

# Get Oregon kids *moving*

Walking, biking and rolling to school planning guide



The Oregon Health Authority produced this guide with assistance from the Oregon Department of Education, Oregon Department of Transportation and Safe Routes to School National Partnership.



# *A generation ago,* **nine out of 10 students**

living within a mile of their school walked and biked to school. Today, that rate has dropped by more than half, to 38 percent.(1)

Large numbers of Oregon students *could* use active school travel to walk, bike, use a wheelchair or skateboard or other self-propelled way to get to and from school. They live in the “walk zone” — the area within a mile of school. They typically do not have bus service, and many are being driven to school.

Fortunately, a new generation of school leaders, parents and kids are creating a vibrant *movement to get movement* back into the school commute. Oregon schools can take steps to reinvigorate active school travel.

This guide will jump-start your efforts by sharing facts about walking, biking and rolling to school, describing roles you can play, and outlining programs and resources.





*“Children need outlets for their elevated energy throughout the day, so starting and ending the school day with a walk or bike ride not only burns calories, but also centers students mentally and emotionally.”*

- Darla, PTO President,  
Elizabeth Page Elementary School, Springfield

**Walking, biking and rolling to school is a positive and proven way to support:**

- Academic achievement
- Schools as community leaders
- Parent engagement
- Reduced absenteeism
- Physical activity and health





## Walking and biking to school: Why it matters

**After 20 minutes of activity, students test better in math, reading and spelling.** Active kids burn off excess energy and can better focus and maximize academic performance. (2)

**A travel plan for students in the walk zone can reduce absenteeism.** (3) Programs that support active travel to school — through parent outreach, encouragement and group walks or rides — can ensure students get to school safely, consistently and on time.

**Organized school travel can reduce bullying.** Providing structure for walking and biking to school can offer a supervised route, create safety in numbers and generally boost students' independence. (4)

**Driving to school represents 10–14% of morning traffic.** (5) Heavy car traffic during arrival and dismissal times can create unsafe traffic congestion. Idling contributes to poor air quality and greenhouse gas emissions.

**Oregon students need to be more physically active.** In 2015, only 30.7% of Oregon eighth-graders met the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's recommendation to get 60 minutes of physical activity daily. (6, 7)

**Everyone needs to be more physically active!** There are more than 1,200 schools in Oregon. Prioritizing walking and biking improvements and programs around schools can help many Oregonians.

## Examples of how active school travel fits with current school priorities

- Active school travel programs engage families. Walk-to-school contests, organized walks and rides, crossing guard education and meetings to plan for safety give parents positive ways to engage with school personnel. This also helps the school serve as a leader as it fosters a healthy community for everyone.
- Active school travel programs can help schools meet goals for physical activity. Oregon legislators have mandated minimum time spent in physical education instruction. In a time of limited resources, schools are identifying ways to take advantage of any before-, during- and after-school physical activity. Schools can include walking and biking safety education into physical education or health classes. These approaches often align with state content standards.

*“We started walking in first grade because of your program. Now we do it almost every day — 1.3 miles — love it!”*

— Parent from Chief Joseph Elementary School, Portland

# EVERYONE HAS A ROLE TO *play*

## How you can promote walking and biking to school

### For administrators: You can champion this effort!

- Ensure information about active school travel gets to all students who live within the walk zone. Publish walk and bike route maps on school website and student transportation pages.
- Explain active school travel policies and describe options (e.g., where to lock bicycles).
- Be inclusive: Students with alternate mobility needs can often walk, roll, or use adaptive technology bicycles or other means to get to school.
- Include safety education for walkers and bikers in school communications that usually cover bus safety information.
- Insert language in your school wellness policy on active school travel as a way to reach physical activity goals.
- If hazards in your walk zone prevent kids from walking, reach out to your city or county transportation department and school resource officers so they are aware of the safety needs and can work to address them.
- Pursue available funding and training opportunities for crossing guard and transportation coordinator resources.
- Support staff wellness and physical activity by including staff in messaging about active school travel. Provide opportunities for staff to participate and serve as positive role models for students.



## FIRST STEPS

### Choose one or more of these activities to kick off your program:

- ✓ Conduct a simple walk audit. Bring the school and community together to identify problem areas and physical barriers around schools. Identify streets within the walk zone – the area within one mile of elementary schools and 1.5 miles of middle and high schools – critical to walking or bicycling to school. Walk assessment forms are available at <http://oregonsaferoutes.org/walk-bike-assessment>
- ✓ Create walking route maps. Show the pedestrian network within the walk zone and indicate recommended routes and crossing points. Post walk zone maps online and at the school. Distribute them to students and families with safety tips and other essential information before the start of each school year. Maps range from low tech to high tech. They can be hand-drawn or created using programs such as Google Maps or GIS. See <http://www.walkbiketoschool.org>
- ✓ Help parents connect with one another to form group walks or rides – “walking school buses” and/or “bike trains” – to get students to school in organized groups. School officials, health advocates and other community members can consider when and where these are needed, such as when students arrive early for the school breakfast program. Go to [http://www.saferoutespartnership.org/sites/default/files/resource\\_files/step-by-step-walking-school-bus.pdf](http://www.saferoutespartnership.org/sites/default/files/resource_files/step-by-step-walking-school-bus.pdf)
- ✓ Complete a school action plan. This is a key step to being eligible for funding education, outreach and other program funding through the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT). See <http://www.oregon.gov/ODOT/Safety/Pages/SRTS.aspx>



## For school wellness contacts and teachers: You can get it started!

- Teach or support traffic safety education programs in classrooms.
- Organize a walking school bus and/or bike train program.
- Conduct a walking audit around your school as a class project. Rate the conditions to help decide on recommended routes.
- Create simple maps indicating preferred routes and, if necessary, intersections or streets to avoid.

## For parents and students: Your support helps the whole community!

- Walk or bike with your kids to acquaint them with the school route.
- Join nearby families for fun and safety in numbers.
- Ask about or support your school's efforts to increase physical activity out of school and improve health for students.
- Share ideas and successes with parent teacher organizations, councils, wellness committees and neighborhood associations.

✓ Teach students traffic safety. Integrate walking and bicycling safety education into the standard curriculum at all grade levels, as a unit in PE/health class or in homeroom. This can meet common core standards. <http://www.oregon.gov/ode/educator-resources/standards/physicaleducation/Pages/default.aspx>

✓ Add physical activity and active school travel language to your school wellness policy. This can provide a foundation for district wellness teams or coordinators to build support for active school travel. <http://www.oregon.gov/ode/students-and-family/childnutrition/SNP/Pages/OregonSchoolWellness.aspx>

## Get active travel rolling at your school with any of these first steps!



## Resources to help you get started

- “A Guide to School Area Safety” is a complete reference on school zone safety for roadways adjacent to a school or a school crosswalk where signs designate school activity. [http://www.oregon.gov/ODOT/Engineering/Docs\\_TrafficEng/Guide\\_to\\_School\\_Area\\_Safety.pdf](http://www.oregon.gov/ODOT/Engineering/Docs_TrafficEng/Guide_to_School_Area_Safety.pdf)
- “The Safe Routes to School District Policy Workbook” helps school board members, administrators, families and community members implement policies that support walking, biking and Safe Routes to School programs. <http://www.changelabsolutions.org/safe-routes/welcome>
- “Buses, Boots & Bicycles” is a report presenting a comprehensive look at student transportation in the United States. It proposes ways to collaborate more effectively to ensure that all children arrive safely to school. <http://www.saferoutespartnership.org/resources/report/buses-boots-and-bicycles>

## How to pay for programs and projects

School transportation is a major part of a district's budget. Sometimes schools spend even more to bus students in the walk zone if traffic safety is a serious issue.

Schools can find cost savings by consolidating bus routes, taking advantage of crossing guard funding, and working with local officials to fix hazards and make walk zones safer. Active school travel initiatives are inexpensive and easy to start and sustain — and resources are available!

### For program implementation (not infrastructure):

- The Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) and the Oregon Department of Education (ODE) Pupil Transportation Program provide supplies and training for crossing guards and school zone safety.
- ODOT offers Safe Routes to School (K-8) and Transportation grants and Growth Management quick response funding for walk audits and other travel assessments.
- Local public health departments often have staff whose work may align with walking and biking goals. They may be able to offer local data, help convene partners, complete walk audits or provide other support.

- Oregon's nonprofit hospitals conduct community health needs assessments and fund local health initiatives using community benefit dollars. Hospitals may support active travel to school as part of obesity prevention.

Find more information on resources to support active school travel initiatives at <http://oregonsaferoutes.org/>

### For street and sidewalk improvements (infrastructure):

- Consult with your local planning or public works department to prioritize improvements around schools, complete a school action plan and ensure projects are in local transportation plans.
- The Oregon Legislature approved an annual allocation of \$10 million for pedestrian and bicycle improvements within a mile of schools, starting in 2018. The allocation will increase to \$15 million annually starting in 2023. The Department of Transportation will administer this program, including local grants.
- Local jurisdictions can apply for biking and walking improvements through a variety of funding programs, so it is a good idea to get to know your local planners.

A list of opportunities is at <http://oregonsaferoutes.org/resources/grants>

## WHAT RESULTS *can we expect?*



Whether you call it “Safe Routes to School” or you just support more kids walking and biking to school, the Safe Routes to School National Partnership reports the following results: (8)

- Building crosswalks, sidewalks and other infrastructure near schools increases walking and biking by at least **18%**.
- Education and encouragement programming results in a **5%** annual increase in walking and bicycling rates.
- A school that combines efforts to improve infrastructure with its education and outreach programming can expect a **43%** increase in walking and bicycling rates over five years.



*Everyone can talk to local officials about the importance of safe and convenient walking, biking and rolling routes for the community. Let's get Oregon kids moving!*

## Endnotes

1. Safe Routes Partnership. US travel data show decline in walking and bicycling to school has stabilized. 2010 April 8 [cited 2017 July 28] Available from: <http://www.saferoutespartnership.org/media/pressreleases/US-Travel-Data-Show-Decline-in-Walking-and-Bicycling-to-School-Has-Stabilized>
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8. McDonald NC, Steiner RL, Lee C, Rhoulac Smith T, Zhu X, Yang Y. Impact of the Safe Routes to School Program on walking and bicycling. 2014 Sept 25 [cited 2017 July 28]. Available from: <http://www.tandfonline.com/eprint/KSUt6v8rSdc7k48pG78K/full>

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