

PARK & WALK TO SCHOOL

Program Guide

Background

Park & Walk programs provide more options for students' commute to school while helping to reduce congestion and vehicle emissions near school campuses. This guide will **help you prepare, promote, and foster participation in a Park & Walk event** or to launch an ongoing Park & Walk program at your school.

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. The program can be implemented as a standalone program or in coordination with other Safe Routes to School activities, such as Walk & Roll to School Day or Walking School Buses.

Park & Walk locations are typically two-to-four blocks from school. Families are encouraged but not required to meet at the designated location and walk together.

Check if school and district policies permit students to walk without adult supervision or if adults coordinating and supervising walking students need to be registered as volunteers with the school.



Why Park & Walk?

Not all students are able to walk, roll, or take the bus to school. Park & Walk programs seek to address several of these barriers to provide more options for students and families. A Park & Walk program:

- ★ Is an option for students who live too far from school to walk, experience obstacles along their route, or are not served by the school bus.
- ★ Can support ongoing Walk & Roll to School events by making events more inclusive.
- ★ Is a great way to decrease congestion and vehicle emissions near schools, promote more physical activity among students, and increase social interactions with other families and neighbors.

Who plans a Park & Walk?

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

Individuals directly involved in the school community are often the program champion, including: PTA members, parent volunteers, PE teachers, school nurses, and/or school administration. Other event champions could include city or school district staff, or a local non-profit staff. This guide is written for anyone who is leading or involved in planning a Park & Walk Program.

Find more information on the benefits of Safe Routes to School at kingcounty.gov/metro/schoolpool



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Plan a Park & Walk to School



Park & Walk program can be simple and provide information to families about park and walk opportunities; or they can be more elaborate, coordinated programs.

The following steps provide guidance on establishing a more elaborate program and include important considerations for programs of all types. While this guide does not include a detailed time line, be sure to allow plenty of time for each step and recruit help from other project champions.

Preparation

Coordinate with School and District Staff

- ★ Create an outline of what you'd like your Park & Walk program to look like and what information you need from the school or others to set the program in motion. *e.g., Will the Park & Walk be a one-day event or be an ongoing program?*
- ★ Check in with school administration, the principal, and/or the school district to share your ideas.
- ★ Share your ideas with the PTA and other project champions to gain support for a Park & Walk Program and identify others to help.

Identify Designated Park & Walk Sites

- ★ Designated Park & Walk sites can ease concerns about finding an available spot or selecting the best route to school. Good options for designated meeting sites should:
 - ▶ Be within ½ mile from the school
 - ▶ Provide a legal and safe place for multiple cars to park
 - ▶ Have a safe way to cross to get to the school, if crossing is required
- ★ Avoid choosing sites along major roadways with difficult crossings. Consider designated parking lots or areas at the following:
 - ▶ Local parks or libraries
 - ▶ Places of worship *e.g., churches, mosques, and temples*
 - ▶ Local businesses or strip malls
 - ▶ Quiet neighborhood streets
- ★ Alternatively, consider encouraging families to park several blocks from the school along neighborhood roadways. This is a great option to gain support for the program while exploring other opportunities for a designated parking area.

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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 & 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, if helpful
- ★ 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 info about the Park & Walk program, including expected times of use, program benefits, and contact information

For long-term Park & 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

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

Simple Promotion Strategies

Use one or more of the following promotional strategies to draw awareness to the Park & Walk option:

- ★ Put up posters around the school with details about the program
- ★ Hand out flyers to families during pick-up and drop-off
- ★ Send flyers or letters home with students
- ★ Post on social media *e.g., the school's PTA page*
- ★ Include an article in the school newsletter or on the website
- ★ Provide information in new student or new school year orientation materials

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Additional Promotion Strategies

- ★ Announce the program at PTA meetings and school events
- ★ Make the Park & Walk a social event for families by encouraging families to meet at the designated drop-off/pick-up site(s) at a specific time so that students and parents can walk together in a group
- ★ Create maps of designated sites 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, and safety
- ★ Consider coordinating with Walk & Roll to School Day events

Crosswalk Reminders

- ▶ **STOP** at the curb's edge.
- ▶ **LOOK** left, right, and behind you.
- ▶ **MAKE EYE CONTACT** with drivers.
- ▶ **DISCONNECT** from cell phone and headphone distractions.
- ▶ **WALK WITH AN ADULT**, other students, or a buddy.
- ▶ **FOLLOW DIRECTIONS** from crossing guards and safety patrols.

Incentives

Incentives can effectively 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 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.
- ★ 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.

Download printable Safety Tips available in multiple languages at kingcounty.gov/metro/schoolpool

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Evaluation

Tracking Participation

Measure and monitor progress to improve the 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.



Resources

- ★ **Safe Routes to School Park and Walk Online Guide:**
guide.saferoutesinfo.org/encouragement/park_and_walk.cfm
- ★ **City of Portland Park and Walk How-to Guide:**
portlandoregon.gov/transportation/article/667770
- ★ **City of Portland Park and Walk Primer:**
portlandoregon.gov/transportation/article/542475
- ★ **ChangeLab Solutions: Opportunities to Walk to School through Remote Drop-Off Programs**
changelabsolutions.org/sites/default/files/SRTS-Remote-Drop-Off-Rural_School_Districts-FINAL_20140611.pdf

Other Considerations

Integrate these additional considerations into a standard your Park & Walk program to extend the program's 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 King County SchoolPool's WSB Guide at kingcounty.gov/metro/schoolpool.

Find more Safe Routes to School resources and templates to use in King County Metro's Safe Routes to School toolkit at kingcounty.gov/metro/schoolpool

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