



School Siting: How to Support Walking, Biking, and Active Kids

Kori Johnson and Michelle Lieberman, Safe Routes Partnership
October 21, 2020

MISSION

The mission of the Safe Routes Partnership is to advance safe walking and rolling to and from schools and in everyday life, improving the health and well-being of people of all races, income levels, and abilities, and building healthy, thriving communities for everyone.



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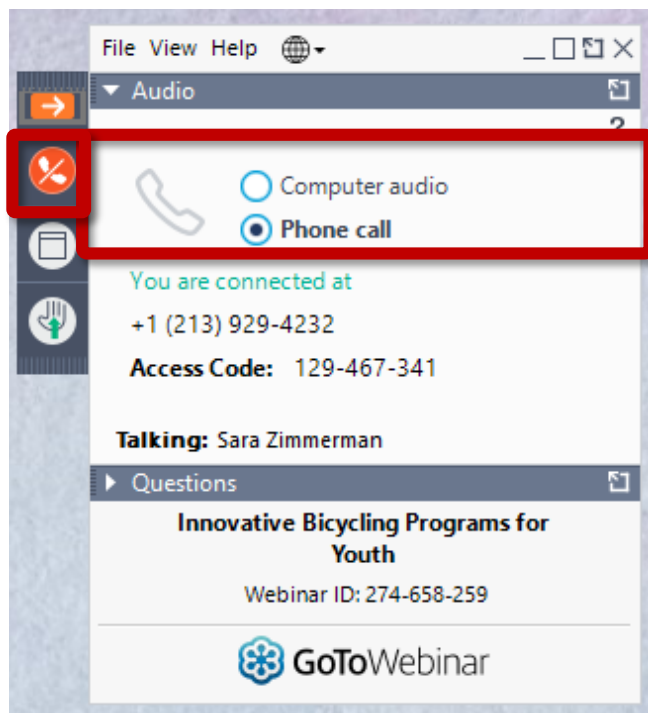
Talking: Sara Zimmerman

Questions

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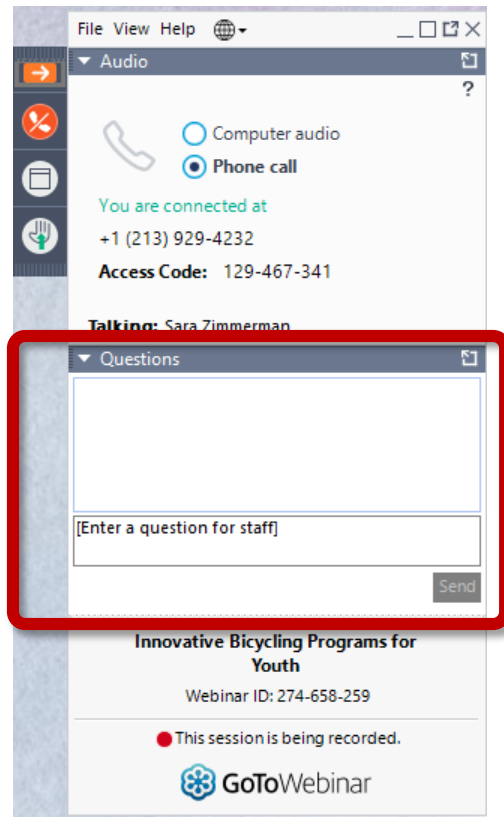
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QUESTIONS & COMMENTS

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Agenda

- Why School Siting Matters
- Who are the Players?
- School District Policies
- Local Government Policies
- State Policies
- Q & A

What is School Siting?

School siting is a shorthand for the bundle of decisions that affect where schools end up located. School siting decisions include considerations about where to build new schools, which existing schools will be closed, whether to renovate a school or start over, as well as decisions about the design and orientation of a school on a site.



Why does school siting matter?

- Health benefits
- Environmental benefits
- Better for community
- Government efficiency
- Fewer travel expenses for families & more involvement





What are the barriers?

- State policies and educational trends
- City policies and development trends
- School closings due to economic troubles

The result? Fewer and fewer kids live near their school.

Children living within a mile of school:

- 1969: 45%
- Now: 24%

61% of parents say distance is the biggest barrier to walking to school



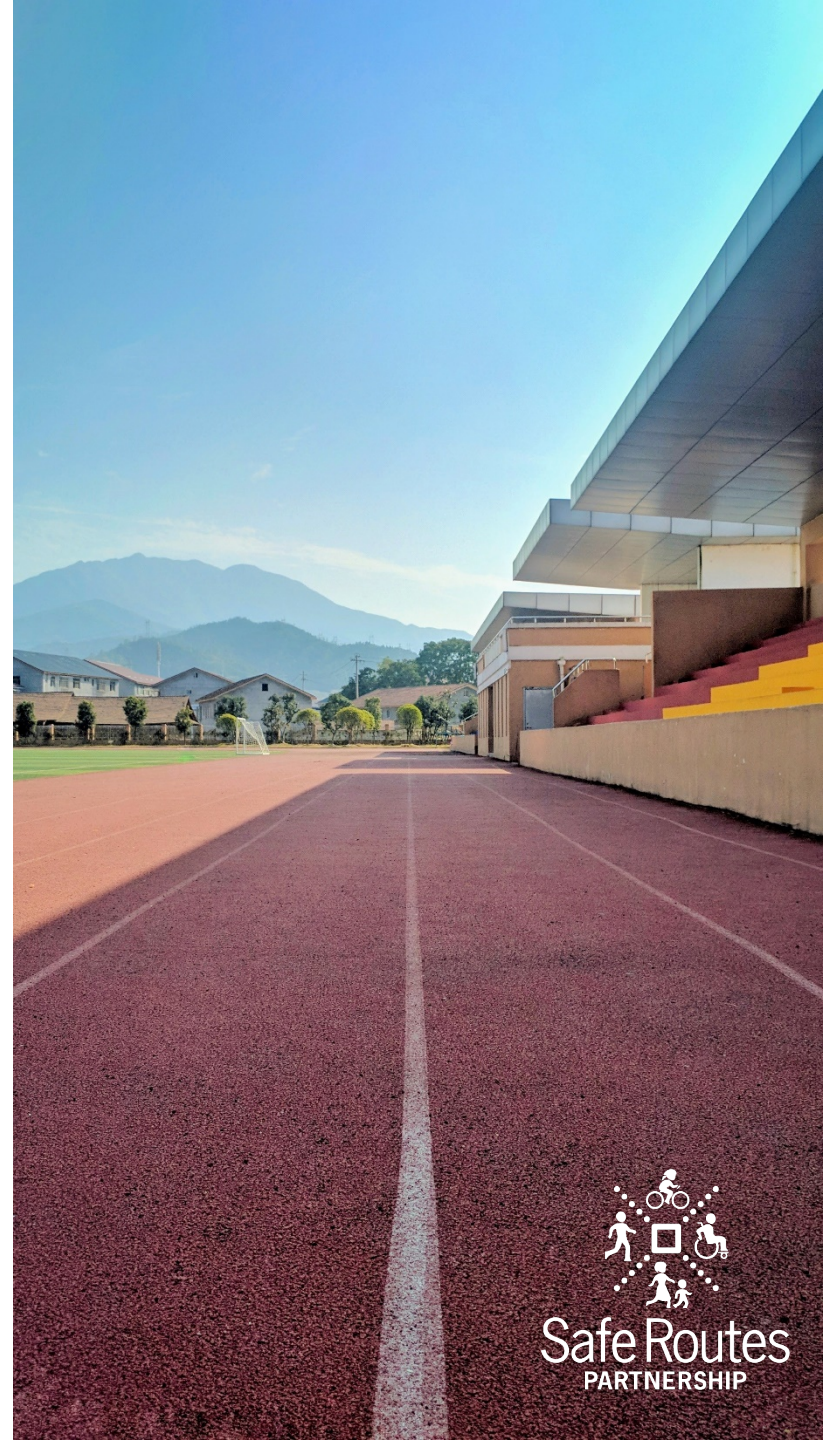


The Players

- **School** districts
- **Local** governments (planning, parks, public works)
- **State** laws (and state departments of education, transportation, health)
- **Federal** government – limited role

Ten Principles of Smart School Siting (ChangeLab Solutions)

- Collaborative Planning
- Long-Term Data Driven Planning
- Account for All Costs
- Co-Location and Shared Use
- Preference for Renovation
- Diverse, Walkable Schools Through School Siting and Assignment Policies
- Equity in School Facilities
- Health Impacts
- Safe Routes to School
- Safe Infrastructure for Walking, Rolling, and Public Transportation

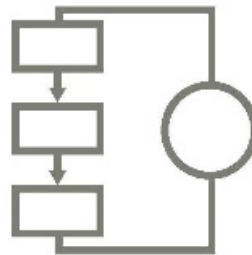


Three Ways to Ensure Smart School Siting



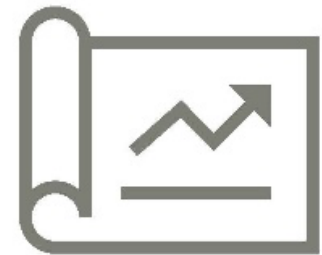
School Districts

Adopt smart school siting policies that address school location and site design.



Local Governments

Establish strong systems for ongoing communication and collaboration with school districts.



State Policy

Set up permanent policy structures that support smart school siting and Safe Routes to School.



School Districts

School District Policies in Colorado

- Many districts use a template and model policies to address school siting
- Limited inclusion of smart school siting principles including prioritizing walking or bicycling, supporting schools in denser residential areas, colocation, or balancing walkability and integration



Best Practices for School Districts

- Incorporate strong language supporting Safe Routes to School into wellness policies
- Adopt strong supportive Safe Routes to School policies
- Develop a statement of goals/principles for school siting, as well as more detailed considerations emphasizing proximity, ability to walk and bike to school, equitable access to school facilities
- Commit to ongoing short and long term data-driven facilities planning



Best Practices for School Districts

- Implement a detailed process involving input and engagement from local communities, the local jurisdiction, and other stakeholders
- Design commitments regarding access for walking and biking, bicycle storage, separation of modes, etc.
- Include considerations regarding student assignment and zones that balance walkability and diversity of student body



Model Policies

Integrate model policies from ChangeLab Solutions that address:

- School Siting Overview Policy
- Long-Term Coordinated Planning
- Procedures for School Site Planning
- Considerations for School Siting Determinations
- Site Design
- General Guidelines for Attendance Zones & Assignment Policies

Model policies tailored for Colorado can be found linked to the info brief



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School Siting Policy Overview

Policy Area: Long-Term Coordinated Planning

- Long term facilities planning
- Planning based on data
- Coordinate with local planning depts.
- Identify joint use and co-location possibilities
- Mothballing plan for excess facilities
- Encourage local jurisdictions to take steps to improve residential integration and walkability



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Policy Area: Criteria for Siting Decisions

Key Criteria:

- Walkable (significant % of student population lives nearby)
- Have safe routes
- Support diversity
- Near community resources
- Not toxic



Policy Area: Site Design & Access

- Bike parking
- Safe access by bike, on foot, bus, and car

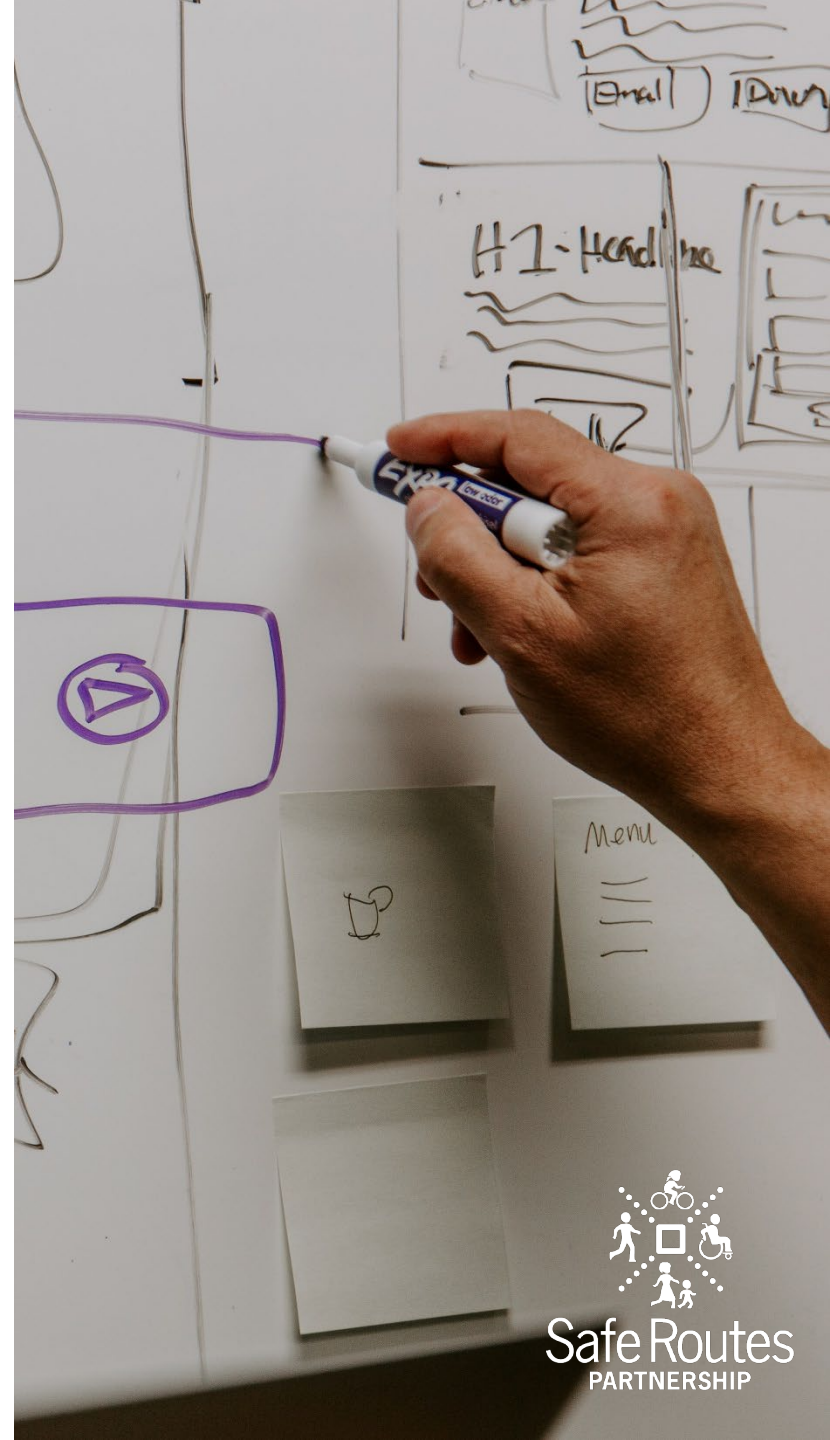




Local Governments

Best Practices for Local Governments

- Zoning and incentivizing dense housing development around existing developed areas, rather than sprawling residential developments that are costly to provide services to
- Colocating parks, libraries, and other civic areas with existing and planned schools
- Developing and regularly updating an active transportation plan (or bicycle and pedestrian plans)
- Adopting a Safe Routes to School resolution
- Adopting a Complete Streets policy
- Establish strong partnerships and systems for ongoing communication and collaboration with local school district(s)





Why Collaboration Matters

- Joint action reaps more benefits
- Walking to school requires:
 - School located near to residential area.
 - Safe, well maintained streets; walkable network – not sprawl
 - Access to the school site
 - Partnerships to apply for SRTS funds

Charlotte-Mecklenberg, NC Task Force (2012)

- Five jurisdictions adopted resolutions supporting coordination – school district, city, county, library, community college
- Task force met monthly
- Addressed joint use and school siting issues





State Policy

Best Practices for States

- Setting up permanent state policy structures
- Avoid negative state requirements, guidelines, or incentives for school siting:
 - No minimum acreage requirements that necessitate excessively large school sites
 - No funding rules that preference new construction over renovation



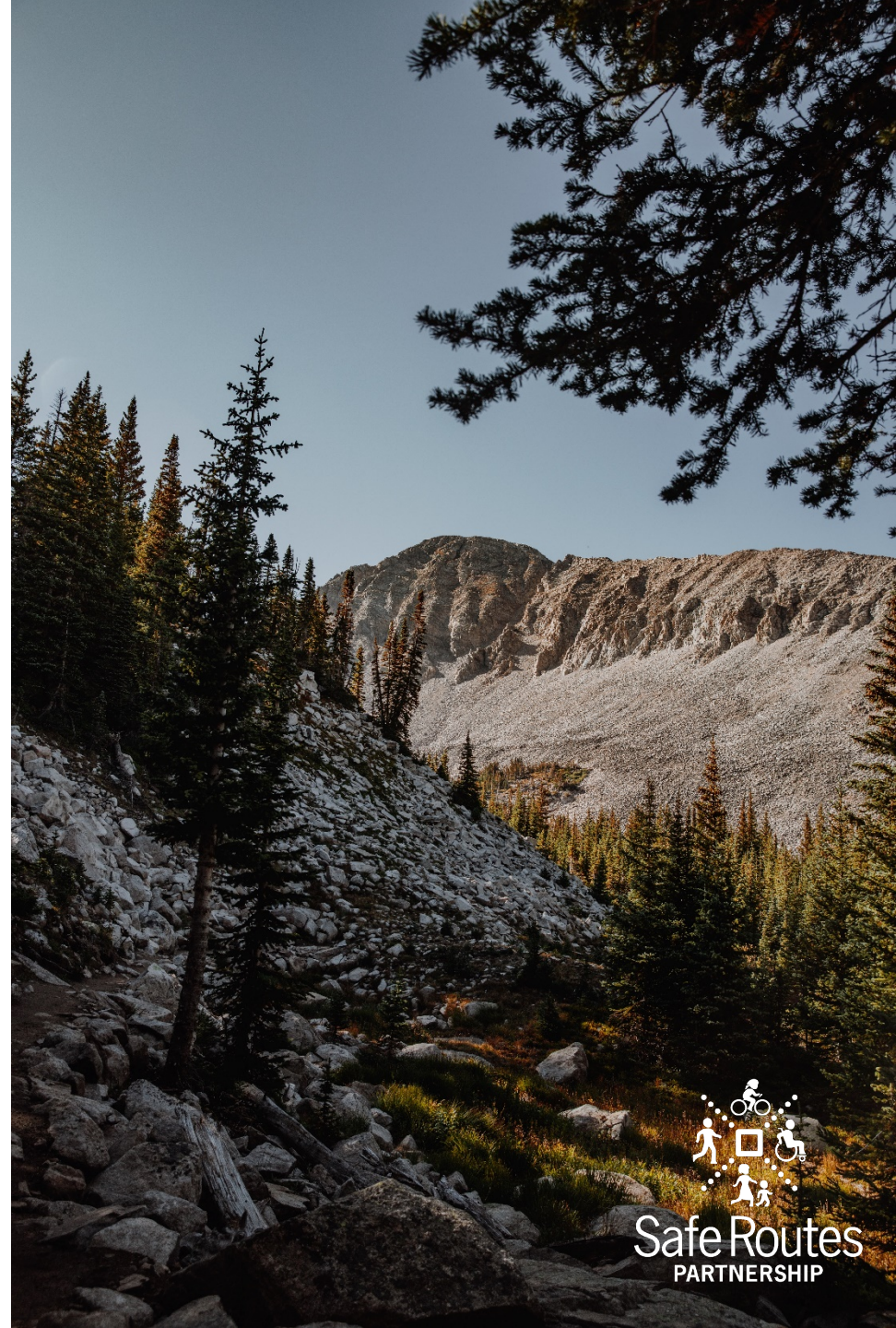
Best Practices for States

- Institute positive requirements, guidelines, and incentives:
 - Support proximity of school sites to student residential origins
 - Support colocation of school sites with parks, libraries, and other civic spaces
 - Support school sites that are well integrated into existing and planned walking and bicycling networks
 - Limit state financial support for excessively large or sprawling sites
 - Consider dangers to students, such as exposure to site contaminants, traffic hazards, air pollution, etc.
 - Support collaborative planning



State Policy in Colorado

- State statute on Safe Routes to School
- No minimum acreage guidelines or negative policies around reimbursement or school funding that prioritize new construction over renovation





State Policy in Colorado: Opportunities

- Establish mandatory or voluntary guidelines, potentially including transportation or education funding incentives:
 - Support for proximity of school sites to student residential origins
 - Support for colocation of school sites with parks, libraries, and civic spaces
 - Support for school sites that are well integrated into existing and planned walking and bicycling networks
 - Considering dangers to students, such as exposure to site contaminants, traffic hazards, air pollution, etc.
 - Strengthening collaborative planning between local jurisdictions and school districts

SUPPORTING SAFE ROUTES TO SCHOOL THROUGH SMART SCHOOL SITING



COLORADO
Department of Transportation



Prepared for the Colorado Department of Transportation

Q & A





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