



Media Talking Points on School Bus Cuts and Safe Routes to School

Short on bucks? Lost the bus? Come walk and bike with us!

- Many schools and communities are struggling with the impact of rising costs and lower revenue on their budgets.
 - Some are responding by cutting back on school bus routes or increasing the walking radius.
 - Parents in many of these communities have responded with concerns that their children will not be safe walking or bicycling to school.
- This is a short-term funding emergency, but a long-term opportunity to improve the health, education, and safety of students and communities.
 - In 1969, nearly 50% of children walked or bicycled to school. Today, that's down to just 15%. This means higher rates of childhood obesity, greater traffic congestion around schools, and higher fuel costs for schools and for parents that drive their children.
 - Childhood obesity has increased five-fold for kids 6 to 11 in last 40 years—25 million children today are overweight and obese, which leads to long-term negative health impacts like type 2 diabetes.
 - Physically active and fit children tend to have better academic achievement.
 - We need to make our roads safer so that more children are able to safely walk and bicycle to school, which will provide important opportunities for safe and healthy physical activity for our kids.
 - This can help keep money in the classrooms. Include data (an average) on how much money this would help keep in the classrooms.
 - If schools and communities do this right, it will make our roads and communities safer for children—and all residents—to walk and bicycle safely.
- If a school is considering cutting bus routes or increasing the walking radius, they must provide for the safety of their students. There are many ways in which this can happen.
 - We recommend that school personnel, city officials, and parents walk the routes to school together and identify traffic hazards.
 - Together, they should create an action plan for how to fix those hazards. They can create a “Safe Routes to School” action team to develop short-term fixes and long-term solutions.
 - These action teams can include representatives from the PTA or PTO, school wellness councils, and city officials.
- The key areas these action teams should focus on include the five “E”s:
 - **Evaluating** the problems that exist by walking the routes and identifying hazards.
 - **Educating** students and drivers. Many state Departments of Transportation or local police departments may be able to provide training in the schools to help students learn how to safely walk and bicycle.

- **Enforcing** traffic safety rules. A lot of the immediate safety issues—dangerous cross walks or drivers speeding—can be addressed through increased law enforcement in the vicinity of schools to enforce speed limits and man crosswalks.
 - **Encouraging** safe walking and bicycling. Schools can put together “safe walking routes” maps of routes they have assessed and determined to be safe. There is safety in numbers. Parents and schools could also look into developing “walking school buses” and “bicycle trains” where parents alternate walking and bicycling groups of students to and from school each day. There’s a guidebook on how to organize a walking school bus available at www.saferoutesinfo.org. Some other encouragement ideas include remote drop offs, so parents don’t have to drive all the way to school.
 - **Engineering** fixes. While many of the infrastructure problems are longer-term fixes, there are ways the city or county can help address safety issues by painting crosswalks on roads around the school, installing signage to warn drivers to slow down around children walking or bicycling, and regularly removing debris from sidewalks and road shoulders.
- For long-term improvements:
 - Schools should consider applying to their state Department of Transportation for funding through the federal Safe Routes to School program to make infrastructure improvements, such as completing any gaps in the sidewalks, building better road crossings, etc.
 - Schools should also think about looking for funding through the city’s general budget or capital improvement program for these kinds of fixes.
- This is not just the school’s problem—it’s the community’s problem as well. Schools and their city or county governments must work together to fix the streets so it is safer for children to walk or bicycle.
 - Schools should look into developing a cooperative agreement with the city on how they can work together to do this.
 - It’s all about how we use the resources in our communities.
 - For schools facing these kind of school bus cuts, cities and counties must take a second look at their schedule for road improvements, and consider prioritizing those in the vicinity of the school.
 - It is not just buses. Districts need to be encouraged to have sustainable transportation plans that include not only buses, but public transportation, walking and bicycling, and driving.
- If it’s done right—schools will have safer routes to school—which mean healthier kids, less traffic congestion around the school, better air quality, cost savings on fuel and buses, and more quality time spent with your children on the way to school.
- Remember, if every student who doesn’t have a bus ride anymore gets to school in their car, we are looking at more cars on the road, which is hurting the environment and our safety on the commute to school.
- Figure out how long it would take you to walk to school. Children can walk ¼ mile in ten minutes. Give it a try and you’ll see it isn’t as far as you think!
- Parents and community members that are concerned about this should contact their Members of Congress and ask them to increase funding for the federal Safe Routes to School program in the next transportation bill.
 - The demand for these projects already far exceeds what is currently available, and it’s only going to be exacerbated by communities that need more help creating safe routes to school to respond to rising fuel costs and school bus cuts.
 - We encourage listeners to visit www.saferoutespartnership.org to learn more about the Safe Routes to School movement.