



Defining Roles and Partnerships for Safe Routes to School

Every community has different priorities, but it is always helpful to work together to achieve shared goals. There are a handful of key players that can directly help with and benefit from collaboration on Safe Routes to School. A **Safe Routes to School task force** is a group of community members who work to support and implement a Safe Routes to School program at the school, city, or district level. A task force’s core purpose is to pull everyone together who cares about Safe Routes to School and is essential to helping students walk and bicycle safely to school.

Building collaborative partnerships between stakeholders can help increase a Safe Routes to School program’s reach and effectiveness. This resource can help in developing a task force or engaging with an existing group of agencies and community partners to support your Safe Routes to School program. Every organization, advocate, or agency has a unique role to play, whether it is analyzing data, conducting walk audits, sharing lived experience, advocating for policy changes, or leading a community event. Use this guide as a starting point to recognize the roles of different partners and take advantage of opportunities for collaboration.



Safe Routes to School Coordinators

Safe Routes to School task forces are often started or chaired by a local Safe Routes to School coordinator – someone who is tasked with leading the Safe Routes to School initiative. Coordinators are essential to the long-term success of a Safe Routes to School program. They can directly provide or coordinate educational programming, facilitate encouragement events, assist with identifying needed infrastructure improvements, evaluate program progress, and center equity and engagement in their work.

Coordinators can be full time or part time and can either be paid or unpaid (volunteer) positions. A volunteer coordinator is most often a parent, family member, or teacher who takes on the role in order to move Safe Routes to School forward in his or her community. While a volunteer lead is beneficial to coordinate efforts when funding has not been identified, there are significant benefits to having a paid coordinator. Safe Routes to School Coordinator positions can be housed at a number of different organizations and agencies, including schools and school districts, local or regional transportation agencies, health departments, and non-profits. Sometimes coordinators are given additional duties that go beyond Safe Routes to School, but still have a focus on walking and bicycling. Such additional duties can include community bike/walk encouragement events and programs, adult education programs, employee commute programs, wellness program coordination, crossing guard and safety patrol coordination, and safe school programs.

School Districts and School Staff

School partners can support Safe Routes to School with education and encouragement programming, pass policies that support physical activity and wellness, identify traffic concerns, and make community connections. Here are some ways school districts and school staff can support your Safe Routes to School program:

- **Transportation departments** can identify walking and biking routes around schools and help with approaches like staggering [arrival and dismissal](#) times to give students time to get clear of car traffic. They can also help designate remote drop-off sites where students can be dropped off or picked up, reducing traffic congestion while encouraging children to be physically active. [School district transportation departments](#) often focus on school bussing, but their role can be expanded to encompass all modes of student travel.
- **Superintendents and school district staff** can help play a key role in increasing access to physical activity opportunities at schools and in communities. Superintendents act as advisors to school boards and provide direction to principals and other school district staff. [School district staff](#) can also help identify Safe Routes to School champions and volunteers.
- **School boards** can pass [policies](#) that support Safe Routes to School, including federally required wellness policies to call on schools to set goals and guidelines that support Safe Routes to School. [School boards](#) can pass specific Safe Routes to School policies instructing principals to encourage groups of students to walk or bicycle to school together and spelling out how the district and schools support walking and bicycling. They can also pass smart school siting policies that help guide the process of deciding where to locate new schools that can make it easier for children to walk or bicycle while ensuring that neighborhood schools serve a diverse range of students. School boards can adopt [shared use agreements](#) that expand access to school facilities like gyms, fields, and playgrounds during non-school hours.
- **Teachers and school staff**, particularly PE teachers, can help build bicycle and pedestrian education into their curriculum.
- **Crossing guards** at busy intersections can improve safety conditions and make families more comfortable allowing their children to walk or bicycle to school.



Community Groups, Nonprofits, and Advocates

Community partners can help lead Safe Routes to School projects, advocate for desired changes, offer lived experience, and volunteer their time and energy. Here are some ideas of non-governmental organizations and community members that may share safe walking and biking goals and be able to lead this work or offer valuable and unique contributions:

- **Children and youth** not only bring an imaginative perspective, but can also help identify barriers to safe transportation, prioritize and design strategies that increase safe transportation for young people, and conduct [youth-led safety education initiatives](#). Engage with school-based or after-school groups of youth, like student leadership groups, service-learning classes, environmental clubs, or a robotics team. Find out what groups exist in your school and see if they would be open to traffic safety collaborations.
- **Local AARP chapters or senior groups** offer opportunities for older adults to connect, a strong source of volunteers, and can be a tremendous resource in planning for age-friendly, livable communities.
- **Local bicycling and walking groups** can partner on encouragement events, help identify safe routes, and organize volunteers for programs like [Walking School Buses](#).
- Supporting and developing authentic relationships with **Black, Indigenous, and people of color-led organizations and affinity groups** can help reimagine and diversify representation in outdoor spaces. For example, local chapters of [Outdoor Afro](#) and [Latino Outdoors](#) offer programming, community connection, and nature outings. [GirlTrek](#) supports women-organized walking teams and is working to pioneer a health movement for African-American women and girls grounded in civil rights history and principles through walking campaigns, community leadership, and health advocacy. Remember to show up to support efforts and events organized by community-based organizations and affinity groups rather than solely expecting residents and organizations to show up for you.
- **Parents and community members** living and working in the areas surrounding schools can help identify community priorities and share what barriers inhibit or support walking and biking access to and from schools. Cultivate authentic relationships with the people who live, work, and play near the schools of focus. Identify ways to support community priorities during and beyond the timeframe of your project or event. Elevate their stories and center them in your Safe Routes to School program.
- **People with disabilities and advocates** bring a much-needed perspective to Safe Routes to School efforts in rethinking “walkability,” reducing barriers to accessible open spaces, and identifying features that increase walking and biking safety and enjoyment for everyone.





Government Agencies

Building connections between government agencies can improve efficiency and multiply resources. Inter-agency collaboration can include co-planning community engagement meetings to consolidate efforts, respect community members' time, and improve trust with residents. Working across agencies can also bring more resources to bear, including budgets, staff time, and diverse expertise, and can help avoid duplicative efforts and cut costs. Here are some of the different roles government agency staff can play in your efforts to improve Safe Routes to School and Safe Routes everywhere:

- **Transportation and public works departments** can help identify infrastructure projects that improve safe walking and biking to and from school and whether those projects are in the city's Capital Improvement Plan, transportation master plan, and other relevant planning documents. These agencies can also help develop maintenance practices that promote well-maintained infrastructure for people walking and biking. They can help analyze existing traffic data, conduct [walk audits](#), collect community surveys, and [lead community meetings/events](#). They can also help apply for grants to support Safe Routes to School infrastructure projects.
- **Public health departments** often work on health promotion efforts to increase physical activity, prevent childhood obesity, and reduce traffic-related injuries. Many Safe Routes to School programs are led by health departments. Public health partners can help identify shared priorities and partner on related Safe Routes to School programming. They can also co-host encouragement events and provide educational programming.
- **Parks and recreation departments** can activate parks and recreation facilities to host engaging community events. They can help activate parks as Park and Walks and meeting locations for Walking School Buses and Bike Trains. Incorporating considerations of [Safe Routes to School and Safe Routes to Parks](#) into park activities may be an easy way to expand effectiveness and reach.

Elected Officials

Elected officials and lawmakers can bring decision-making authority, funding, and project authorization to Safe Routes to School efforts. Here are some of the roles they can play:

- **Lawmakers and elected officials** set policies and issue resolutions that declare priority issues in their communities. They can then direct staff to execute action items that help achieve these goals. For example, passing a Safe School Zone Ordinance can include directives to agency staff to conduct speed studies near schools and reduce speed through environmental design.
- **Elected officials** can incorporate Safe Routes to School action items into system-wide planning and policy, including the Capital Improvement Plan, maintenance plans, and street design policies to increase the sustainability of efforts.
- **People in decision-making positions** can also support cross-sector partnerships by offering letters of support, forming community task forces, and dedicating funding to collaborative projects.



Conclusion

When government agencies, decision-makers, and community advocates work together, they can achieve shared goals and accomplish even more than each could do separately. Developing a coalition of agencies, community organizations and advocates, and decision-makers can elevate your Safe Routes to School efforts and help achieve shared goals. Look around you and you'll see all the unique roles, perspectives, and resources each partner has to offer. When working together you can make extraordinary changes in your schools and communities.