

Massachusetts Safe Routes to School Guide on **SCHOOL STREETS**



massDOT
Massachusetts Department of Transportation



MASSACHUSETTS
Safe Routes to School

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SCHOOL STREETS FOR MASSACHUSETTS SCHOOLS

Schools globally have introduced “School Streets” as a tool to address student commuter safety, reduce traffic congestion, and improve the environment in and around school zones. School Streets close designated roads or parts of roads to vehicles during school arrival and dismissal, allowing only pedestrians and cyclists in these areas. The benefits of School Streets include better safety and accessibility, improved air quality, and increasing healthy travel modes like walking and biking. Creating a car-free zone helps promote student independence and reduces absenteeism by making walking and rolling to and from school a more comfortable, community-focused journey and transportation option.

This guide introduces the concept, value, and process of implementing School Streets for schools in Massachusetts.

INTRODUCTION

In the United States, many school properties were designed in a time when more students walked, rode bikes, and took the bus for their daily commutes. Schools today have difficulties accommodating vehicular family traffic and growing faculty/staff parking needs. With the prevalence of SUVs taller than most adults and the current dependence on family vehicles, there are almost one million students and staff who commute to and from school in Massachusetts today, making the need for increased safety a priority.

In response to the shifting modes of transportation, schools around the globe are adopting measures to increase safety for both the school community and their surrounding neighborhoods. Restricting vehicle flow in the school zone when students and faculty arrive and depart is a trending initiative called **School Streets**.

A School Street is a traffic calming tool that closes a road or roadway section to vehicular traffic during school arrival and dismissal. During these times, this space is dedicated to walking and rolling, or in some cases, school bus use only. This area can serve as a temporary pedestrian plaza where students, families, and staff can more comfortably navigate school arrival and dismissal while safely separated from through-traffic. Only vehicles that have been granted exemption and emergency vehicles are permitted during these times.

The goal of School Streets is simply to put children first¹ by improving their health and safety during their daily routines.

In today's world of larger vehicles and higher volume roadways, traffic calming is needed to better protect our vulnerable road users. By creating a School Street, a community can positively affect driver behavior while improving the visibility of student pedestrians and cyclists. These safety improvements work to create safer communities for everyone.

ORIGINS OF SCHOOL STREETS

Bolzano, Italy is credited as the origin city of School Streets, where in 1989 several local schools began closing their streets to vehicular traffic for fifteen minutes during the arrival and dismissal periods. In the early 2000s, the Municipal Police of Bolzano moved to make this change official, and after several iterations of policies, the mayor of Bolzano signed a decree in 2013 to update the times of closures for each specific street to be closed. Studies from the Municipal Police of Bolzano show that fewer residents rely on private cars for school arrivals, and a much larger number of residents now walk, bike, or use public transportation.²



Figure 1: School Streets Sign, Bolzano, Italy, Project Metamorphosis, 2020

Since the 2020 outbreak of COVID-19, schools have adopted the concept of School Streets more widely as a way of fostering a sense of community and encouraging the many benefits of active transportation and of being outdoors. Schools in countries all over the world

have implemented School Streets in their own unique ways. Paris, for example, has a goal to implement 300 School Street solutions by 2026, and as of August 2024 has already helped calm 218 streets, including 70 landscaped and planted streets.³

BENEFITS OF SCHOOL STREETS

From quick install pop-up projects to long-term infrastructure solutions, School Streets provide benefits to students and the greater community.

School Streets:



**IMPROVE GENERAL
SCHOOL SAFETY**



**CREATE OPPORTUNITIES
FOR OUTDOOR PLAY AND
COMMUNITY GATHERINGS**



**IMPROVE SCHOOL
ACCESSIBILITY**



**FOSTER COMMUNITY
CONNECTIONS**



**IMPROVE AIR
QUALITY**



**REDUCE TRAFFIC
CONGESTION**



**INCREASE RATES OF
ACTIVE AND HEALTHY
SCHOOL TRAVEL**



**REDUCE THE
POTENTIAL FOR
DANGEROUS DRIVING
BEHAVIOR AROUND
SCHOOLS**



**ENCOURAGE STUDENT
INDEPENDENCE AND
RESILIENCY**

HOW DO SCHOOL STREETS WORK?

School Streets involve temporarily (during school arrival and dismissal) or permanently closing a lane, section of a street, or full length of a street to vehicular traffic, typically adjacent to a school entrance. Residents and businesses within the closed area, as well as emergency vehicles, are exempt. Permanent or temporary portable signage and road barriers are used to prohibit vehicle use and communicate the restriction.

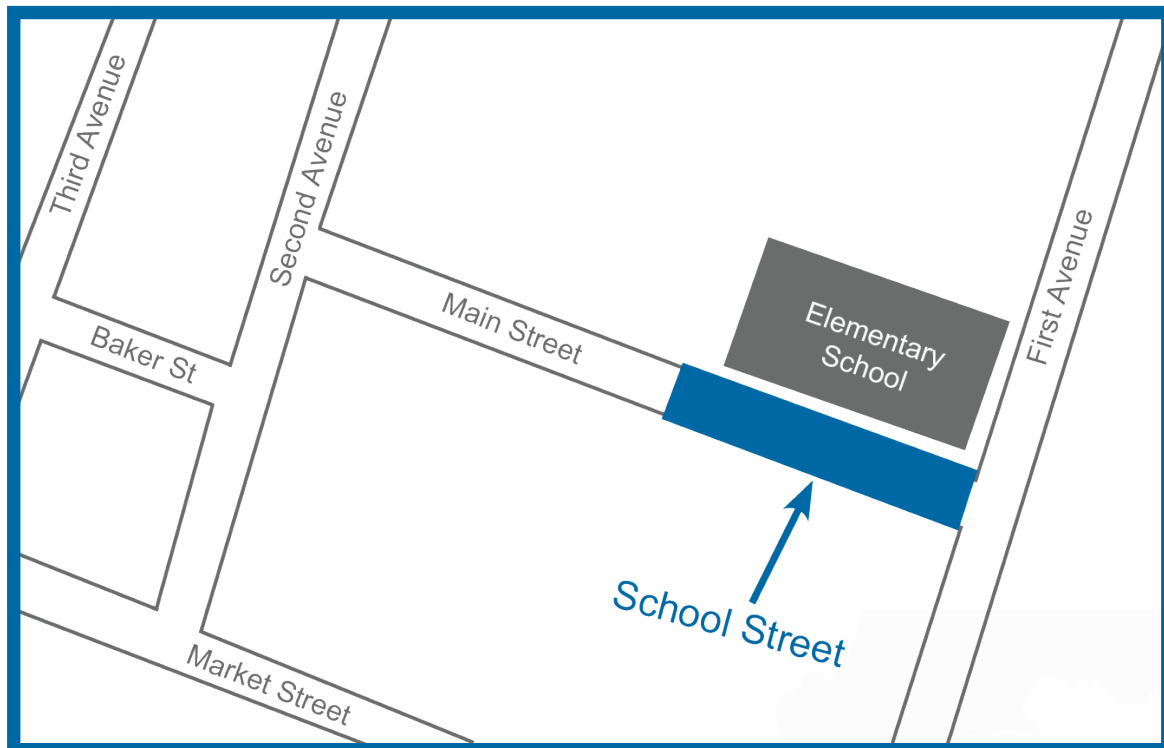


Figure 2: Partial street closure example -
“The School Street took place at Strathcona Elementary School on a portion of Lamoreaux Street. The School Street was 70 m long with closure barricades placed at Strathcona Avenue North and on Lamoreaux Street immediately before the school parking lot.”

School Street design elements can include minimum enforceable safety components as well as the potential for creative beautification and student-friendly features.

Some examples include:

Installation of portable or permanent physical barriers to prohibit vehicle use with bollards, barrels, horses, gates, cones/flex posts, or large planters



Installation of regulatory and informational signage to communicate that the roadway is temporarily or permanently closed to vehicle traffic



Use of amenities to create an inviting pedestrian plaza, such as benches, planters, bike racks, school recess storage bins, or ground mural games



Special pavement treatments to visually distinguish the area from the rest of the roadway, such as painting the curb a signature color



Pedestrian safety improvements adjacent to the School Street to improve pedestrian visibility, such as high visibility crosswalks

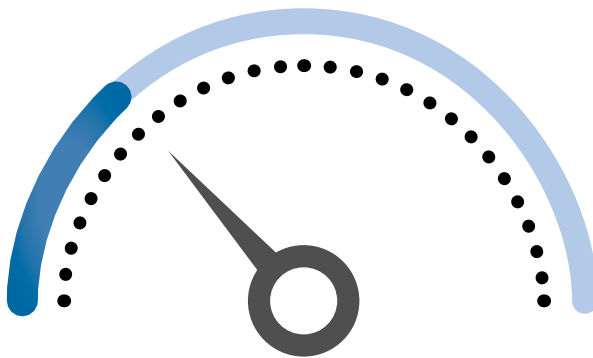


School arrival/dismissal circulation flyers to communicate the expectations for all modes of school transportation



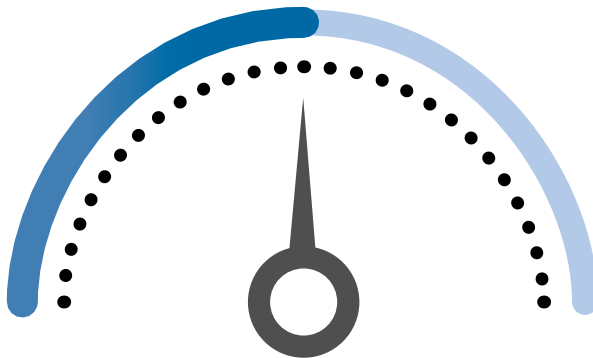
Infrastructure safety can be financed by local Departments of Public Works (DPWs) or other municipal governments' departments while beautification amenities can be Parent Teacher Association/Organization (PTA/PTO) or community projects.

School Streets projects can fall into the cost categories below:



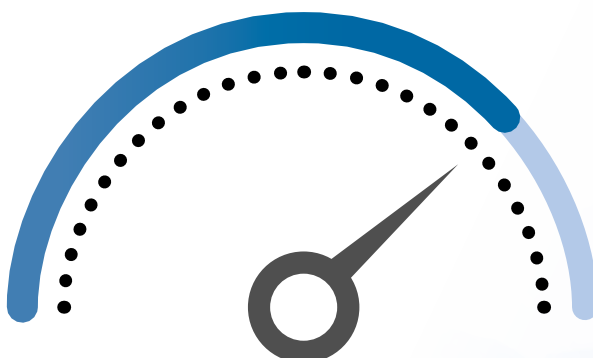
LOW COST –

**REGULATORY SIGNAGE AND
ROADWAY BARRIERS**



MEDIUM COST –

**AMENITIES TO MAKE THE
AREA MORE INVITING**



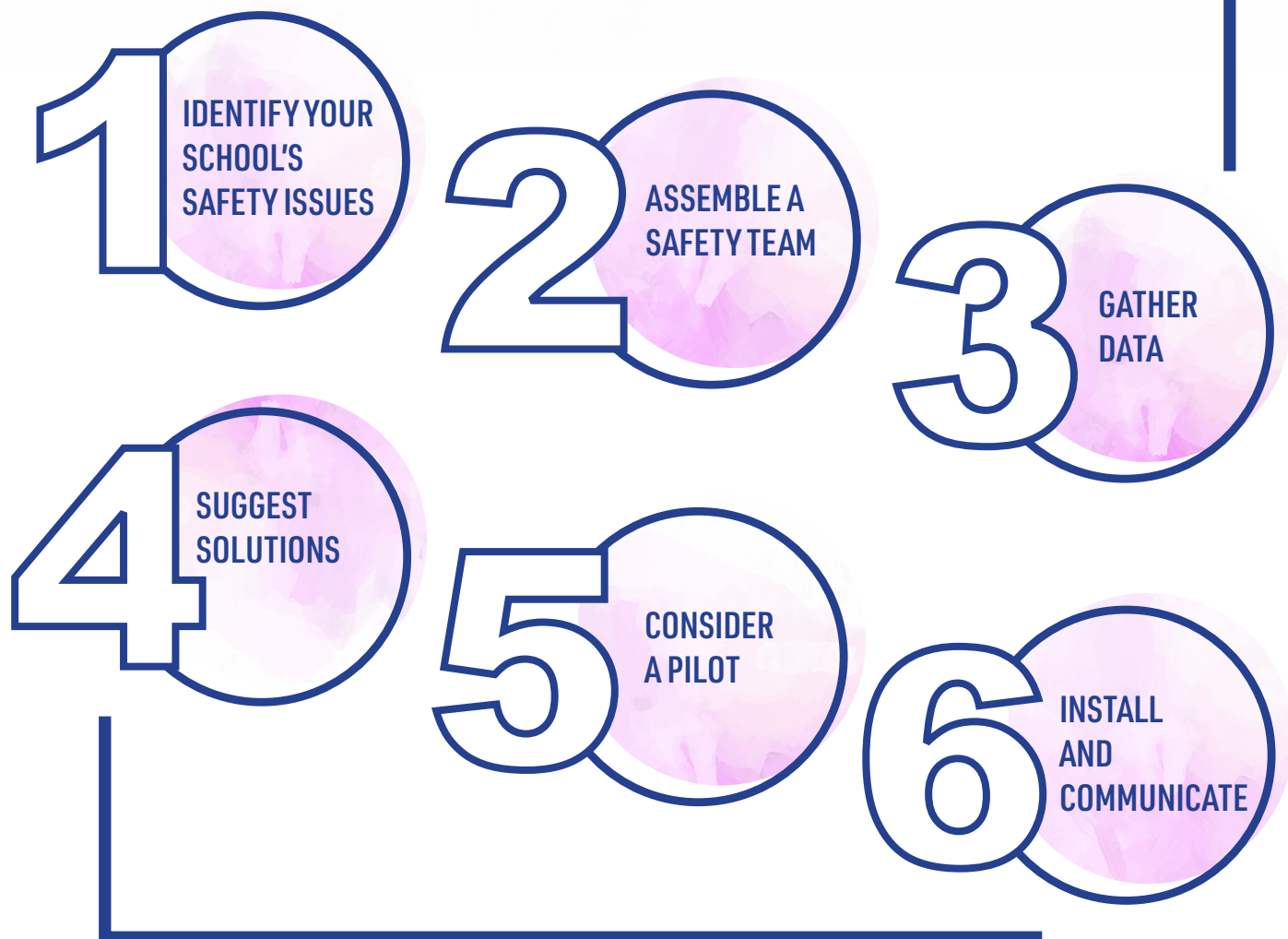
HIGH COST –

**LOCAL SIDEWALK AND
CROSSWALK IMPROVEMENTS**

IMPLEMENTATION

This section is designed to help illustrate the steps involved in establishing a School Street at a facility and the details about how to work with the Massachusetts Safe Routes to School (MA SRTS) Program's Outreach Coordinator.

FLOWCHART OF THE STEPS :



IDENTIFY YOUR SCHOOL'S SAFETY ISSUES

According to the National Center for Education Statistics School Pulse Survey, 72 percent of U.S. public schools have parents/guardians who reported barriers for their children walking, biking, or rolling to commute to school. In the Northeast region, 38 percent of public

schools reported that traffic patterns around their school pose a threat to their students' physical safety while commuting to school.⁴ This data shows the widespread need and desire for safer school commutes for students, faculty, and families.

Recognizing that there is a general safety concern is the first step towards making changes. Ask the following questions to guide a discussion with school stakeholders:

- What behaviors of people walking, biking, rolling, and driving do your school community encounter during the school commute?
- Does the interaction between student transportation modes at your school or in the school zone make you uncomfortable?
- Rules apply to everyone, but what are your school's rules? Does your school have an Arrival/Dismissal Plan and is it reliably followed?
- Is your school Principal regularly writing about traffic concerns in the school newsletter?
- Do Crossing Guards share their concerns with students and families?
- Do family vehicles arrive at your school well before dismissal to try to "beat the rush?"
- Does your community have difficulty hiring Crossing Guards due to lack of interest even with the recognized need for their safety services?

ASSEMBLE A SAFETY TEAM

Establishing a team of various stakeholders who understand and support the need for change brings together different expertise and perspectives. Examples of team roles include school and community outreach, coordination with municipal departments and committees, data collection, designers, and communications.

Throughout the process, the team should consider itself an extension of the school community. It is important for schools to own that the family traffic their students generate needs to be managed by the schools. Principals are not traffic engineers; establishing a School Street is a collaborative effort requiring multiple stakeholders.

Each member of the School Streets safety team can provide valuable insight. Members of this safety team can include:

- » School faculty and staff, especially the school principal or designee
- » Interested parents and guardians
- » Parent Teacher Organization or Association
- » Students, such as Student Council members
- » Local residents
- » Local Crossing Guard, School Resource Officer, or Police Officer
- » Community pedestrian/bicycle groups
- » Local Transportation Safety Committee or similar group
- » Municipal staff
- » Elected representatives, school and/or municipal

To garner broad-based support, it is important to host public meetings or community forums where information can be shared and discussed with all potentially impacted parties, including neighbors and other community members.

Communicating through school newsletters, neighborhood flyers, websites and social media, and local newspapers can also help to raise awareness and build support for the cause. Creating a petition of community and school support or sending out a survey can serve as a tangible show of solidarity and commitment to addressing the concern of transportation safety and School Streets as a solution.

WHERE TO FIND YOUR OUTREACH COORDINATOR –



GATHER DATA

To determine the best course of action, the team will need to collect data to support their safety concerns. Working with the MA SRTS Program, the school's Outreach Coordinator can provide the following:

- Using school and anecdotal observations as a starting point, the Outreach Coordinator can help a school conduct an Arrival/Dismissal Observation to collect data by assessing the school site. This includes documenting local signage, collecting counts of each mode of transportation used on the property, and observing arrival and dismissal behaviors.
 - » Assessing the school property with the information found in the Arrival/Dismissal Report will be key to understanding which considerations work best for your unique school community. Consideration of a School Street is one such Program recommendation.
 - » Arrival/Dismissal Observation Reports contain photos, maps, and other information to help guide decision making for future solutions.
- Concurrently, the Outreach Coordinator can help a school launch the SRTS Family Travel Survey to better understand the travel habits of students and to highlight family awareness that the school is undergoing a safety campaign.
- The Outreach Coordinator would also help the school create a Student Radius Map to visually identify where students reside. This is important in identifying the more heavily traveled routes used by students traveling from home to school.

Understanding Permissions

When considering the proposal of a School Street, it is important to understand the necessary permissions – whether they be municipal, state, or local needs.

While selecting the roadway for developing a School Street, keep in mind how the roadway is used and who it connects within the community.

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- Is the road in question a local road or a highly active corridor?
 - Is there a public or school bus route that runs along the roadway?
 - Does the roadway contain public parking facilities, businesses, or residential homes?
 - Does adding a road detour for a School Street impact another nearby school?

Considering each of these questions will help to better design the School Street so that it makes the most positive impact on the community without hindering accessibility to other locations.

Most public and non-school roadways are under municipal jurisdiction, so having the support and approval of the Police and engineering departments or DPW is critical. Additionally, some jurisdictions may require police presence on certain roads, so consider using volunteers, Crossing Guards, or paid flaggers to create a welcoming and safe environment for families while also saving on costs and coordination efforts.

SUGGEST SOLUTIONS

After collecting data to better understand a school's needs and local rules and restrictions, the safety team can move forward with brainstorming solutions. Consider the following strategies for identifying and proposing solutions to address your school's unique needs:

- With the school's permission, your Outreach Coordinator can first review the MA SRTS Arrival/Dismissal Report with your team and decide on which report considerations to implement. Some of these recommendations include:
 - » Creating dedicated areas for pedestrians, cyclists, school buses and vans, as well as family vehicles.
 - » It is important for students walking, rolling, and riding the bus to be able to navigate their way safely in the school zone. This involves creating dedicated areas for pedestrians, cyclists, school buses and vans, as well as family vehicles.
 - » Using regulatory and informational signage.
 - » Proper signage can both identify where each mode of transportation is located and explain what behavior is expected. Installing clear and concise signs can play a crucial role in improving traffic safety by helping to educate drivers on the rules of the road and reducing the risk of crashes.
 - » Improving student visibility.
 - » This may involve short-term solutions such as installing on-road crosswalk signage, reflective signage, and

enhancing crosswalk paint. These solutions can help to make pedestrians more visible to drivers and reduce the risk of crashes. While permanently installing bollards or gates may be the goal of a School Street, starting with visible but easily removable barriers can be the first step towards testing solutions.

- The case studies listed in the section “Examples from Here and Around the World “ serve as models to show how different communities have implemented changes relevant to their unique situation. Talk to your Outreach Coordinator to learn about what other schools have done and what solutions might be a good fit for your school.
- Consult the [Pop-up Projects for Massachusetts Safe Routes to School Guide](#) for fun and collaborative

ways of creating ground murals or colorful designs on school hardtops and driveways.

- Educate students on the life skills of pedestrian and bike safety using the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE)-approved Massachusetts SRTS Pedestrian and Bicycle Safety curriculum. The Pedestrian Curriculum includes sidewalk, crosswalk, and parking lot safety. The Bike Curriculum includes personal safety, bike safety, and rules of the road.
- Consider additional safety training workshops and public awareness campaigns and initiatives.
- Consider adding Crossing Guards to help control traffic and ensure the safety of families walking and rolling to and from the school, particularly at busy intersections.

AMENITIES AND DESIGN



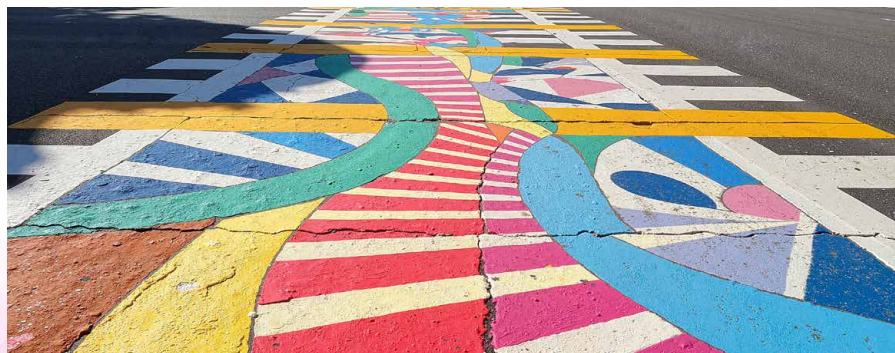
Amenities and Design

Along with the aesthetics of a School Street, the amenities provided to students and their families will help enhance the space beyond the initial purpose of enhancing safety by creating an inviting place for the community to gather.

Adding amenities like benches, bike racks, planters, school recess storage bins, stroller corrals, or ground mural games can help to make the space more enjoyable and foster community. Trees add shade and raised gardens can become living laboratories. Additional physical changes to the area may

include making it flat and accessible, using lighter asphalt to decrease urban heat island effect, and ensuring that infrastructure used is sustainable and beneficial to the local environment. These amenities may develop over time as the School Street transforms from a pop-up or short-term project to a longer-term neighborhood destination.

If a municipality is tackling multiple School Streets at once, it can be beneficial to standardize their appearance and regulatory elements in the same manner as school zones, making a standard look for each street can help unify them behind a local identity. For example, the « rues aux écoles » in Paris uses similar colored light asphalt and green landscaping in their School Street designs.



COMMON ROADBLOCKS

Throughout the project initiation and implementation, School Streets may face opposition from multiple sources, who may worry about the changes, safety, or accessibility and ease of roadway travel.

» **Opposition from drivers or parents/guardians:**

Sharing the intentions and solutions that School Streets will help to emphasize the importance of safety and community as the intentions of the plan.

» **Opposition from abutters:**

Consistent communication to abutters throughout the program's timeline and exemptions for local traffic are key components of getting the community on board with the School Streets initiative.

» **Opposition from local businesses:**

Exemptions can be granted to essential business vehicles or deliveries to allow them to enter the School Streets zones during operating hours. Operation times will also be communicated thoroughly to all stakeholders to ensure the community understands when School Streets will take place.

CONSIDER A PILOT

A pilot School Street may be useful to test the effectiveness of the proposed road changes before they are installed or implemented on a more long-term or permanent basis. By monitoring its results, the safety team can determine if the proposed improvements are having a positive impact on traffic safety. If the

results are promising, this could help to secure funding for more permanent changes in the future.

- Choose a location for a School Streets pilot, whether a portion of a road, lane, or full street.
- Determine the pilot timeline. Will the pilot be installed for a few days, weeks, or months?

- Work with your municipal DPW and/or engineering department to devise a pilot plan for regulatory signage and roadway barriers. If the School Streets plan is temporary for use during school hours only, decide which school staff or volunteer will position the barriers daily and where they should be stored. Some schools simply roll their barrels or move their flex posts to the side of the roadway.
- Communicate with the neighborhood and greater community by posting flyers, articles in local newsletters, cable, and town e-newsletter, and by hosting a community information session.
- During the pilot, members of the safety team or other volunteers should collect observational data to understand if drivers and pedestrians are following the new traffic patterns, how many are ignoring the new rules, and general attitude towards the change.
- Following the pilot, conduct outreach to understand how the community feels about the proposed solution and if they feel it made a difference in local safety. Input can also be collected through presentations to municipal boards/commissions, by hosting a public meeting, conducting a survey, posts on social media, and through meetings with the PTO/A.



INSTALL AND COMMUNICATE

Before, during, and after a School Streets pilot installation, communication with the surrounding community and members of the school community is essential to ensure the pilot operates as intended and that students and families are made safe and aware of the changes being made.

After the pilot period is completed, reflect on the observational data and survey feedback collected, and determine if any adjustments to the more permanent School Streets plan should be made.

If a pilot is deemed a success, then the team can work together to think about how permanent School Streets could be beneficial to the community and pursue funding, if needed, to complete the project.

EXAMPLES FROM HERE AND AROUND THE WORLD

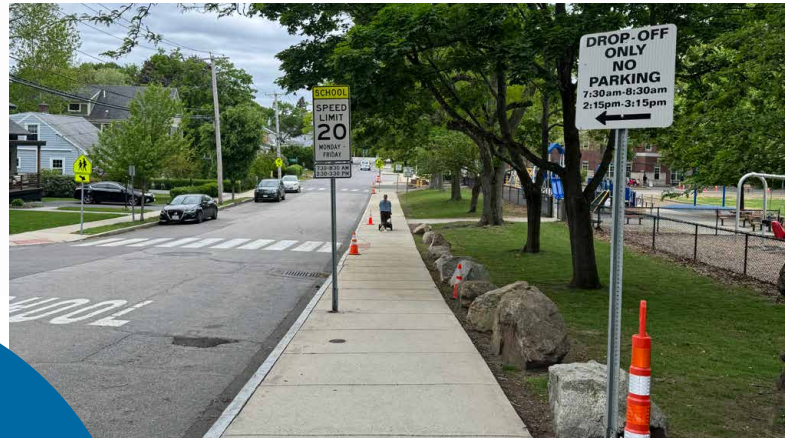
DALLIN SCHOOL

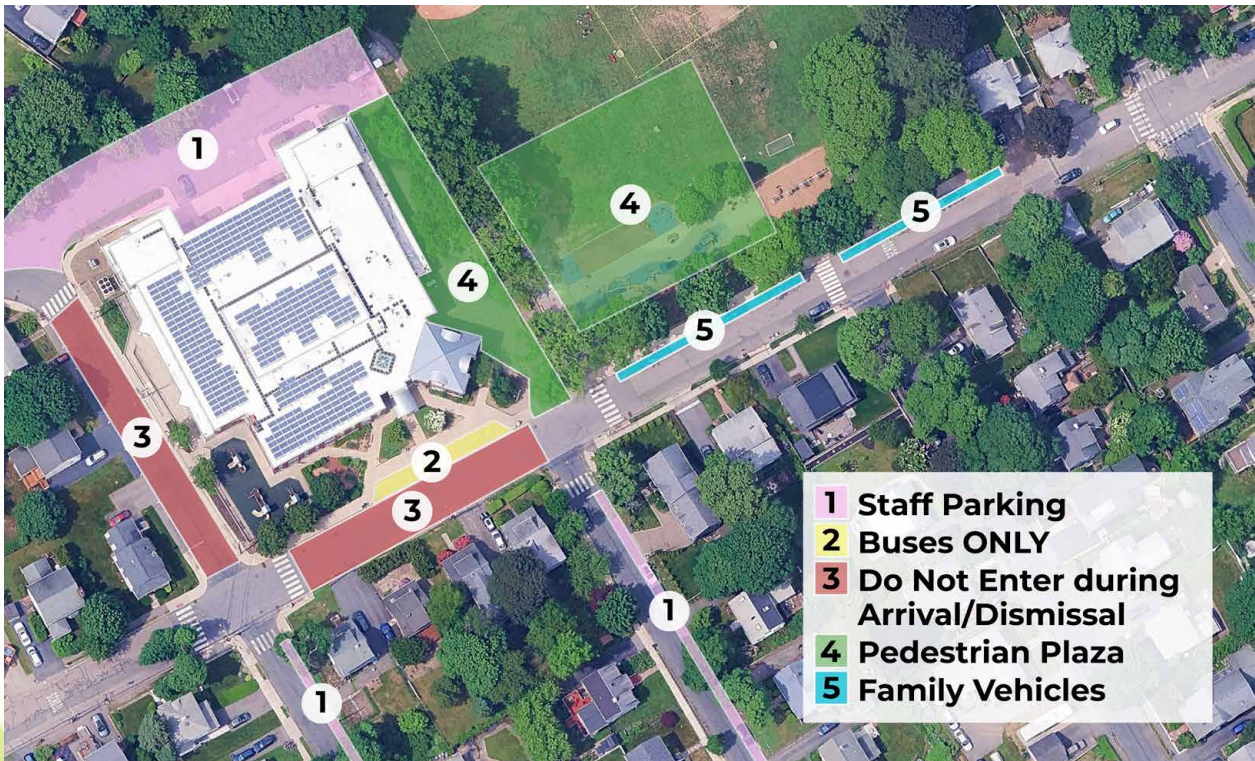
Arlington, Massachusetts

February 2022

The Dallin School obtained feedback from parents and observed instances in which the traffic conditions at arrival and dismissal times were unsafe, which prompted the school community to seek new remedies before serious injuries occurred.

Working with the MA SRTS Program, the school community worked to implement a restricted zone on Florence Street in front of the school and create alternative drop-off opportunities further down Florence Street. The school had the support of the community, the superintendent of Arlington Public Schools, and School Board to work to implement safety solutions at the school.





GREATER TORONTO AND HAMILTON AREA, ONTARIO, CANADA (PILOT PROGRAM)

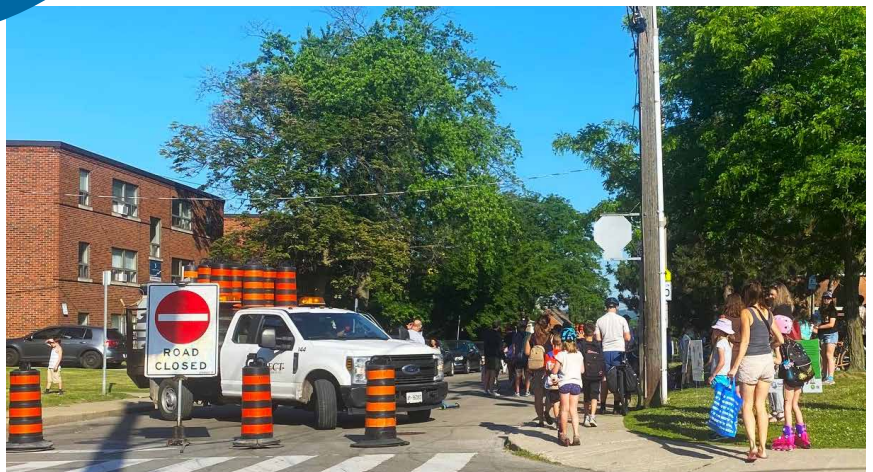
Kingston, Ontario, Canada

Multiple municipalities took part in a 2021-2022 effort to create School Streets in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton area. The Kingston Coalition for Active Transportation (KCAT), a non-profit group, ran their School Street for the entire 2021-2022 school year with the support of the City's transportation department and school community.

The pilot ran at Winston Churchill Public School every school day for 25 minutes during the morning and afternoon commute. The School Street area included almost 650 feet of MacDonnell Street, creating a traffic-calmed environment where pedestrians and cyclists can move freely through the space. The pilot used lightweight plastic barricades, road closed signs, and promotional signs to close the street to vehicles. Volunteers were stationed at each barricade as well as within the closed School Street zone and equipped with high-visibility safety vests. Throughout the program, trips to school using an active form of transportation (walking, biking, or rolling) increased by 11%.⁵



Dr. Patricia Collins, Queens University, Canada



8 80 Cities

VESTRE SKOLE

Odense, Denmark⁶

2010

Roersvej, a street located next to *Vestre Skole* (Western School) faced morning traffic issues during drop-off times. The school also experienced limited recess space, so in 2010 it became the first Play Street in Odense, Denmark. The street helped promote more physical activities for children and enhanced safety by reducing morning traffic.

The school also allows older students to volunteer to be School Patrol Guards to help with traffic on busy side streets and near crosswalks.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Richard Clarke, Policy and Evidence Manager at the FIA Foundation for School Streets: Putting Children and the Planet First, Children's Health Initiative, April 2022.
- 2 Franco Casadidio, "Bolzano and the School Streets," Bolzano e le Strade Scolastiche, April 11, 2011, <https://www.interventi.net/index.php/ecologia/224-bolzano-e-le-strade-scolastiche>.
- 3 "Plus de 200 ' Rues Aux Enfants ' Dans Paris," Ville de Paris, accessed February 19, 2025, <https://www.paris.fr/pages/57-nouvelles-rues-aux-ecoles-dans-paris-8197>.
- 4 "School Pulse Panel: Surveying High-Priority, Education-Related Topics," School Pulse Panel - Interactive Results, April 2024, <https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/spp/results.asp>.
- 5 Ontario School Streets Pilot Summary Report, 2022, https://www.880cities.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/OSSP-Summary-Report_Updated_.pdf.
- 6 <https://www.metamorphosis-project.eu/case-studies/play-and-school-street-odense-denmark.html>



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