

SAFE ROUTES TO SCHOOL MESSAGING FOR PROS



**A Communications Toolkit for Schools
and School Districts**





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Introduction

Consistent and clear communication is essential for a strong Safe Routes to School program. Schools, cities, and community partners often look to school districts for leadership in Safe Routes to School communication. School districts and schools have an integral role to play in promoting safe walking and bicycling and Safe Routes to School. This toolkit provides school districts and schools with guidance and resources for a comprehensive communications strategy that supports Safe Routes to School.

School districts can provide guidance and set the tone for Safe Route to School initiatives in their schools. Individual schools have direct contact with families and students and are key messengers when it comes to student travel. The toolkit highlights why it is important to talk about Safe Routes to School, identifies important audiences to keep in mind, suggests platforms for sharing messages about Safe Routes to School, and covers key messages and talking points. Handouts and sample copy can be found in the appendix, covering topics such as a Safe Routes to School webpage, social media copy, sample letters, and so on. When school districts and schools lead with consistent messaging around Safe Routes to School, students, parents, teachers, and communities can obtain the education, encouragement, and resources needed to support safe, active, and healthy students.

What is Safe Routes to School?

Safe Routes to School provides health, transportation, and academic benefits for students and schools. The Safe Routes to School movement works to make sure students can safely walk and bicycle to and from school, encouraging incorporation of healthy physical activity into daily routines. At the local level – in individual schools, school districts, cities, and counties – Safe Routes to School practitioners run education and encouragement programs with families and schools.

1 Why Is It Important to Talk About Safe Routes to School?

Schools and school districts have unique relationships with students. With direct access to students and families, schools and school districts can enable students to be safe, knowledgeable, and skilled at walking and biking from an early age. Consistent messaging around Safe Routes to School coupled with supportive policies and activities creates healthy students who are better positioned to excel academically, while also providing a strong active lifestyle foundation so students can develop into healthy and active adults. Whether your school or school district has a formal Safe Routes to School program or not, any school or district can integrate messaging around safe walking and biking into other school travel communications.

Health and safety for students are key benefits, of course. The value of Safe Routes to School extends beyond health and safety for students, into academic performance, student transportation, and community-wide benefits. Studies show that community benefits from Safe Routes to School initiatives include:

- **Safer students:** Improved traffic safety and increased confidence for students through opportunities to learn about and practice road safety.
- **Healthier students:** Increased daily physical activity, forming healthy habits that can last a lifetime, helping students build strong bones, muscles and joints, and decreasing the risk of chronic disease and obesity.
- **Better focus:** Students who are ready to learn, who are healthy, awake and alert, with better focus and concentration, which can improve academic performance.
- **School transportation fixes:** Solutions to school transportation issues such as reduced or no bus service, dangerous traffic congestion at pick-up/drop-off times, and student absences and tardiness due to transportation challenges.
- **Community connections:** Increased family and community engagement, providing positive social opportunities for students and families.



The 6 E's of Safe Routes to School

Research shows that comprehensive Safe Routes to School initiatives are more effective at increasing physical activity and reducing injuries for children. A comprehensive approach requires embedding Safe Routes to School into many aspects of a community. [The Six E's of Safe Routes to School](#) are a convenient way to summarize the key components of a comprehensive, integrated approach. The Six E's of Safe Routes to School include: education, encouragement, engineering, evaluation, enforcement, and equity.



2 Targeting Your Message: Communicating to Different Audiences About Safe Routes to School

Knowing where and how to talk about Safe Routes to School is essential for effectively reaching students, families, school staff, and the community. Safe Routes to School requires collaboration between administration, teachers, families, students, and the community. Each audience plays an important part in supporting and increasing safe walking and biking to school. Changes in behavior come through regular messaging and repeated practice. This section highlights key audiences for Safe Routes to School and useful communication tools. More information and examples of key messages can be found in the appendix.

A. Families and Caregivers

Families play an important role in reinforcing behavior learned at school, and ultimately make the decisions about how their children get to and from school. Schools have several platforms for reaching families. Families often attend school events and activities or follow school websites or social media. Many families and caregivers overlap with PTO/PTA membership, so include PTO/PTAs in your family audience.

Key Messages

Walking and biking to school are safe and normal; our school supports healthy active walking students; families need to look out for walking and biking students during drop-off and pick-up.

How to Reach Families and Caregivers

Each school is different and the best tool for dispersing information to your students and parents depends on how families are used to receiving information and other local factors.

Websites

Families may go first to school and district sites for resources and announcements. Including information about Safe Routes to School on your website can provide valuable safety instructions and introduce concepts such as active student travel to families. A Safe Routes to School webpage should identify what Safe Routes to School is and why the district supports it. Include educational materials, school

safety maps, rules for drop-off and pick-up, and other transportation safety challenges within your community. For examples of Safe Routes to School webpages and a list of key components, reference [School District Safe Routes to School Website Examples](#) in the appendix.

Handouts, Email, Texts, Automated Calls

If handouts are an option, you can include flyers about events like Walk or Bike to School Day, and informational materials such as the [Active Travel Options](#) handout.

Use text, email, and automated calls to inform families about Safe Routes to School activities, student active travel options, and safe pick-up and drop-off behavior. Sample messaging can be found in the [Safe Routes to School Family Letter](#) and [Student Active Travel Options](#) handout.

Start of the Year Paperwork, Enrollment Packets and/or School Handbooks

To ensure all families are provided with information on safe walking and biking, include Safe Routes to School information in materials for new students and those that are shared annually, such as school welcome packets and handbooks. Consider inserting the [Student Active Travel Options](#) handout, [Safe Routes to School Letter to Families](#), and How to Be a Parent Champion for Safe Routes to School in enrollment packets. Distributing this information will enable families to discuss their travel options and practice safe walking, biking, and pick-up and drop-off at the beginning of the year.

Social Media

Share information about Safe Routes to School safety tips, videos, events, and resources on all social media platforms. Routine posts about Safe Routes to School is essential for changing behavior and making school environments safer for everyone. Social media is often a free and quick way to reach families and may be the primary platform for reaching older students. For sample content reference examples from [Safe Routes to School Social Media Posts](#) in the appendix.

Signs

Districts can show support for Safe Routes to School by providing schools with signs. Display Safe Routes to School signs at entrances of schools, parking lots, and crossings. Signs can encourage drivers to engage in safe behavior and visibly demonstrate school and district support of the program. Displaying signs made by students can be very effective.

Videos

Short videos featuring testimonials from students, parents, teachers, and district staff on the benefits of walking and biking to school can be a powerful messaging tool to share on social media. Videos don't necessarily require a large budget or professional tools! These student-made videos from Anaheim and showcase clips of kids walking and biking to school and effectively promote the Safe Routes to School message.



B. Principals

Principals can have a significant influence on the way in which students travel to and from school. Principals can create an atmosphere of support and enthusiasm around Safe Routes to School, may be an important voice for supportive district policies and procedures, and can provide leadership for teachers and school staff.

Key Messages

Highlight the academic benefits of Safe Routes to School: students that walk or bike to school arrive awake, alert, and ready to learn, and physical activity before school increases academic performance and reduces student absences.

How to Reach Principals

In-Person Meetings

Set up a meeting early in the year with the principal and other stakeholders from the school or district to discuss your program's goals and activities for the year. Giving the principal a chance to weigh in and ask questions about the program can go a long way in bringing them on board with your goals, and they may also have ideas for how they can get involved and become a champion of the program. Ask the principal to convey Safe Routes to School's impact on student health, wellness, and achievement through administrative channels such as regular principals' meetings, directives from the superintendent, and discussions or presentations at meetings.

Informational Resources

For principals who may be new to Safe Routes to School, share a one-pager that highlights the benefits of walking and biking for student health and academic performance, as well as the basics of your program. If your principal is already a supporter, they may be interested in more advanced materials that help enable broader support at the district and city level, such as with [A Primer for School Boards and Principals](#) to enable their support of Safe Routes to School.



C. Teachers

Teachers can provide education, resources, and encouragement for Safe Routes to School to students and families. Teachers have the ability to shape student's behaviors through these methods. They can also serve as role models for students. Reference the [Safe Routes to School Teacher Letter](#) and [Easy Ways to Incorporate Safe Routes to School in the Classroom](#) for more ideas.

Key Messages

Highlight the academic, physical, emotional, and environmental benefits possible through walking and biking to school. Emphasize the unique role teachers have to shape students' behavior, encouraging individuals to develop healthy and active lifestyles in school and beyond.

How to Reach Teachers

Letter and Handouts

At the beginning of the year, provide teachers with a handout sharing information on the program and activities planned for the year. Include ways they can get involved or support their students who are participating in events like Walk or Bike to School Day.

Staff Meeting

Ask if you can present information about Safe Routes to School and how your class is participating during a portion of a staff meeting.



D. Before- and After-School Program Providers

Before- and after-school program staff work with families, students, and school staff. Walking school buses are often used to transport students from schools to after school programs. This key audience can reinforce information received in school through handouts or activities. Provide before- and after-school program staff with messaging for students and families. After-school providers can include Safe Routes to School materials in their program materials, ensuring all students understand their travel options and families have the resources they need to do it safely. Include the [Student Active Travel Options](#) handout and [Safe Routes to School Letter to Families](#) in after-school program materials to all students and families.

Key Messages

Walking and biking to before- and after-school programs are normal and safe ways for students to get around, and support healthy students.

How to Reach After-School Providers

In-Person Meetings

Present Safe Routes to School materials in planning meetings at the beginning of the year.

Case Study: Anaheim Elementary Walking School Bus Video

Anaheim Elementary School District created a [Walking School Bus](#) video to promote programs at elementary schools within their district. The video provides information about walking school buses and as well as registration information. The school district and Orange County Health Care Agency have shared the video with families and community members via websites, social media, and emails. This video has been a helpful communication tool for reaching school families and informing them about an available safe walking option for students.

E. Students

Safe Routes to School can change students' lives inside and outside of the classroom. Students are the primary beneficiaries of Safe Routes to School programs. Students need engaging messaging around Safe Routes to School to create enthusiasm about the program. Use the [Student Quick Guide for Safe Routes to School](#) to provide students with information about Safe Routes to School.

Key Messages

Walking and biking are fun and healthy ways to get around; it's important to be safe when you walk and bike.

How to Reach Students

Bike and Pedestrian Safety Education

Formal programs teach elementary school students how to safely navigate streets and traffic by foot and by bicycle. Enabling children to be confident and safe getting around on foot and on bike is the first step toward empowering them to live healthy, active lifestyles. These can occur before, during, or after school in assemblies or during classes.

Integration with curricula

Provide teachers with worksheets and activities that combine encouraging messages about biking and walking with lessons about science, the environment, and math. Integrating walking and bicycle safety with physical education curricula is often an easy fit.

Flyers, Text Messages and Social Media

To reach middle and high school students, use flyers, banners, signs, and text messages with Walk to School Day information and safety announcements. Share information on the social media platforms where they are likely to see it.

District Policies as Support for Strong Safe Routes to School Communications

A school district can show strong commitment to Safe Routes to School by integrating provisions for safe walking and bicycling to school in its wellness policy or by the school board adopting other Safe Routes to School supportive policies. District policy is important for enabling comprehensive and consistent school district communication. With a district policy in place, schools and staff can expand support through education and programs.

F. Community

Community buy-in and engagement is important for a comprehensive Safe Routes to School program. Bicycle and pedestrian safety near schools requires collaboration from everyone in and outside of schools. Community organizations may have established relationships with families and students and could reinforce school messaging or support school initiatives.

Key Messages

Walking and biking is a great way for kids to get to school and adults to get around; neighbors need to look out for students walking and biking to school; Safe Routes to School is good for communities because it reduces congestion and makes streets safer and healthier.

How to Reach the Community

Signs/Event Flyers

Post information about events such as Walk to School Day, car-free days, or regular walking school buses that take place in the neighborhood. The city department of transportation may be a good partner in helping distribute event information by mail.

Op-Eds or News Articles

Recruit a school district leader or prominent community member to write an op-ed about why Safe Routes to School is important to the community. Newspapers might be more interested in publishing these pieces ahead of a community-wide event such as Walk to School Day or a car-free day. You can also pitch stories to local reporters about newsworthy events such as the completion of a new biking or walking project, funding received, or other accomplishment in your district. Post op-ed or news article to social media platforms.



3 Next Steps

Now that you are ready to start supporting walking, bicycling, and Safe Routes to School through communications, develop a Communication Plan to provide all school community members with information. Follow these easy first steps:

- Use existing communication channels to send families, teachers, administrators, students, and community partners [The Benefits of Safe Routes to School](#) handout.
- Encourage school community members to participate in [Walk or Bike to School Day](#), [walking school buses](#), [walk audits](#), and [bicycle trains](#).
- Provide families, PTOs, and PTAs with detailed information on [How to Be A Parent Champion for Safe Routes to School](#).
- Start the conversation on walking and biking safety to school by distributing the [Walk Audit Checklist](#) and asking your school community to partake in a walk audit of their route to school.
- Reference the appendix for additional resources to provide information and support for Safe Routes to School in your district.

Resources Appendix

Informational letter templates and sample copy and examples for supporting Safe Routes to School are provided in the appendix.

- [Student Active Travel Options](#): This handout highlights opportunities for safely walking or biking to school.
- [Easy Ways to Incorporate Safe Routes to School in the Classroom](#): This handout is intended for teachers, providing examples and ideas of ways to integrate Safe Routes to School into classroom activities.
- [Letter to Families](#): This letter explains student active travel options to families.
- [Letter to Teachers](#): This letter sets out how teachers can support Safe Routes to School inside the classroom.
- [District Webpage Examples](#): This handout provides examples of district Safe Routes to School webpages and key components to include on a Safe Routes to School webpage.
- [Monthly Social Media Copy](#): This handout provides sample copy for monthly social media posts encouraging Safe Routes to School.
- [Key Messages and Talking Points](#): This handout provides a variety of talking points about the benefits of Safe Routes to School, grouped by topic area and target audience. [Also available in Spanish.](#)

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