SCHOOLS CHANGING TRANSPORTATION

Becoming the Advocate!

A Guide for Local Leaders

ACTIVE TRANSPORTATION
ALLIANCE

Becoming the Advocate! Schools Changing Transportation: A Guide for Local Leaders was developed by the Active Transportation Alliance to empower school boards, school councils, parent groups and other organizations to make changes that will increase the number of walking, cycling and public transit commutes by students and school employees. These groups, while governed differently, all have the ability to make an impact on the school's culture and help change current transportation practices.

From adopting new curricula to installing new crosswalks, from bicycle lanes to speed bumps, the changes can be great or small. But whatever changes you would like to make to the transportation practices around your school, this guide will take you step-by-step through the process of becoming an advocate to make them happen. The examples provided will give you some ideas, but we strongly encourage you to create your own solutions and seek out additional resources.

If you have any questions or comments, please contact the staff at Active Transportation Alliance. We are eager to provide added assistance, information and resources to support your efforts whenever possible. We would also be excited to hear your stories of success – and failure – to help us better help other groups advocate for the changes they would like to make to the transportation practices and habits at their schools.

Good luck!

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Step 1. Assembling Your Team

Before you can begin your campaign, you first have to identify key stakeholders and recruit them to be a part of your team. Representatives from the school board, school administration, faculty, community affiliates and parent groups are just some of the people you may want to involve in your campaign. Recruiting individuals from a variety of backgrounds creates a strong team, able to identify synergies and any possible competing interests related to your project. The broader the backgrounds of your team members, the broader range of resources you will be able to tap.

Whether you include members from all these groups or just a couple of them, these are groups you should consider including in your recruitment efforts, along with their corresponding responsibilities, duties or interests:

School board and school council members
Responsible for implementing district- or school-wide educational reforms governed by educational policy and school system administration.

School administrators
Oversee all aspects of the operation of schools in their district. Responsible for monitoring school instruction, financial operations, building maintenance, etc.

Teachers, nurses and other school employees
Implement curricula and provide instruction to students, health and safety best practices and maintenance of school facilities.

Community affiliates
Provide resources for out-of-school operations, such as park districts and neighborhood associations.

Parents
The prime constituency for the education and safety of children at schools. Usually a great resource for creating and supporting new programs aimed at making schools safe havens and encouraging children to live healthier lifestyles.

After you have targeted your recruitment groups and assembled your team, the next thing to do – before the team starts advocating the change in the community – is to outline the project. It's a simple 3-phase process:

1) Assign task responsibilities for each member of the team.
Appendix 1 is a sample Task Responsibility Worksheet that provides structure for assigning tasks and responsibilities.

2) Set goals for each step of the process.
To achieve the best results, these goals should follow the SMART method. They should be:

Specific – Define clear end-states for each goal. This eliminates potential confusion about the work to be accomplished.Measurable – Define goals that can be assessed as to how successfully, or at least verified, that they have been reached.Attainable – Define goals that are not too easily reached but instead entail a reasonable degree of stretch. Conversely, the goals should not be so difficult that they could be perceived as "impossible," which can have a de-motivating effect on the team.Relevant – Define goals that are pertinent to the over all objective of the campaign. If an objective does not support the campaign in any way, then it probably should not appear on your Task Responsibility Worksheet. Time-specific – Ensure the clarity of the goals by setting key milestones and deadlines for them.

Continually monitor the team members' progress during the process to make sure their goals remain necessary to accomplishing the overall goal, based on the work that has already been accomplished.

3) Make a change! Just follow the roadmap created by next steps of this guide.

Step 2. Identifying Your Issue

Every school serves different students, has different teachers and engages a different community. What issues and challenges do each of these constituencies at your school face? Or maybe you already have an issue that you want to pursue. If not, take a few moments to review the questions related to the issues listed below.

Traffic Concerns

1. Where is your school located? Are there any streets or intersections that cause particular concern? If, so what are they?

2. Who has jurisdiction over these streets and intersections? The state? County? Municipality? Township?

3. What types of streets are they? Residential? Commercial? Arterial?

4. What is the posted speed limit? What is the average speed of traffic on the street?

5. What traffic control devices are present? School Zone? Flashing beacons? Crosswalk? Traffic signal? Stop sign?

6. What type of traffic travels the streets? What is the average daily traffic count (ADTC)?

7. When are the streets the busiest and why? School arrival and dismissal times? Morning and evening rush hours? Retail hours?

8. Do vehicles stop and yield regularly for pedestrians and cyclists?

9. Are these intersections or streets monitored by crossing guards? If so, who has authority over them? The school district? The Police Department? The state? County? Municipality? Township?

10. What observations do crossing guards have about these intersections and streets?

11. What traffic laws do drivers break? Failing to yield to stop signs, traffic signals or pedestrians? Speeding? Obstructing crosswalks? Cell phone use or other distracted driving?

12. Is there a history of collisions near the school?

13. Who was involved in the collisions? Students?

14. Where and when have these collisions occurred? A certain part of an intersection? In the crosswalk? Mid-block?

15. Did the collisions involve multiple cars?

16. Did the Police respond promptly?

17. Could the presence of crossing guards have averted the collisions?

Speeding Issues

1. Why do motorists use a particular street? Fewer stops? Less traffic? Higher speed limit? The most direct route to destinations other than the school? Where are they going?

2. If an arterial street, where does it lead? Big box store? Library? Commuter train station?

3. What causes collisions on the street?

4. Why do motorists fail to stop and yield to pedestrians and other motorist at the intersection?

5. When do motorist drive fastest on the street?

Congestion Problems

1. How many students, faculty and other staff members walk, cycle, carpool, take the bus and drive private vehicles to school? (If unknown, conduct a survey.)

2. How many students, faculty and other staff members live less than a half mile from the school? From a half mile to 1 mile? From a mile to 1.5 miles? Greater than 1.5 miles? (If unknown, conduct a survey.)

3. Why do parents drive their children to school?

4. What kind of community support does the school have at arrival and dismissal times? Crossing guards? Police? Student patrol? Parental patrol? Volunteers? Faculty? Other staff?

5. If intersections and crossings are monitored by crossing guards or others, what areas do they patrol? When do their shifts start and end? When do students arrive at and leave from school? Where are they coming from and going to? Are students crossing alone?

6. What are the most common issues that occur during arrival and dismissal times? (Conduct a survey of parents, students, faculty and other staff.)

7. Is there a separate entrance for pedestrians and cyclists or do they comingle with motor vehicles?

8. Is there a bicycle rack at the school? For how many bicycles?

Community Hazards

1. Are there any hazards near the school? What are they? Abandoned buildings? Stray dogs? Intersections with high collision rates? Speeding traffic? Incomplete, missing or cracked sidewalks? Railroad tracks?

2. Are the sidewalks and crossings ADA compliant?

3. Is crime in the area high or perceived to be high?

4. Are any students eligible for hazardous route busing? Those living in which neighborhoods or blocks?

5. Does the school provide hazard busing? Why?

6. When did hazard busing begin? Did something change for this to be initiated? A change in school district boundaries? Street widening? Parental complaint? Increased train traffic? Missing sidewalks?
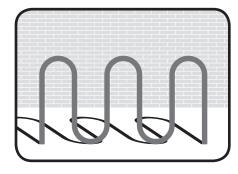
7. Who pays for hazard busing?

Obesity Risks

1. Do students get enough physical activity in their school day?

2. Does the school offer daily Physical Education instruction?

3. What are the overweight and obesity rates of the student population?

4. Could walking, biking and transit options at the school help mitigate obesity concerns?
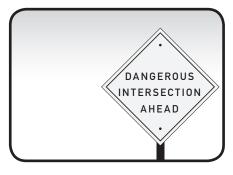
Education Needs

1. Have students been observed during arrival and dismissal times darting into traffic? Do students forget to look both ways before crossing the street? Have motorists almost hit students at crossings?

2. Are students given instruction about how to safely walk to school? About how to safely cycle to school?

3. Are students and parents aware of any special rules about walking or cycling to school?

4. Are students aware of public transport options they can take to school?

5. Do parents need to be better informed about issues that are creating an unsafe environment around the school?

Answering these questions about your school, students, parents, faculty and other staff, location and demographics will help you identify the challenges you confront at the school, and help you decide which issues you want to pursue.

In the space below, list at least five transportation concerns and issues students, parents, faculty and other staff members face at the school.

(Example) *Parents are reluctant to allow their children to walk to school, because they have to cross a high-speed road near the school and there is no safe crossing monitored by crossing guards.*

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DANGEROUS INTERSECTION AHEAD

Identify barriers to accomplishing your task.
Look at transportation concerns and issues you listed. What are some barriers that might prevent you from finding and implementing solutions to overcome the concerns and issues?

(Example) *The village and school district cannot provide enough funding to designate a crosswalk and provide a crossing guard.*

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5. _____

Programs, activities and changes addressing your issue
Examine the issues and the corresponding barriers. Which issues have the greatest barriers? The fewest barriers? This will help you select the issue or problem your team wants to address, one that you can solve. For some issues, such as adding a transportation component to existing curricula, small changes requiring only minor changes to school or district policy might be all that is necessary to accomplish your goal. More involved issues might require substantial work by the entire team to complete the project.

From your list of transportation concerns and issues, select one for the team to address. With your issue identified and selected, you can then define your goal, create a plan to accomplish it and assign measures of success. Be creative. It might help to implement small events or programs in the early stages of your project to create support for the larger transportation safety campaign your entire list of concerns and issues comprises.

From the ideas your team generates and the examples listed below, make a list of programs, activities and changes that will make transportation at your school safer and more efficient. For a more detailed list of concerns and issues; possible tools, changes and solutions; and outcomes, see Appendix 2, Implementation Options. Note that funding will be discussed in Step 5.

(Example) *To raise awareness of the problem, the school district will hold a Walk to School event, during which the dangerous road in front of the school is closed to allow students to cross it safely.*

At parent-teacher conferences, we will encourage parents to sign a petition stating that they want their children to get more physical activity during the school day; they also want to make walking and cycling to school safe transportation options.

The school district will attend a village board meeting to gain its support by demonstrating the how the school's community is united behind our issue.

In anticipation of planned improvements to the crosswalk in front of the school, the school district will initiate a pedestrian and bicycle safety education program to better prepare students to walk and cycle to school when work on the crosswalk is complete.

Step 3. Collecting Data

To gain community support for your issue, validate it with facts and research. The Internet is a good place to start. You will find a variety of resources for research and statistics supporting your issue. What resources you tap will depend on what issue you are confronting and the solution you are pursing. See Appendix 3, Resources for a list of resources and the type of research that can be found on them.

Ask your team these questions to help you focus your research efforts.
What data would we like to collect and how will it support the case for our issue?

(Example) The Department of Transportation has collision statistics for the dangerous intersection near the school. This data reveals the necessity of improvements to the intersection, including a safe crosswalk on the high-speed road near the school, monitored by a crossing guard. The Department of Health has statics about child obesity of the community. If the crosswalk is improved, more students will be able to walk and cycle to school safely, increasing the physical activity students get, resulting in lowered child obesity rates.

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Data found using the resources listed in Appendix 3 easily supplements any research you conduct, such as the surveys mentioned in Step 2. This targeted research should shore up the case for your issue, generating greater school and community support. When you conduct your own research, narrow your focus. Determine what supplementary data you need to gain added support for your case and whom you need to survey to collect this data.

What research could the team conduct that will provide data that will support our case?

(Example) *A survey of residents in the local community (every household within a four-block radius of the school) about interest in improving dangerous crossing conditions near the school and their home will reveal local support for the issue. Asking parents of students at the school if they would allow their children to walk or cycle to school if the crossing is improved would likely reveal even more community support.*

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Conducting your research with parents, faculty, other school staff and community members can be done in a number of ways. Parents and community members can be reached by calling or visiting them at their home, or through email surveys or community group meetings. Parents can also be reached at school functions. School faculty and staff members may prefer a presentation at a school meeting, individual meetings or even email surveys. Community members may best be reached through ward or community e-newsletters, phone calls, community groups or personal visits.

Regardless of how you go about conducting your research and collecting data, it is important to keep your questions short and to the point.

(Examples) *Would you support improvement to the crosswalk in front of the school to make it safer? If yes, what kind of improvements?*

How does your child get to school now? If improvements were made to the crosswalk in front of the school and it was monitored by a crossing guard during arrival and dismissal times, would you allow your child to walk to school?

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Step 4. Building Momentum

After you have selected your issue, stated your case and collected data to support it, next focus your argument to raise awareness of your issue and build support for it in the community and school.

The first step in building support is to have a clear statement. You will probably have to adapt it for the different audiences the team talks to, but a simple and concise statement lays a foundation you can build your argument upon for any audience.

Write a short statement (two to five sentences) that organizes your ideas, defines your strategy and clearly communicates your issue and solution.

(Example) *Students of Lincoln Elementary School, their parents and community members will benefit greatly from improvements to make a safe crossing of busy Washington Road in front of the school. Most of the students live within an easily walked four-block radius of the school. The State Department of Health reports that 64% of children between the ages of five and eighteen living in this same area are either obese or overweight. We surveyed residents in the neighborhood and an overwhelming majority (85%) expressed an interest in improving the safety of the intersection by creating a crosswalk and hiring a crossing guard during school arrival and dismissal times. Over three-quarters of parents said they would allow their children to walk to school if these improvements were made.*

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After you have written your statement, generate a list of the people you need to reach out to in order to get implement the solution or change.

Prioritize the list by placing the names of people easiest to reach at the top. Approach these people first.

Also organize the list of names into the different audiences so you can then determine how you would like to contact each of them. Options include:

- Email

- Telephone calls

- Home visits

- Letters

- School meetings and functions

- Community group meetings

- Governmental meetings

- Individual in-person meetings

- Petitions

- Flyers

Survey your team members to learn if any are associated with of the audiences you plan to contact; it might be best to have people already associated with that audience make contact with it. Your audiences and methods of contact might include:

- City officials and engineers of local municipalities

- Individual in-person meetings, letter, petition, etc.

- School faculty and staff

- Staff meetings, surveys etc.

- Parents and students

- School functions, report cards, council meetings, etc.

- Community members

- Flyers, group meetings, walking audits and walk ability surveys, etc

- Members of the greater community

- Flyers, local business surveys, group meeting with crossing guards, park districts officials, hospitals and community centers, etc.

Select your audiences and how you will contact them. Include specific names.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

Also edit your statement to directly address each of the audiences your team will approach, including a list of "asks" for each audience. These are the things you would like each audience to do or provide. It could be as little as general support (community members) or as great as plans and funding (local municipalities).

See Appendix 4, How Tos and Samples for more audience engagement resources.

Step 5. Lobbying for Your Cause

Build and maintain your momentum through the support of your audiences until you believe have you a significant group to advocate your issue and change. Now it's time to lobby for your cause.

For every change the team has defined, there is a person or department that holds the power to decide whether or not that change can be made. The leverage you have with theses decision makers depends on who is on your team and how much momentum you have been able to build to this point through the support of your audiences. With enough data and significant community support, decision makers will have to take notice and listen to your statement.

The key is to identify the decision makers who have the power to make the different changes you want to see made. This might be one of the more challenging tasks of your team's work. If you are fortunate, you might already have on your team decision makers who can directly impact your issue, but you cannot count on that. So it is vital to target the right decision makers.

Your issue and the nature of the change to address it will determine the decision makers you will need to lobby. Some issues and the decision makers to approach about them include:

- Infrastructure, collision concerns, abandoned houses, stray dogs, safety concerns, etc (Alderman/City Council member)

- Infrastructure, safety concerns, abandoned houses, stray dogs, trains, etc. (Mayor)

- Crossing guards, speeding and other traffic, collisions, safety, etc. (Police)

- Infrastructure, collision concerns, traffic design (Public Works Department, city engineers)

- Encouragement and education programs (walking and cycling to school events, frequent walker and cyclist cards, walking school buses), walking school buses, school infrastructure (School District)

In many cases, you may need to lobby more than just one decision maker to get the decision to implement a change.

Refer to the list of programs, activities and changes you generated in Step 2. For each change, ask your team:

Who can make an official decision to implement the changes we want? Write the person, people or groups here:

(Example) *In order to improve the dangerous crosswalk, we first contact the city's public works/transportation office to see why this intersection has not been made safe for children to use. We then speak to the school's transportation director to ask why the crosswalk does not have a crossing guard. We finally schedule a meeting with city council members to discuss the issue so we may work with them to make the change happen.*

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If you don't know or are unsure about whom to speak with, find out! Discussing your issue with any of the above authorities can be helpful. Even if they do not have direct decision-making powers to make the changes your team wants, these officials can refer you to the people who do. And in the process, you may gain powerful allies to your cause.

Once you determine whom to target, develop your plan of action. This may include writing letters to or meeting with public officials, going to city council meetings and speaking with local public works officials.

Cite your research and leverage any powerful partners when making your case to decision makers. The more people you can involve, the better! If you are appealing to the mayor or alderman, telephone calls, email and letters from faculty and other school staff members, parents, students and others in the community will demonstrate widespread support for your issue, providing effective follow up to a meeting by a couple team members. Coordinate your efforts for the greatest impact possible.

If the project requires funding, securing funds may be a significant obstacle to its completion. Appendix 5, Funding lists sources where you can apply for funding.

Step 6. Evaluating Results

Congratulations! You are now an advocate. We hope that what you set out to do or change was successfully completed. But no matter the result or status of your campaign, you have made a difference by educating others about the importance of your issue.

Now is the best time to look back at all you have done along the way.

1. What did you learn from this process?

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2. What would you do differently next time?

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3. What would have made your work easier or go more smoothly?

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4. If the change didn't happen, what were the reasons? If the change did happen, what led your to success?

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5. If the change has not happened yet, how can you alter your strategy expedite the process as you pursue your issue further?

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