

# love my air denver

## AQ-CAN is now Love My Air Denver

By Kyle Wagner Edited by Elizabeth Scherer

Love is in the air, all right—especially now that the Denver Department of Public Health & Environment (DDPHE) is striving to improve Denver’s air quality by measuring, monitoring, and reducing air pollution surrounding metro-area schools with its newly named program, Love My Air.

It seems like a no-brainer that what we draw into our lungs has a significant impact on our bodies, but continually increasing ozone levels contain harmful nitrogen oxides and volatile organic compounds—the primary sources of which are car and industrial emissions. In addition, particulate matter—airborne particles that also come from vehicles, industrial sources, wildfires, and wood burning—clogs the air and acidifies lakes and streams while depleting soil nutrients. The result? Our lungs respond with asthma attacks, coughing, and wheezing. We also can experience a higher risk of developing more serious respiratory illnesses, like chronic bronchitis, and an increased risk of cardiovascular problems.

According to the National Weather Service (a subsidiary of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration), poor air quality is responsible for “an estimated 60,000 premature deaths in the United States each year,” and “costs from air pollution-related illness are estimated at \$150 billion per year.” In Denver schools, more than 10,000 students have been diagnosed with asthma-related conditions. Children are more susceptible to the effects of air pollution, such as decreased lung function and missed days of school. While multiple factors influence exposure to air pollution, schools have been identified as an ideal intervention point for sensor deployment, education, and empowerment.

So, what does it mean to Love My Air? Because Denver is ranked the 14th-worst major city in the U.S. for air quality, DDPHE applied for—and subsequently earned – a \$1 million grant from Bloomberg Philanthropies last year to install sensors at 40 Denver Public Schools over the next three years, in order to collect real-time data on the air quality surrounding each location. The initial pilot program comprises 10 DPS sites, and 10 more were just announced (see our list of participating schools, below). The other 20 are slated to be online by 2021. The participating schools were selected based on asthma rates, reduced-lunch rates, and school-readiness.

This means that now, for the first time, parents, teachers, and administrators can monitor air pollution on campus, in real-time, daily.

“Everyone should be able to say they love the air they breathe, and through the Love my Air program, we’re hoping to create a city where we not only feel good about our air but feel better because of it,” says Aubrey Burgess, Community Engagement Coordinator for DDPHE’s Environmental Quality division. “We didn’t want a fancy logo or big, splashy campaign, though. Instead, we wanted to show that this is a

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critical part of DDPHE’s mission, intertwined with and integral to our overall Climate Action plan to address climate change.”

As a Denver Smart City project, the program incorporates components that address other climate change issues, as well. Solar power run the air quality sensors, battery storage, and data connectivity. In addition, the program draws together talented and committed community members, such as the local artists who are painting the sensors to reflect Denver-area themes. Schools also have been encouraged to conduct contests for students to create unique artwork that reflects their school or surrounding communities.

“The success of this program is contingent on community buy-in because they’re the ones who can make the changes to create meaningful impact,” Burgess explains, adding that local branding agency Rassman Design created the Love My Air campaign. “Because this program is so easily replicated in any municipality or school, we are excited to connect with other places that want to participate, so that they can ‘Love My Air,’ too.”

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