

Safe Routes

Easy Win:

Invite the media, community leaders and representatives of stakeholder groups to walk, bicycle, and/or roll the routes students use—or could use—to get to school¹. This is a powerful way to show people why safe routes to school are needed.

Outcomes:

Recommendations to improve current routes

Support for Safe Routes to School

New SR2S team members

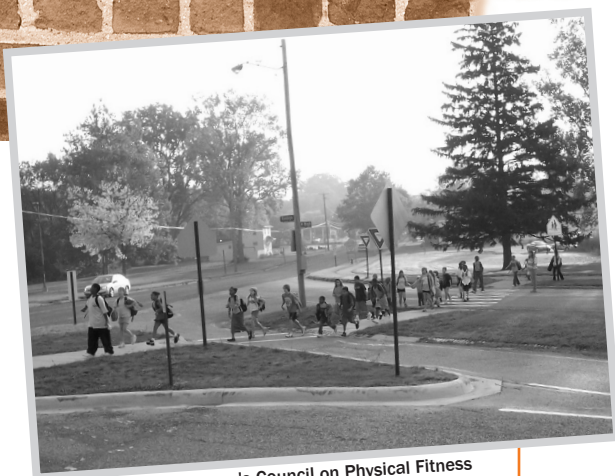


Photo courtesy Governor's Council on Physical Fitness

Optional Materials:

- Walking audit overview and materials (CD)
- Invitation letter (CD)
- Maps and map options
- Mayor invitation letter (CD)
- Press release (CD)
- School property assessment (CD)
- Walking Audit: What to Look For (CD)
- Walking Audit What to Look For—Special Needs (CD)
- Bicycling Audit: What to Look For (CD)
- Trails as Safe Routes to School—Appendix T
- Bicycle Education Lessons—Appendix B

Communication Power:

Nothing is more powerful than experience! Invite your mayor, city council, school board and other important decision makers—and the media!

WHAT IS THE ROUTE SAFETY ASSESSMENT?

- Environmental audit of school property and routes students may use to walk, bicycle, or roll to school
- Major SR2S event to collect information for engineering nonmotorized pedestrian and bicycle facilities

WHY ASSESS ROUTE SAFETY?

- To identify safety hazards along routes students may use to get to school
- To increase community awareness and support for SR2S by providing first-hand experience of safety problems
- To complete the Safe Routes to School planning process

WHEN?

- Date and time to maximize participation
- Alternate days/times and input opportunities can be made available to give everyone an opportunity to participate
- Assess school property during school arrival and dismissal times

WHO TO INVITE?

- Parents, community leaders, city council and school board
- Student representatives on SR2S team (not entire school body)
- Core and expanded SR2S team and the SR2S Task Force, if it exists

WHERE?

- Walking and bicycling routes most frequently used to travel to school
- School property and pick-up/drop-off bus and parent site
- Nearby trails that might be safe routes

¹ A bikeability audit can be conducted at the same time as the walking audit, or at another time. One or more experienced bicyclists are needed to lead a bike audit and all participants must wear helmets. Bikeability checklists are available on the Internet by entering "bikeability" into your search engine. Local bike club members are a great resource for the audit.

Optional Safe Routes Checklist

Steps

1. Decide when the walking audit, school property assessment and bicycling audit will occur.
2. Determine the walking (and bicycling) routes for the event. Include the perspectives of parents of students with special needs when making these decisions.
3. Obtain maps. (see Maps and Map Options)
4. Select the meeting location and arrange for enough chairs and tables for attendees.
5. Modify invitation letter, flyer and press release. If a bicycling audit is part of the event, be sure that helmet use is required and publicized.
6. Send invitations and distribute flyers.
7. Assess school property at a time when school is in session and present findings during walking audit event.
8. Send press releases.
9. Prepare maps and materials.
10. Conduct event and form recommendations.

By When

By Whom

Safe Routes

Walking Audit Overview and Materials

Walking Audit Event and Timeline: Total time is 2 ½ hours

Materials:

- *What to Look For* lists
- Small maps of walking routes
- Large map of school area, mounted on firm backing
- Pencils, markers
- Flip chart or large sheets of paper and tape
- Clipboards, magazines, or cardboard square (writing surface for audit)
- Sign-in sheet
- Optional: digital cameras, computer laptop, screen/projector, refreshments

Introduction—15 minutes

- Greet participants and describe the goal of Safe Routes to School
- Ask each person to say his/her name and their role at the school
- Tell people the agenda
 - a. Review the *What to Look For* lists
 - b. Form groups and receive maps
 - c. Walk/bike the route
 - d. Create a list of the safety hazards and pick the highest priority problems
 - e. Present the group's top 3 priorities
 - f. Decide as a large group on the highest priorities for the school

- g. Recommend general solutions¹ (if experts are present, specific solutions can be suggested)
- h. Set meeting dates to complete Action Plan

What to Look For—10 minutes

- Hand out the *What to Look For* list(s) and review the content of the list(s). If both a walking and bicycling audit will occur, break into two groups for the review.

Walking/Bicycling Routes—55 minutes

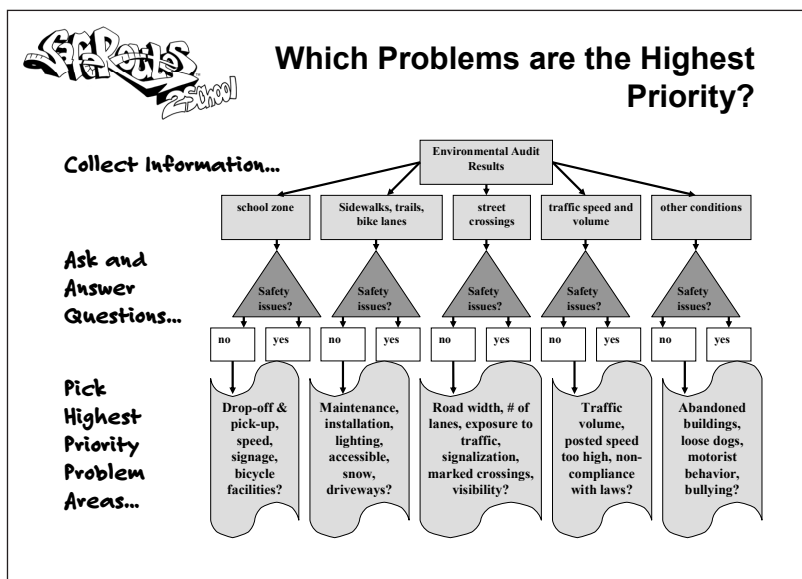
- Form groups.
- Hand out the maps.
- Explain that each person will identify hazards and the location of the problems, on his/her map.
- Give each group an extra map to use when they compile their observations.
- If photographs will be taken, explain the need to record the location of the photograph.

Small Group Discussion—10 minutes

Small Group Presentations—10 minutes

Large Group Discussion and Recommendations—20 minutes

Set Dates for Action Planning Meetings



¹ Recommended solutions begin as general solutions. They become specific recommendations only after appropriate experts and the road authority are consulted. For example, if high traffic speed is a priority problem, the general solution is to slow the traffic (if possible). A specific recommendation to install speed bumps requires additional analysis by experts and the appropriate authority.

Safe Routes

Maps and Map Options

Purpose of Maps

- To identify where students live and the routes that are, or could be, used to walk and bicycle to school
- To select routes for walking and/or bicycling audit
- To identify the location of safety hazards

Getting Started

A map of your school's home area and walking area is needed to develop an effective Safe Routes to School program. A school "home area" is the geographic area in which students must live to attend that school. The boundaries of the home area are usually streets.

The school "walking area" is also mapped. The walking area is the area in which bussing is not provided. The boundaries are also usually streets.

1. Start by identifying the streets that define the school home area and walking area. Your school district will have this information.
2. Option: get a list of student household addresses. If obtained, use this information to identify where student homes are located relative to the school.

Map Sizes

A SR2S team should have two sizes of maps: a large map (roughly 2' by 3') that is used during pre- and post-walk group discussions, and small maps (8.5" by 11") that are used during the walking and/or bicycling audit.

To Obtain Maps

Listed here are a few of the available options.

Option 1: Obtain maps online using MapQuest, Google, Yahoo! Maps, or other on-line services.

What you need to do: Visit one of the websites listed above (or another site that offers mapping services) and follow the directions on the site, using the road or street boundaries identified earlier to build the map. Because the maps may only show a small part of your school's home area at one time, you may need to download several small maps and "piece" them together to form a larger map. This can be done with any image editing software such as Adobe PhotoShop.

What you will receive: Small (8.5" by 11") maps only, unless you have a plotter or large-format inkjet printer.

Other steps: Make the large map for group discussion by taking the smaller map to a copy shop for enlargement.

Option 2: Obtain maps from local sources

Local public works departments, school transportation offices and Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) Service Centers occasionally have maps available for little or no cost. It may be worth checking with these local officials to see if they could supply your team with maps of your school's home and walking area.

What you need to do: Contact your school district pupil transportation office, city public works department or local MDOT Transportation Service Center and inquire if they have maps available or if they can make a map for you.

What you will receive: The size of maps your team will receive will depend on the source.

Option 3: Obtain maps from the Michigan Fitness Foundation

In the event your school team cannot locate a suitable map from other sources, the staff at the Safe Routes to School office at the Michigan Fitness Foundation may be able to create one for you.

What you need to do: Contact the Safe Routes to School office at (800) 434-8642. Please have your school home area and walking area roads/streets identified. Allow at least two weeks for delivery.

What you will receive: An electronic version of a small (8.5" by 11") map.

Other steps: Make the large map for group discussion by taking the smaller map to a copy shop for enlargement.

Walking Audit Invitation



[INSERT SCHOOL NAME] [WALKING AND/OR BICYCLING AUDIT]:
[INSERT DATE AND TIME]

Building a Healthy School Community Together

Dear Parents, Guardians and Community Members,

We need your help on [DATE OF WALKING AND/OR BICYCLING AUDIT] at [LOCATION OF WALKING AND/OR BICYCLING AUDIT]. Please join us to [WALK AND/OR RIDE] the routes our children use to travel to and from school. Walking and biking provide important physical activity that children need for good health.

The [WALKING AND/OR BICYCLING] audit is a way for parents, guardians and community members to see what our children experience as they walk and bike to school. The more eyes the better!

- No experience is needed for this important job.
- Walk rain or shine.
- Meet at [LOCATION OF WALKING AND/OR BICYCLING AUDIT] on [DATE OF WALKING AND/OR BICYCLING AUDIT] at [TIME OF WALKING AND/OR BICYCLING AUDIT].

After a short training, we will form groups and [WALK AND/OR BICYCLE] six-to-eight blocks. Back at school, we will review what we learned and make suggestions to improve walking and biking safety for our children.

For more information, contact [CONTACT'S NAME] at [CONTACT'S PHONE NUMBER].

Yours in safety,

[SCHOOL NAME] Safe Routes to School Team

P.S. – We will [WALK AND/OR BICYCLE] rain or shine. However, if weather is severe, please call the school.



Mayor Invitation



Note: print on school stationary

[DATE]

The Honorable Mayor [MAYOR'S NAME]
[MAYOR'S ADDRESS]

Dear Mayor [MAYOR'S LAST NAME]:

On [DATE OF WALKING AUDIT] the Safe Routes to School team at [SCHOOL NAME] will host a walking audit of the routes students use to travel to and from school by foot or bicycle. The purpose of the audit is to collect information to improve walking and biking safety. Short- and long-term recommendations will be developed based upon the information collected.

We would like to invite you, or a representative from your office, to participate in the walking audit. The agenda for the walking audit is as follows:

(Modify agenda to fit audit times)

9:30 a.m.	Introductions and overview of morning
9:45 a.m.	Safe Routes to School presentation and instructions on use of checklist
10:05 a.m.	Walking audit of designated routes to and from [SCHOOL NAME]
11:00 a.m.	Map walking audit results
11:35 a.m.	Group discussion of results
11:55 a.m.	Summary and next steps

I have enclosed a copy of a press release we are preparing for the walking audit, for your information.

Please contact me at [CONTACT PHONE] if you are able to join us on [DATE OF WALKING AUDIT] or if you have questions.

Sincerely,

[SCHOOL CONTACT]
For the [SCHOOL NAME] Safe Routes to School Team

enclosures





Safe Routes

School Property Assessment

Observe the areas around entrances of buildings, the drop-off/loading areas, biking facilities, etc. Consider the following and note what you observe and suggest for each.



1. Students exiting/entering cars are protected from other vehicles.

☐ Yes

☐ No

NOTES:

For example:

- Students step onto a raised sidewalk
- Students don't exit from the car onto a street
- Students don't have to cross through a parking lot
- Students don't have to walk between other vehicles

2. Students exiting/entering buses are protected from other vehicles.

☐ Yes

☐ No

NOTES:

For example:

- Students step onto a raised sidewalk
- Students don't have to cross through a parking lot
- Students don't have to walk between other vehicles

3. Students who walk or bike have safe routes off the road while on school grounds.

☐ Yes

☐ No

NOTES:

For example:

- There are sidewalks and/or separated pathways
- The grounds are free of conflicting driveways

4. Students who walk or bike are protected from vehicles as they approach/leave the school entrance.

☐ Yes

☐ No

NOTES:

For example:

- Walkers and bikers have a separate entrance
- Walkers and bikers don't have to cross through cars to enter or exit
- Walkers and bikers have a separate dismissal time

5. Sidewalks, driveways and pathways on school property are properly maintained in all seasons.

☐ Yes

☐ No

NOTES:

For example:

- The sidewalks, driveways and pathways are not cracked or broken
- Leaves and snow are removed regularly
- The sidewalks, driveways and pathways are swept regularly

Safe Routes

School Property Assessment, cont.

6. Traffic flows smoothly and efficiently in and out of the driveway.

☐ Yes

☐ No

NOTES:

For example:

- Congested or not congested

7. All drivers have an unobstructed view of pedestrians and bicyclists around the entrances and the school building.

☐ Yes

☐ No

NOTES:

For example:

- There are no blind driveways
- They are no visible barriers such as signage, walls or other impediments

8. The school property is well-lit.

☐ Yes

☐ No

NOTES:

9. There are bicycle-parking facilities on the school grounds.

☐ Yes

☐ No

NOTES:

10. There are enough spaces in which to park bikes.

☐ Yes

☐ No

NOTES:

11. The location of the bike parking structure (bike rack, shed, etc.) is within reasonable proximity to entrances/exits.

☐ Yes

☐ No

NOTES:

12. The bike parking structure can be viewed for security purposes from within the building.

☐ Yes

☐ No

NOTES:

13. Students can properly secure their bicycles to the bike parking structure.

☐ Yes

☐ No

NOTES:

14. The bike parking facilities are covered to protect bicycles from weather.

☐ Yes

☐ No

NOTES:

15. Any other observations:



Safe Routes

Walking Audit: What to Look For

As you walk your route, notice sidewalks/trails, street crossings, speed of traffic, school zone signs and other general barriers along the way. Write the problem on your map and take a picture of it. Number your observations so they correspond to your pictures. Include all hazards you observe.



EXAMPLES OF WHAT TO LOOK FOR:

Sidewalks/Trails

1. No sidewalk or trail
2. Too narrow
3. Too close to street
4. Too many driveways crossing sidewalk or trail
5. Blocked/cluttered (shrubs overgrown, car parked over it, etc.)
6. Not maintained (broken/cracked, ice/snow, puddles, trash/broken glass)
7. Not well lit

Street Crossings

1. Road too wide
2. Traffic volume too high
3. Too many lanes
4. No traffic signal to stop vehicles
5. No pedestrian signal
6. Timing of signals inadequate (too slow, too fast, doesn't work)
7. View of oncoming traffic is blocked (list by what...a car, trees, etc.)
8. Poorly designed curb ramps (need repair or widening, etc.)
9. Need curb ramps
10. Not well lit
11. Drivers don't yield to pedestrians

Speed

1. Posted speed limit is too fast for pedestrian traffic
2. Speed limit is not being obeyed

School Zone

1. No advance signs indicating driver is approaching a school zone
2. No signs indicating driver has entered a school zone
3. No signs indicating crosswalks
4. No signs indicating school zone speed limit
5. Existing signage is discolored, faded, damage/vandalized or outdated (e.g., wrong color)
6. Posted speed limit is too fast for school zone

Other Barriers

1. Driver's sightline is limited/small children walking or biking are blocked from view.
2. Abandoned car(s)
3. Abandoned/boarded up building(s)
4. Area of known (or suspected) crime (drug dealers, drug houses, gangs. etc.)
5. Loose dog(s)
6. Dark corners, hiding places, or no other people present

Safe Routes

What to Look For: Special Needs

Safe Routes to School programs can and should include all students and families that wish to participate, including students with physical, visual, or cognitive impairments. Encourage parents and guardians of students with special needs to participate.



Safe Routes to School teams need to be aware of the special requirements pedestrians with mobility, visual or cognitive impairments have when assessing the routes to and from school. Students with unique challenges benefit from education tailored to their needs. For education to be effective, a trained person may need to assess the capacity of the student.

Pedestrians with mobility, visual or cognitive impairments face many challenges that may not be easily recognized. Use the following checklist to help you identify these potential barriers. See Appendix U—Unique Challenges for more information on Safe Routes to School for students with special needs.

The potential challenges listed below are classified as M (mobility impairments), V (visual impairments) and C (cognitive impairments). Some items may fall under more than one classification. Write the problem on your map and take a picture of it. Number your observations so they correspond to your pictures. Include all hazards you observe.

EXAMPLES OF WHAT TO LOOK FOR:

Sidewalks/Trails

1. No sidewalk or trail (M, V, C)
2. Too narrow (M)
3. Blocked/cluttered (M, V)
4. Not maintained (M, V)

Street Crossings

1. No pedestrian signal (M, V, C)
2. Pedestrian signals are not clearly marked (V, C)
3. Pedestrian signals are not easily accessible (M)
4. Walk indicators are not audible (V)
5. Timing of signals inadequate (M)
6. View of oncoming traffic is blocked (M, V)
7. Absence of curb ramps (M)
8. Absence of level landings (M)
9. Faded or illegible signage (V, C)
10. No texture/color change at intersection (V)
11. Not parallel to the traffic flow (V)



Safe Routes

Bicycling Audit: What to Look For

EXAMPLES OF WHAT TO LOOK FOR:



On-road Bicycle Lanes

1. No bike lane or bike lane ended
2. Heavy traffic
3. Too many trucks/busses
4. No space for bicyclists on bridges or in tunnels
5. Poor lighting
6. Potholes, cracked/broken pavement, uneven surface (e.g. drain grates, utility covers)
7. Debris

Off-road Bicycle Paths/Sidewalks

1. Path or sidewalk ended or didn't go where needed
2. Path or sidewalk was crowded
3. Path intersected with roadways that were not safe to cross
4. Sharp turns, dangerous hills or too many hills
5. Slippery surfaces when wet (e.g. wood)
6. Debris

Street Crossings and Intersections

1. Had to wait too long to cross
2. Unsure where or how to cross
3. Couldn't see traffic while crossing
4. Signal didn't provide enough time to cross

Speed

1. Posted speed limit is too fast for bicycle traffic
2. Speed limit is not being obeyed

School Zone

1. No advance signs indicating driver is approaching a school zone
2. No signs indicating driver has entered a school zone
3. No signs indicating bicycle lanes
4. No signs indicating school zone speed limit
5. Existing signage is faded, damaged, or outdated
6. Posted speed limit is too fast for school zone

Motorist Behavior

1. Passed too close to bicyclist
2. Did not signal
3. Cut off or harassed bicyclist
4. Ran red lights

Other

1. Bullying/theft when riding
2. Dogs
3. Motorists sightline is limited/ bicyclists not visible
4. Abandoned buildings
5. Areas of known or suspected crime

Walking Audit Press Release



FOR RELEASE [DATE OF RELEASE]

Contact: [CONTACT'S NAME]
[CONTACT'S TITLE, IF APPLICABLE]
[CONTACT'S PHONE NUMBER]

Safe Routes to [SCHOOL NAME] Elementary School

[CITY, STATE - MONTH DAY, YEAR] On [DATE] at [TIME], the [SCHOOL NAME] Elementary Safe Routes to School team will host a [WALKING AND/OR BIKING] audit of routes students use to walk and bike to school. Safe Routes to School is a national and state program to increase walking and biking to school along safe routes. The [WALKING AND/OR BIKING] audit is the main Safe Routes to School activity at [SCHOOL NAME].

Community members and parents are encouraged to participate in the [SCHOOL NAME] [WALKING AND/OR BIKING] Audit. Participants will help identify the safest routes for children to walk and bike to school. Participants are asked to sign up by contacting [NAME OF SCHOOL CONTACT] at [SCHOOL PHONE NUMBER] and to meet at the school in Room [LOCATION OF MEETING] at [TIME]. The event will include directions to use a simple checklist, [WALK AND/OR BIKE] a designated route, mapping results, and developing recommendations to increase safe walking and biking to school. The [WALKING AND/OR BIKING] portion of the audit will take approximately 50 minutes.

Findings of the [WALKING AND/OR BIKING] audit will be used to create a SR2S action plan to increase safety on routes students walk or bike. A benefit to students from Safe Routes to School is the regular physical activity they receive from walking or biking daily to and from school. A recent national survey found that while 70% of parents walked or bicycled to school as children, only 18% of their children walk or bike to school today. Three out of five children aged 9 to 13 don't get any physical activity outside of school physical education. The Centers for Disease Control predicts that one-third of children born since 2000 will become diabetic unless Americans start eating less and exercising more.

For more information on Safe Routes to School at [SCHOOL NAME], contact [CONTACT'S NAME] at [SCHOOL PHONE NUMBER] or the Michigan Fitness Foundation at 1-800-434-8642.

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