

Cleaner Air Sooner Schools: Background Research

About: Context, objectives and rationale

Methodology

Timeline

Findings: Desk research

Machine learning

Global

Municipal

Implications





Cleaner Air Sooner Schools: Executive Summary

From 14 benchmark campaigns since the 1980s best practise can be summarised in four key points:

- 1. Embed message in all assets across every channel
- 2. Include constructive and feasible proposals
- 3. Solicit support from local celebrities and politicians
- 4. Give a face or faces to the campaign

From machine learning analysis of 467 viral stories, accounting for over 2.5 million interactions:

- 5. Create a strong visual impact via art/image/graphics
- 6. Embed practical, low-effort supporter actions
- 7. Make your voices heard via letters, petitions
- 8. Pool resources and inspiration via social media







Context: objectives and rationale

Cool World Consulting is launching a Cleaner Air Sooner Schools program in Autumn 2020, which will provide guidance, resources and case studies on simple and achievable projects that schools can undertake to achieve cleaner air. The program is supported by the Clean Air Fund, and is running in collaboration with a Clean Air Schools Framework set up by Global Action Plan.

Cool World Consulting asked Signify to participate in the project as online research and marketing partners. Our remit has been to establish what factors have contributed to the success of prior programmes in schools in terms of student engagement, and wider public interest. In addition to informing the promotion strategy for the Cleaner Air Schools initiative, we hope it will be of interest to schools, local authorities and clean air campaigners across the country.

This briefing details preliminary research carried out by Signify consisting of desk research and a machine learning analysis of social media, designed to identify the features, content and elements that led some environmental projects based in schools to have huge impact in their communities.

In addition, we have looked at the extent to which the CV-19 pandemic has changed attitudes towards clean air among UK public and parents specifically.







Methodology

Our background research combined desk research with machine learning to find what the common factors are in compelling, effective campaigns and schools programs.

Desk research - what makes a great campaign? Studying 14 very high-profile campaigns (dating back to the 1980s) and identifying common factors in their design and implementation that grabbed public and media attention.

Machine learning - what spikes public interest? Using our proprietary ShareScore AI to scan and analyse the content of 467 pieces of viral content (news articles, videos and blogs), which garnered **2.5 million** interactions. ShareScore determines what themes, personalities and types of content correspond to a high level of public interest.

COOLWORLD CONSULTING 1. Source Data Obtain all content about school campaigns and air pollution

2. Clean Data Remove unrelated articles and noise including bots

3. Apply threshold Ignore articles below an applied engagement threshold (50 shares)

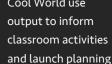
4. ShareScore Use AI to extract key concepts and entities within viral coverage

5. Insight Human analysts identify factors that inspire public interest

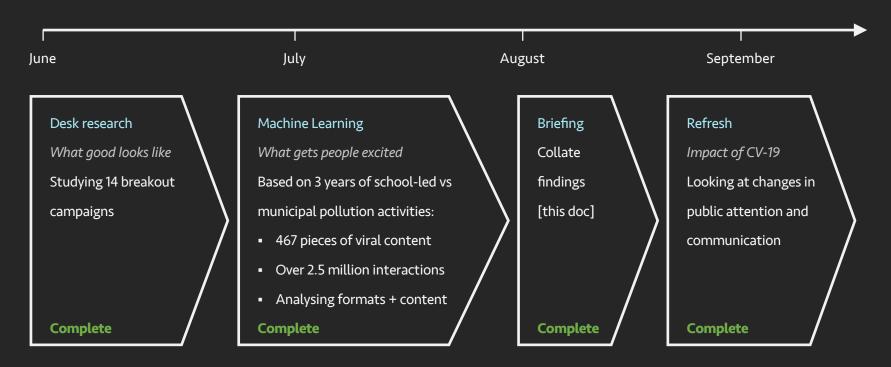
Cool World use



6. Planning

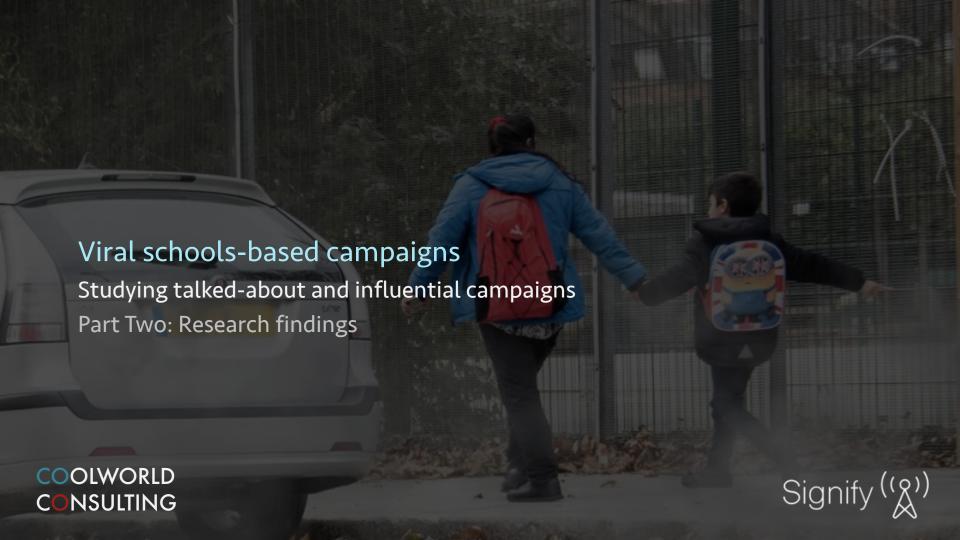


Timeline: Background research









Catching on: what does great look like?

We began with an analysis of 14 breakout schools-based or pupil-led environmental campaigns from around the world, going back as far as the 1980s, to single out some common factors in the most impactful programs since the 1980s.

1. Educating others and spreading awareness

The most popular initiatives feature resources that encapsulate the problem and contain a clear call to action, such as signing a petition or sharing a video. 2. Constructive and meaningful proposals

By citing policy and process changes, young campaigners created goals for government and business, and pressure to perform. They also celebrated some major policy shifts.

3. Asking for support

By overtly involving local celebrities, and organizing public events and rallies, effective schools-based campaigns create much wider awareness and support.

4. Having a 'face' for the campaign

Many of the most effective campaigns have a charismatic leader who embodies the campaign, although this is not desirable or practical for a school-based initiative.

















Examples: what does great look like?

1. Educating others and spreading awareness



The Sink Or Swim (USA) project includes video, PPT, infographics and quizzes all built around ocean pollution. The project has also been featured on MTV, National Geographic and TED.

2. Constructive and meaningful proposals



Campaigns like *Kids Against Plastic* (UK) and *Strawbassadors* (Australia) have completely reshaped fast food chains policy on single-use plastic cutlery, straws and toys.

3. Asking for support



Plant For the Planet (Germany) has now recruited more than 100,000 children from 74 countries around the world to their planting challenge. They have also raised millions via micro donations.





School & Pupil-led action What inspires public interest?

Based on coverage for school and pupil action around pollution in the past three years. (149 blogs, articles and videos accounting for >1 million shares). This coverage includes all mentions of 'pollution' and therefore skews towards single-use plastic campaigns.

#1 Culture: *Blue Planet* defined pollution, but a teacher dumping plastic in a local pool also created a viral moment. Backlash against single use 'Red Nose Day' noses is also prominent.

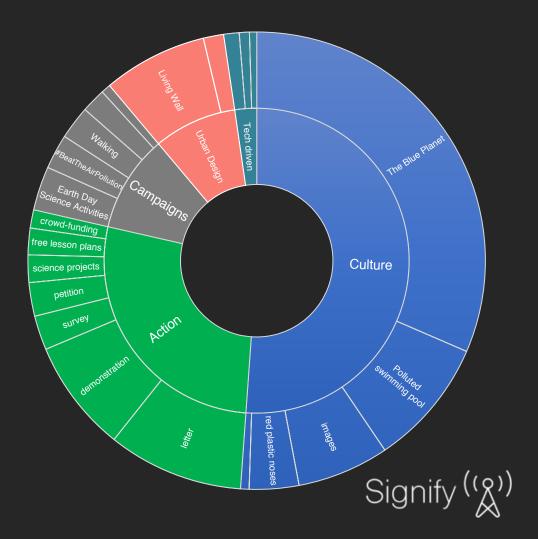
#2 Action: Demos, petitions and surveys engaged the public but letter writing proved even more effective

#3 Campaigns: Earth Day brought schools together

#4 Urban Design: Living walls attracted wide interest

#5: Tech driven: Moderate interest in air filtration, sensors





Example activity

Physical demonstration

Filling the school pool with plastic bottles brought the notion of ocean pollution to life for pupils, who were visibly shocked by the state of the pool, before diving in to help with the clean up.

The activity made the problem tangible for pupils, and fired them up for further action. The spectacle also attracted news crews from ITV and local press.













School & Pupil-led action Who inspires public interest?

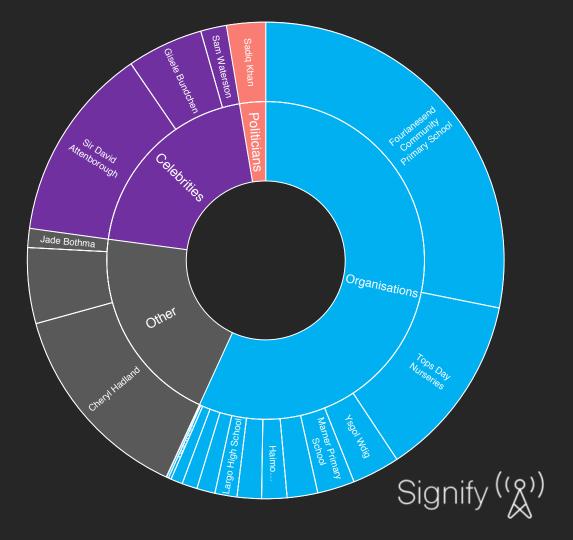
#1 Organisations: Most notable action has been individual organisations rather than large orchestrated movements, particularly schools. Fourlanesend Primary in Cornwall got a letter from Sir David Attenborough backing their campaign against plastic pollution.

#2 Other: Surprisingly, non-celebrities were more prominent than famous faces. Most of these were teachers like Cheryl Hadland, head of a nursery that decided to ban glitter.

#3 Celebrities: Sir David Attenborough dwarfs other celebrities and is very active visiting schools. Gisele Bundchen is a UN Clean Air Ambassador while Sam Waterstone spoke out about plastic pollution.

#4 Politicians: Apart from Sadiq Khan, few politicians have been roped into school/pupil-led action





Example activity

Letter writing

Pupils at Fourlanesend Primary School in Cornwall leveraged a cultural phenomenon (Red Nose Day) to draw attention to a separate issue – single use plastics – and promote their ocean clean-up efforts.

Their letter-writing to Comic Relief (and their photogenic home-made noses) attracted media attention and sparked a public endorsement for their efforts from Sir David Attenborough.

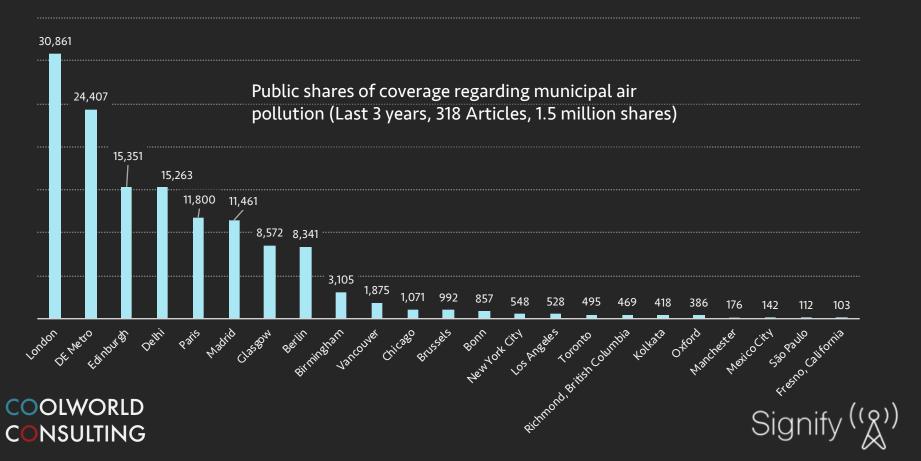








Municipal attention: London leads the world



Municipal action

What inspires public interest?

Based on coverage for air pollution in cities published and shared in the past three years. (318 blogs, articles and videos accounting for >1.5 million shares)

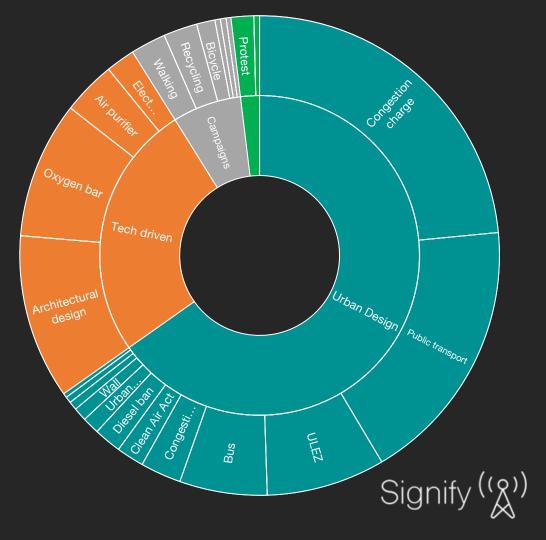
#1 Urban Design: Congestion charges, zonal restrictions and better access to cleaner public transport inspired the most interest from the public.

#2 Tech driven: Public are quite interested in technical solutions like smarter building design, opening of oxygen bars and installation of air purifiers although these highlight lack of air quality. Interest in electric vehicles as a solution, was moderate.

#3 Campaigns: Walking, recycling and cycling schemes such as city-wide walking days and cycling days attracted moderate interest.

#4 Protest: Moderate interest in Protests, mainly based on possible traffic disruption.





Ideas for action Simple, radical, free

While London, Edinburgh, Madrid have all imposed anti-congestion zones, Paris mayor Anne Hidalgo caused a sensation by raising the prospect of free travel on public transport to help address dreadful air quality in Paris.

Even discussion of such a radical measure raises awareness of the impact of moving journeys to public transport – as well as forcing practical engagement from across the political spectrum.







Municipal action

Who inspires public interest?

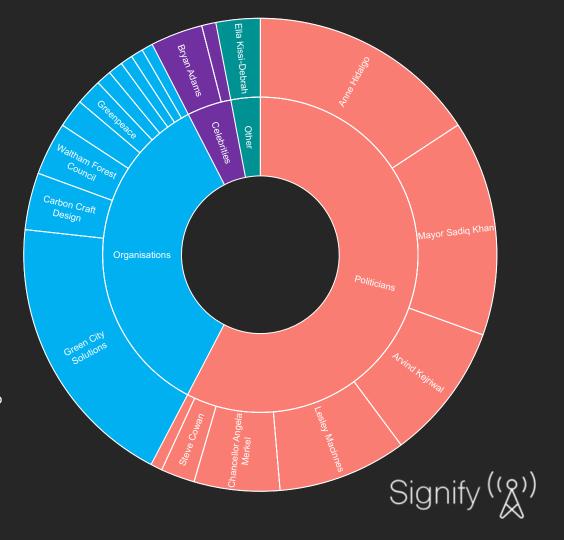
#1 Politicians: Anne Hidalgo of Paris and London Mayor Sadiq Khan are among a number of very prominent politicians featured in coverage – likely through their connection to urban design programs.

#2 Organisations: Pioneers like Green City Solution (they are involved in developing City Trees tech) attract a good share of public interest.

#3 Celebrities: Only one celebrity has a significant profile within this municipal pollution sub-segment – Bryan Adams, who shared viral photos of air pollution in Delhi.

#4 Other: Amongst the general public, the figure most associated with municipal pollution is Ella Kissi-Debrah (and her mother) after Ella's death aged 9 was attributed to air pollution in South London.





Build support
Changing mindsets

Sadiq Khan has been a consistent advocate for antipollution measures but local schools have also worked effectively to create both pressure and support for GLA measures.

A single car-free day does a huge amount to spark debate and raise awareness around the impact of unnecessary car journeys, and the cheap alternatives available.









Implications for schools

According to this research, these four factors correlated to wider engagement from parents and the public, so consider these points when planning projects.

#1 Strong visual impact

Campaigns featuring pupils, with shareable artwork or photo stories, have greatest impact. Celebrity endorsements also help increase engagement. Develop a plan to publicise each scheme project.

#2 Be practical and actionable

By putting forward simple, actionable and proactive suggestions, you increase uptake and momentum.

#3 Encourage the children to make their voices heard

Letter writing is highly effective and a great activity for pupils. If feasible, participation and engagement with local politicians will widen audience and increase press coverage. Petitions also effective at raising awareness locally.

#4 Share energy and inspiration

Ensure your successes are shared, by publicising your projects via hashtags and sharing resources.





Viral schools-based campaigns

Studying talked-about and influential campaigns

Appendix: Impact of CV-19





CV-19 impact assessment

Signify used their our proprietary ShareScore tool to analyse global English language media coverage of air pollution in the last six months (March-September) and see if the overall volume had gone up, and what percentage of discussion relates directly to the pandemic, or to schools.

In total we looked at 985 articles, blogs and videos from the period, shared across Facebook, Twitter and other channels over 1.3 million times.

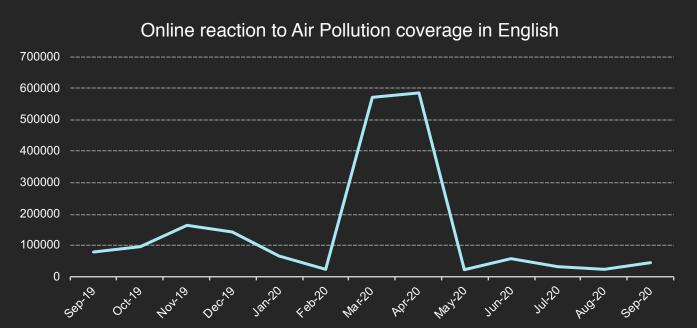
At the beginning of lockdown, there was a wave of public enthusiasm for the positive impact on air quality. Our objective was to see if any of this enthusiasm for cleaner air persists in public discourse, and to what extent air quality figures in the thoughts of parents and society in general as they contemplate a return to school.







Air pollution debate surged during lockdown, but was not sustained



From February 2020 to March 2020, when lockdowns around the world began - engagements with coverage on air pollution increased by 2358%, staying at this elevated level until May.

This was mainly contributed by widely shared observations on how air pollution had dropped and air quality increased as a result of nationwide lockdown.

After June the topic faded in terms of media coverage, but also public engagement with continuing stories.

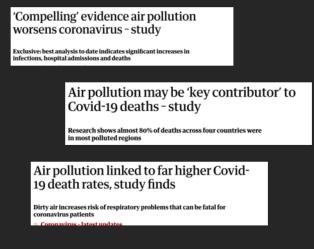




We were able to categorise positive, and negative coverage



51% of all engagements during the period were associated to positive news of air pollution decreasing and/or air quality increasing.



17% engagements were on negative coverage about air pollution causing more coronavirus deaths and aggravating effects of the virus.





We were able to classify positive, and negative coverage



'Compelling' evidence air pollution worsens coronavirus - study

Exclusive: best analysis to date indicates significant increases in infections, hospital admissions and deaths

Air pollution may be 'key contributor' to Covid-19 deaths - study

Research shows almost 80% of deaths across four countries were in most polluted regions

Air pollution linked to far higher Covid-19 death rates, study finds

Dirty air increases risk of respiratory problems that can be fatal for coronavirus patients

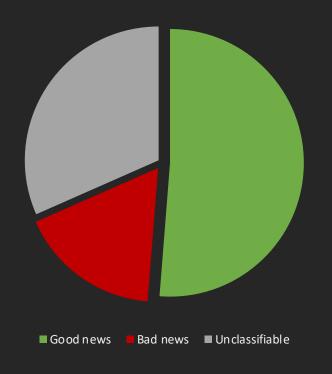
Coronavirus - latest undates





There was much higher global awareness of good news...

Social engagement around Air Pollution

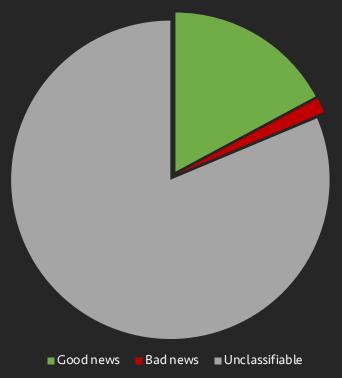






...but this was driven by much more coverage for 'good news'

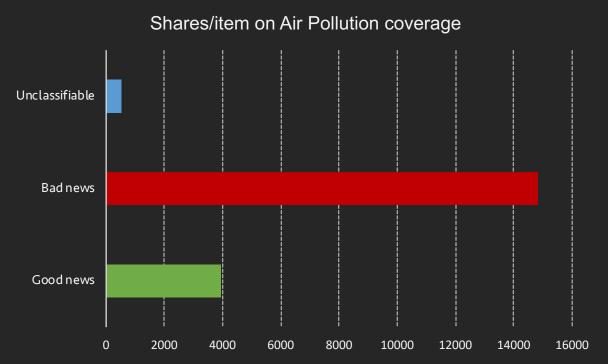
Coverage published around Air Pollution







So actually, bad news travels farther







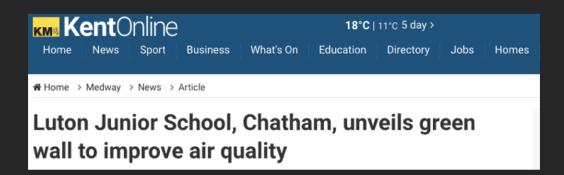
School related coverage was effectively non-existent

There were just 16 notable news items about school schemes during the period (1.6% of coverage) with negligible public interest (0.08% of total engagement).

The most shared piece was from the Manchester Evening News and concerns a learner pack related to idling.

Coverage included infrastructure and inventions but the most recurrent theme (31% of coverage) was school runs, drop off and pick up – and associated exposure to vehicle fumes.









COVID-19 impact: Summary

- News media have a strong interest in positive, proactive campaigns and good news around this topic.
- Public are more likely to share content that concerns health risks.
- Cleaner Air comms for media should include both dangers and practical, hopeful solutions.
- Interest in the air quality impact of the pandemic peaked in April and May and has fallen off sharply. To put a positive spin on this, there are fewer stories about air pollution to compete for coverage.
- At the height of first wave, activists worried that it was insensitive to be excited about cleaner air. We now know that both press and public are very interested in upsides from the pandemic, and valued that improvement in air quality.





Thank you

For questions about this briefing, please contact <u>Signify Group</u>



