

Reduce Vehicle Idling to Protect Student Health

SCHOOL POCKET PARKS for a healthy place to be



Air pollution poses a significant threat to human health (especially children) and the environment. Traffic exhaust fumes, abrasion of tires and brake pads, and resuspension of particulates account for about half of air pollution emissions in Pima County.

Student exposure to air pollution is a concern in school parking lots due to increased concentration of emissions from [idling vehicles](#). One vehicle dropping off and picking up kids at school puts about three pounds of pollution into the air per month. This air pollution increases the likelihood of children developing adverse health outcomes and missing days of school.

IMPROVE THE AIR WE BREATHE *by reducing vehicle idling*; this is also a way to reduce your carbon footprint!

An Alternative to Vehicle Idling: A School Pocket Park

Pocket Parks can be small areas on school grounds set aside for relaxation, enjoyment, learning and promoting a stronger community. Parents can park their vehicles to reduce vehicle idling, and use the Pocket Park to:

- Meet other parents;
- Engage with school activities;
- Provide healthier air for students to breathe.

A school Pocket Park can be located near the student pick-up area, with a bench and shaded space and resources such as a Little Free Library, rainwater harvesting display, or community garden. Your Pocket Park can be whatever you, your students, and your community can imagine!



HEALTH RISKS ASSOCIATED WITH AIR POLLUTION:

Research suggests that children are acutely at-risk to developing adverse short and long-term [health issues from breathing air pollution](#). Children are physiologically different from adults, with higher respiratory rates, faster heart rates, and thinner skin. These factors make them more susceptible to harm. Studies have linked various negative health outcomes to vehicle pollution exposure, including:

- Decreased cognitive performance;
- Reduced language abilities;
- Asthma symptoms;
- Chronic respiratory symptoms;
- Reduced lung function; and
- Respiratory infection.

[Particulate matter](#) (PM) and [ground-level ozone](#) (O₃) are air pollutants of significant concern in Pima County, especially during times of high wind, wildfire, or intense sunlight. Visit www.pima.gov/deq for current air quality levels or sign up to receive air quality advisories.

Visit the [Vehicle Idle Reduction](#) page on www.pima.gov/deq for more information.

*Protect your students
Improve your schools
Enhance your environment*



WHAT CAN YOUR SCHOOL DO?

Use the following ideas and resources to establish a Pocket Park. Level one activities require minimal resources. Levels two and three will need more time and money.

LEVEL 1: MODEST

- Plant shade trees at low cost
- Create no-idling zones
- Install free bicycle racks
- Design outdoor class activities
- Establish a parent volunteer work area

LEVEL 2: MODERATE

- Incorporate art or science projects
- Provide benches and tables
- Build bird houses or plant vegetation for butterflies
- Install a Little Free Library
- Make a Zen or Peace Garden

LEVEL 3: MORE

- Install a shade canopy or ramada
- Use a rainwater harvesting system
- Plant a vegetable garden
- Build a message or info board
- Establish a roadside barrier

LEVEL 1: Modest Expense or Effort

-  **Plant trees to provide cool shade and save energy.** Programs such as [Trees for You](#) and [Trees for Tucson](#) provide low-cost options that can create an enticing area for parents while they wait to pick up students after school.
-  **Designate a parent No-Idling Zone** at your school. The [EPA](#) and [ADEQ](#) Idle Free Schools program provide a free comprehensive toolkit, including schedules, sample letters, and pledge forms.
-  **Install free bike racks** for school visitors through the City of Tucson's [Bicycle and Pedestrian Program](#).
-  **Utilize a Pocket Park as an outdoor classroom** and engage students with interactive activities in an outdoor setting.
-  **Designate space** where teachers can provide projects for volunteering parents while they wait for students.

LEVEL 2: Moderate Expense or Effort

-  **Engage classes** by assigning art or [science projects](#) for the outdoor space.
-  **Provide benches and tables** for visitors or students to gather at for conversation or lessons.
-  **Plant low-maintenance native vegetation** that attracts butterflies or build nest boxes for desert birds. Visit the [Tucson Audubon Society](#) for educator resources and volunteer opportunities.
-  **Install a Little Free Library** stocked with free books donated from the community and [Literacy Connects](#).
-  **Make a Zen Garden** or [Peace Garden](#) as a setting for quiet reflection or student service learning.

LEVEL 3: More Expense or Effort

-  **Install a shade canopy or ramada** to protect people from the sun. Incorporate solar projects to provide shade.
-  **Contact the Watershed Management Group** to advise on rainwater harvesting. They provide consulting, trainings, and education services. Student groups or classes can manage the space for service or as part of classroom lessons.
-  **Offer students leadership opportunities** and hands-on ecology education with a school community garden. [Manzo Elementary](#) is a great example. [Community Gardens of Tucson](#) provides planting guides and resources.
-  **Build an information or message board** to post updates, carpooling opportunities, or community news for parents.
-  **Install physical barriers** as an effective strategy to limit direct exposure to particle pollution. Use the [EPA guidelines](#) for roadside or vegetative barrier installation.

Other Community Resources:

-  **Use your student council, honor society or other engaged student group** to develop and maintain the space. Perhaps parents would lend a hand as they wait for their students at the end of the school day.
-  **Utilize student groups** that provide community service such as the [National Honor Society](#), [Student Council](#), [Boy Scouts](#) (Eagle projects), and [Girl Scouts](#) (Bronze, Silver, and Gold projects) to plan, develop, and implement the project.
-  **Contact the Arizona Transportation Builders Association (ATBA)** for heavy equipment needs.
-  **Contact Pima County's Department of Environmental Quality** for free air quality and eco presentations to help you or your teachers, nurses or students learn more and take action to protect the environment and community health.