



# MN SRTS Park and Walk Guide





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# 1

## Introduction

Park and Walk programs provide options for students who live too far, or regularly get driven, to add some activity on their way to school while reducing congestion and vehicle emissions near schools. This guide will help you prepare, promote, and encourage families to participate in a Park and Walk event or an ongoing Park and Walk program at your school.

This guide was adapted with permission from King County Metro SchoolPool.



Figure 1. St. Paul Txuj ci Hmong neighborhood walk (Credit: Saint Paul Public Schools)

## What is a Park & Walk?

A Park & Walk Program:

- Encourages families to park at a designated spot near the school and walk the last few blocks to school together
- Can be implemented as a standalone program in coordination with other Safe Routes to School activities, such as Walk and Bike to School Days, Walking Wednesdays, Bus Stop and Walks or Walking School Buses

Park and Walk locations are typically two to four blocks from school. Families may meet at the designated location and walk together. Locations can include parks, community centers, or church parking lots which may be underutilized during the day. Ideally, routes are planned along safe and accommodating places to walk, with few intersections. School staff, parent-volunteers or members of the SRTS Committee can support students crossing streets or busy arterials. Otherwise, parents and caregivers should be encouraged to walk with their child.

## Why a Park & Walk?

Not all students are able to walk, bicycle, or take the bus to school. A Park and Walk Program:

- Can provide more options to students and families who face barriers to walking or biking, such as those who live too far from school, experience obstacles along their route, or are not served by the school bus.
- Can support ongoing Walk and Bike to School events by making them more inclusive.
- Can help decrease congestion and vehicle emissions near schools, promote more physical activity among students, and increase social interactions among families, neighbors, and school community members

## Who plans a Park & Walk?

Anyone can be the Park and Walk champion, as long as they receive permission from the school principal and follow school district volunteer requirements.

School community members are often the program champion, including: PTO members, parent volunteers, PE teachers, school nurses, and/or school administration. Other event champions could include city or school district staff, local public health or local nonprofit staff. This guide can be used by anyone who is leading or involved in a Park and Walk program.

Find more information on the benefits  
of Safe Routes to School:  
Visit the MnSRTS Resource Center!



Figure 2. Students at Hiawatha Elementary School participating in Park and Walk (Credit: Minneapolis Public Schools)

# 2 Plan a Park & Walk to School

A Park and Walk program can be simple and merely provide information to families about park and walk opportunities or it can be a more elaborate, coordinated program.

The following steps provide guidance on establishing a more elaborate program, including important considerations for all types of programs.

## Preparation

### Coordinate with School and District Staff

- Create an outline of what you'd like your Park and Walk program to look like and what information you need from the school or others to set the program in motion
- Check in with school and/or district administration to share your ideas
- Share your ideas with the PTO and other project champions to gain support and identify others to help

### Identify Designated Park & Walk Sites

The drop-off location will need space to accommodate the total number of parent and caregiver vehicles at approximately the same time. For ease of traffic flow, it is ideal to have access to and from the drop-off site; it is best to avoid locations where cars would have to back up to exit and would cross the path of students walking.

Examples of potential drop-off sites may

include:

- Nearby park or trail head Middle or high school a few blocks away
- Neighborhood street with sidewalks and low traffic
- Places of worship
- Public libraries
- Senior center
- Shopping center

## Choosing a Route

To ensure student safety and comfort along the route to school, look for routes with continuous sidewalks or shared-use pathways. If there are no sidewalks in the neighborhood surrounding the school, look for streets with low traffic volumes and speeds, ample width for students to walk on the shoulder, and be sure to walk facing traffic. If there are no sidewalks or suitable streets near the school, students can be dropped off at school and led to the school track or along another route on school property. While it doesn't provide hands-on safety education or the experience of active transportation, walking around school does provide the same health and academic benefits. To the extent possible, limit the number of street crossings along the route from the drop-off site to school. Where crossings are inevitable, look for intersections with simple geometry (i.e. one or two lanes in each direction, streets intersecting at 90-degree angles, and traffic control devices such as stop signs or traffic signals). Also, look for pedestrian infrastructure at the intersection – are there curb ramps leading to marked crosswalks? If there is

a traffic signal present, are there walk/ don't walk signals? It's often worth it to alter a route, even if it makes it slightly longer, to avoid busy or complicated intersections. Most able-bodied adults walk a mile in about 20 minutes. Since students have shorter strides and an abundance of potential distractions on the way to school, this guide recommends a route between 0.25 and 0.5 miles long. Walking these distances should take students no more than 8 to 15 minutes, respectively, and are usually well within the school walk zone. Be sure to allow enough time for students to walk from the drop-off location to school. In Minneapolis, classroom teachers report the benefits of remote drop offs, such as increased focus and more positive attitudes, far outweigh the minor change in schedule. On-time arrival may differ by grade level, or depending on whether students eat breakfast at school. Work with school administrators and classroom teachers to ensure the Park and Walk schedule is compatible with regular morning routines.

## Adult Supervision

The physical characteristics of the walking route to school are just one component of the route planning. Park and Walk organizers will also need to determine the amount of supervision needed along the route. The number of major intersections along the route will influence the number of adult volunteers the route will require. At minimum, at least one school staff member, usually the Park and Walk Leader, needs to be at the drop-off site before the cars arrive to greet the students. Preferably, there will be two or three adults at the drop-off site: one to greet the cars and coordinate traffic flow, one to lead the first group of students to school and one ready to take the next group. Along the route, there should be additional adults stationed at every major intersection. Schools with student safety patrols can decide whether to involve these students at minor crossings, on school grounds, or working with adults at some of the busier intersections. As mentioned previously, coordinating with the local police department for traffic control assistance may be necessary at very busy intersections.

## Coordinate with Parking Lot Owners

If a parking lot is identified as the designated meeting place, coordinate with the City and parking lot owners to gain permission and communicate the details of the program. For a one-day or intermittent Park and Walk event:

- Reach out to the City or parking lot owner to ask for permission
- Consider asking a City contact to ask the parking lot owner
- Ask the principal or school administration for assistance to help make the case
- Create a one-page document to provide the lot owner with basic information about the Park and Walk program, including expected times of use, program benefits, and contact information

For long-term Park and Walk programs:

Ask the district to enter into a shared-use agreement or Memorandum of Understanding with the parking lot owner, which may be the City if it's a public park.



# 3

# Promotion

## Key Messages

To encourage participation in the program, share information about why families should participate and how they can get involved. Be sure to include information on:

- Where to park are recommended walking routes
- Benefits of the program
- How they can learn more
- Who to contact if they have questions or concerns

## Simple Promotion Strategies

Take advantage of existing school and community communication channels to promote the Park and Walk.

- Put up posters around the school with details about the program
- Hand out fliers to families during pick-up and drop-off
- Send flyers or letters home with students Post on social media
- Include an article in the school newsletter or on the website

- Provide information in new student or new school year orientation materials and emails
- Announce the program at PTO meetings and school events
- Make the Park and Walk a social event
- For families by encouraging them to meet at the designated site at a specific time so students and parents can walk together
- Create maps of designated sites and routes to distribute to families, noting if there are any parking rules or requests to follow
- Tailor promotional messages to the school's interests, such as congestion, pollution, health/physical activity, and safety
- Consider coordinating with Walk and Bike to School Day events

Don't forget to communicate with students about Park and Walks. Students should not only be made aware of changes to the way they get to school, but need to be told what the expectations are for them on their walk to school. Ideally, pedestrian safety skills would be covered in the classroom or during bus safety week at the start of the year. School announcements are another method of reviewing the rules for walking and basic pedestrian safety reminders can also be shared on school announcements.



## Incentives

Incentives can encourage families and students to try out Park & Walk. For elementary students, incentives should be small and can be offered to all those who sign-up or pledge to participate, on an ongoing basis, or at a promotional event.

For Middle or High school students, offering a raffle for a larger item is typically more successful at encouraging participation. Consider including Park & Walk families in celebratory efforts for Walk & Roll to School Days. Incentive offerings could include:

- Providing free stickers or hand stamps, coffee, juice, pastries, and fruit a few days throughout the school year to families who participate in Park & Walk.
- Reach out to local businesses, who may be willing to donate select items or provide coupons to their business.
- Checking with your local city agency for any safety-based incentives, such as reflective zipper pulls or backpack lights

## Safety

Safe walking tips information and resources should be distributed to participating families. Details about challenging crossings or areas near the school could be provided if families are choosing their own Park & Walk site.

- Follow all instructions from staff, crossing guards, and school safety patrols
- Wait at every intersection for the crossing guard or the school patrol to direct you to cross a street
- Look left, right, left and behind you and in front of you for traffic. Walk (don't run) across the street
- Watch for cars, trucks and bicycles at every parking lot, driveway, alley and intersection
- Obey all traffic signals and traffic signs
- When you are near the street, don't push, shove, or chase each other
- Stay on the sidewalk. When walking on the sidewalk, be mindful of neighbors' plants and flowers
- Dress for the weather. We will walk rain, shine or snow!

- Leave scooters, skateboards, and sports equipment at home
- Older kids—look out for younger kids
- Be friendly and courteous to all. You represent yourself, your family, your classroom and our school. Make us all proud!



*Figure 3. Students participating in Remote Park & Walk  
(Credit: Clara City)*

## 4 Evaluation

### Tracking Participation

Measure and monitor progress to improve program activities and messaging to better reach audiences:

- Before program launch: Observe school pick-up and drop-off, assessing and noting school traffic congestion, student safety, and number of students currently walking to school.
- After program launch: Consider interviewing participating families to gather quotes and feedback. Count the number of students or families participating, if feasible. Handing out and counting stickers to participating students over one or multiple days is an easy way to capture a participation estimate.

# 5

## Other Considerations

Integrate these additional SRTS programs into a standard Park & Walk program to extend its reach.

**Bus Stop & Walk:** School buses unload the children away from school and the students walk along a designated route to school with classmates, staff, and volunteers. This strategy allows many more students to reap the benefits of walking to school.

**Park & Walk with a Walking School Bus:** A Walking School Bus (WSB) is an organized group of students who walk to and from school with adult volunteers. Typically, groups of students are picked up along a designated route, but combining a WSB with a Park & Walk allows for all students to leave from the designated site together with one or two (rotating) parent volunteers. This strategy requires parent or teacher volunteers to sign up and supervise. Get started with MnSRTS' WSB Guide.

# 6

## Resources

**Safe Routes to School Park and Walk Online Guide:**  
[guide.saferoutesinfo.org/encouragement/park\\_and\\_walk.cfm](http://guide.saferoutesinfo.org/encouragement/park_and_walk.cfm)

**ChangeLab Solutions:** Opportunities to Walk to School through Remote Drop-Off Programs:  
[changelabsolutions.org/sites/default/files/SRTS-Remote-Drop-Off-Rural\\_School\\_DistrictsFINAL\\_20140611.pdf](http://changelabsolutions.org/sites/default/files/SRTS-Remote-Drop-Off-Rural_School_DistrictsFINAL_20140611.pdf)

**Walk! Bike! Fun! At home! Distance learning curriculum:**  
[bikemn.org/education/walk-bike-fun/walk-bike-fun-distancelearning](http://bikemn.org/education/walk-bike-fun/walk-bike-fun-distancelearning)

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