



Planning Considerations for Walking and Rolling to School in Fall 2020

Around the US, school is going to look different this fall. Due to the COVID-19 global pandemic, school districts and states are considering several variations of in-school and at-home learning. In-school learning might include staggered arrival/dismissal times, rotating schedules with different students attending on different days and other options to limit contact. To meet physical distancing requirements, school bus service may also look different and may result in increased private vehicle congestion on streets near the school or families walking or biking to school who have not done so in the past. Parents will have a high priority for both their children's health and emotional well-being, as well as balancing the demands of their work and other responsibilities.

It's going to take a collective, flexible approach for children to arrive to school safely, on-time and ready to learn. **Walking and rolling to school can be part of the solution to school re-opening challenges.**

The following questions are intended to help guide schools and communities in planning for walking and biking to school when schools re-open.

1. How can we appeal to families to choose walking and biking when possible?

The most compelling and fitting encouragement for walking and rolling depends on the school community, so there are many potential messages to consider:

- Walking or rolling to school has benefits for mental and physical health. Physical activity opportunities like recess, PE and after-school sports will be more limited than in the past, so an active trip can be critical for students. It can also provide a much-needed chance to rebuild community and social connection that has been lost in recent months.
- The trip to school can be a chance for a kid to “be a kid” in a time with a lot of change and new structure.
- There are many changes happening and this is an opportunity to set new habits, including walking and biking.
- Walking and biking is a way that families can contribute to the health of their community by leaving space on the school bus for those who need it and reducing traffic in the vehicle queue.
- Avoiding the drop-off line, whether by walking from home or from a remote drop-off location, might be particularly appealing for parents and caregivers motivated by convenience.
- A pledge to walk or bike a certain number of days or on certain days of the week can help solidify commitment.

Please also remind families who must drive to [slow down and yield for people who are walking](#).

2. How will we address physical distancing for walkers and bicyclists?

AROUND THE SCHOOL

- On streets with many walkers, engage the city to discuss options to re-allocate street space using temporary barriers to allow more room for walking. Additionally, designating specific routes to the school can focus street changes and discourage cut-through traffic. See examples of [School Streets](#) designs from NACTO's *Streets for Pandemic Response and Recovery*. Or consider closing down the street in front of a school altogether. See the [School Street Initiative](#) for instructions.
- Lawn signs or chalk stencils (with city permission) on routes to school can remind students about physical distancing while also being playful and fun.

ON THE SCHOOL CAMPUS

- Examine options for using multiple school entrances to maximize space for physical distancing.
- Rethink parking lot space. At a school in Portland, Oregon, pre-COVID-19, part of the school parking lot was closed-off 15 minutes before school start to create an area for physical activity. A similar approach could be used to provide more space to accommodate physical distancing requirements.
- Develop a system for arrival and departure that keeps families at least six feet from each other. Distancing markers may be needed on walkways. Engage the school nurse or health liaison to plan for where and how walking and biking students will have health screenings prior to school entry.

3. Where and how can bicycles be parked?

- At racks, post signs to (a) reinforce physical distancing at racks and (b) remind students to wear masks. Consider releasing kids who bike a few minutes early so they all have time to get their bikes while taking turns and social distancing.
- If all rack spaces are not typically full, block off every other spot to reinforce social distancing. If there are enough rack spaces, schools could assign parking to individual students (and be sure to leave additional parking for students or visitors who don't ordinarily bike).
- Usage of bike racks may require following disinfection protocols or may be prohibited altogether, as set by local or state health guidance.
- Designate additional places for bike parking, such as along a fence.
- Obtain or [build](#) (with permission) additional racks (and put them in a highly visible place, like outside the school office windows).

4. What else can help reduce the amount of private vehicle traffic arriving at the school?

- Establish one or more remote drop-off locations. Identify and reach out to local businesses, churches, city/county governments and others with parking lots on a walkable route to the school. See example [instructions](#) from Denver SRTS and the [Three Block Challenge](#) from Boulder Valley School District SRTS. Parents will need to walk their child the remainder of the route to school unless other arrangements are made. A simple map can help make this feel more possible for parents to do.

- Walking school buses – groups of students supervised by adults on the route to school – can help share the responsibility among families. For example, the SRTS program in Marin County, California, is initiating PedPods; encouraging a few families with students in the same grade to walk together while maintaining physical distance. The idea is to maintain the same “exposure circle” as the students will have in class while supporting parents in trading off the responsibility of accompanying students. This adult supervision is also a way that parents whose schedules permit walking to school can help families who cannot do so.

Support pedestrian and bicyclist road safety

Local governments are critical partners in addressing road safety on the route to school. Families need to have places to walk separated from motor vehicle traffic and road crossings that help protect walkers and bicyclists. Drivers need to slow down and yield to pedestrians. [Schools](#) and [caregivers](#) can help students learn and practice safety skills. Many state and local agencies have developed their own pedestrian and bicycle skills trainings. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration toolkit [Everyone is a Pedestrian](#) offers community-based messaging and graphics.

For more information

The [Safe Routes Partnership](#) will be releasing recommendations for three back-to-school scenarios later this summer.

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