating a healthy school environment for children and school staff. We hope that the School Committee will join us in taking action to reduce idling at Springfield Schools.

We look forward to meeting with the School Committee and staff.

Sincerely,



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