



The National Policy & Legal Analysis Network to Prevent Childhood Obesity (NPLAN) is a project of ChangeLab Solutions. ChangeLab Solutions is a nonprofit organization that provides legal information on matters relating to public health. The legal information in this document does not constitute legal advice or legal representation. For legal advice, readers should consult a lawyer in their state.

Support for this document was provided by a grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

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Introduction

Only about one-half of U.S. children and youth ages six to 15 get the recommended 60 daily minutes of physical exercise.¹ Walking or bicycling to school is an easy way for children to incorporate physical activity into their day^{2,3} and arrive at school focused and ready to learn.⁴ However, today only 13 percent of students walk or bicycle to school, down from nearly 50 percent of students in 1969.⁵ Physical activity and recreational opportunities in schools have decreased during the same time period, creating new challenges for students' academic achievement, cognitive skills, and behavior.⁶ The overall decrease in daily physical activity corresponds with a dramatic increase in childhood obesity that has resulted in a nationwide health epidemic.^{7,8}

Safe Routes to School programs can help communities and school districts encourage active transportation, and make it safer for students and their families to walk and bike to and from school. Walking and bicycling to school also helps reduce air pollution^{9,10} and traffic congestion around schools¹¹⁻¹³ and build community cohesion. Schools can improve student and community health by raising awareness about active transportation and implementing policies and programs that promote active transportation.

Local School Wellness Policies

All school districts participating in the National School Lunch Program are required to adopt a local school wellness policy. This requirement reflects the essential role schools play in promoting student health, including preventing childhood obesity. Wellness policies must include “goals for nutrition promotion and education, physical activity, and other school-based activities that promote student wellness.”¹⁴ The wellness policy provisions that promote physical activity typically include a wide range of opportunities for students to be physically active, including physical education, recess, physical activity breaks in the classroom, and before- and after-school programs like intramural or interscholastic sports. School districts can also help promote physical activity by including provisions in their wellness policies that encourage active transportation to and from school.

Walking and biking to school can also be addressed in a stand-alone district policy. Districts that want to develop a comprehensive active transportation policy are encouraged to use the online *Safe Routes to School District Policy Workbook*, developed by ChangeLab Solutions and the Safe Routes to School National Partnership. Districts with stand-alone policies should also address active transportation in their local school wellness policies to ensure students, parents, teachers, and other district staff understand the important role walking and biking to school can play in promoting student health and wellness.

Adopting the Model Local School Wellness Policy Language

ChangeLab Solutions has developed the following model policy provisions to include in a local school wellness policy. These provisions can be tailored to meet the specific needs of the school district. School districts will need to (i) choose which elements to include, (ii) determine where to add the language to their existing local school wellness policies, (iii) make other changes for consistency, and (iv) follow the appropriate procedures for amending their policies. In the model, *italicized* language provides different options or explains the type of information needed in the blank spaces in the policy. “Comments” describe the provisions in more detail or provide additional information.

See all of ChangeLab Solutions’ resources on Safe Routes to School at www.changelabsolutions.org/childhood-obesity/srts.

See all of ChangeLab Solutions’ resources on Local School Wellness Policies at www.changelabsolutions.org/local-school-wellness-policies.

Model Local School Wellness Policy Language

Encouraging Walking and Bicycling To and From School

Statement of Support: The School District (“District”) supports walking, bicycling, and other forms of active transportation to and from school and encourages families and District personnel to minimize driving when possible. District shall establish a Safe Routes to School District Task Force to address planning, funding, and policies. District shall encourage individual schools to establish a School Team focused on Safe Routes to School to oversee school planning, funding, and implementation efforts for Safe Routes to School programs, taking into account the unique needs and circumstances of their individual school, their students, and the surrounding neighborhoods and infrastructure. District will provide all students and teachers with traffic safety education and trainings on active transportation skills. The role of the [*District Transportation Department*] shall include encouraging active transportation to and from school, including through events and activities that promote walking and bicycling, such as walking school buses and bicycle trains.

Facilities and Resources: District will provide storage facilities for bicycles, scooters, and other active transportation devices. District will consider how to ensure the adequate provision of crossing guards. District shall ensure equity in distribution of Safe Routes to School resources; evaluate policies and resources that support or inhibit safe and convenient active transportation to or from school, such as the adequate provision of crossing guards; and identify and pursue available funding (from federal and/or state grants and other sources) to support Safe Routes to School.

Integrating Walking with Busing or Driving: District [*shall / shall consider whether to*] establish remote drop-off locations—places where students can be dropped off by bus or car to safely walk the remainder of the way to school—and shall explore safe routes to bus stop programs to allow students who are bused or driven to incorporate active transportation into their day.

COMMENT: Remote drop-off locations and safe routes to bus stop programs can strike a balance between encouraging active transportation and accommodating students who travel long distances to school. For these reasons, they are especially suitable for rural school districts. For more information on school active transportation policies that can be effective in rural areas, see our comprehensive fact sheet, [On the Move: Safe Routes to School Policies in Rural School Districts](#).

Walk Audits: District [*encourages / requires*] individual schools to perform walk audits to assess traffic and safety conditions in the vicinity of each school and identify safety conditions that need mitigation. Where identified problems exist in areas under District’s control, District will seek to mitigate them as promptly as is feasible; where problems are under [*Local Jurisdiction’s*] control, District will encourage [*Local Jurisdiction*] to mitigate them.

School Siting: When determining where to locate new schools or making decisions affecting current school locations, District shall choose locations that support the overall needs of students, their families, and the broader community, with particular attention given to locations that support safe active transportation to and from school, and encourage racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic diversity. In addition, when considering new school facilities or consolidating or closing existing facilities, District shall coordinate its land use planning with [*Local Jurisdiction*]. When constructing a new school or renovating an existing one, District shall design the site to maximize safety and convenience for walking and bicycling to school.

COMMENT: The paragraph on school siting may be particularly appropriate for districts that are anticipating either growth or contraction that will result in the opening or closing of schools. For more information on how school locations can make students healthier and communities stronger, see our [Smart School Siting](#) materials.

Photos courtesy of Lydia Daniller, Flickr Creative Commons: SLO Co Bicycle Coalition, EPA Smart Growth, MoBikeFed, and Livia Rojas.

- ¹ National Physical Activity Plan. *The 2014 United States Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth*. Columbia, SC; 2014.
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- ⁴ Trost SG. *Active Education: Physical Education, Physical Activity and Academic Performance*. San Diego, CA; 2009.
- ⁵ National Center for Safe Routes to School. *How Children Get to School: School Travel Patterns From 1969 to 2009*. Chapel Hill, NC; 2011.
- ⁶ Singh A, Uijtendwilligen L, Twisk JWR, van Mechelen W, Chinapaw MJM. Physical activity and performance at school: a systematic review of the literature including a methodological quality assessment. *Arch. Pedi* 2012;166(1):49-55.
- ⁷ Ogden CL, Carroll MD, Kit BK, Flegal KM. Prevalence of obesity and trends in body mass index among US children and adolescents, 1999-2010. *JAMA* 2012;307(5):483-90. doi:10.1001/jama.2012.40.
- ⁸ Goran MI, Reynolds KD, Lindquist CH. Role of physical activity in the prevention of obesity in children. *Int. J. Obes*. 1999;23(Suppl 3):S18-S33.
- ⁹ Brandt SJ, Perez L, Künzli N, Lurmann F, McConnell R. Costs of childhood asthma due to traffic-related pollution in two California communities. *Eur. Respir. J*. 2012;40(2):363-70. doi:10.1183/09031936.00157811.
- ¹⁰ Gauderman WJ, Avol E, Lurmann F, et al. Childhood Asthma and Exposure to Traffic and Nitrogen Dioxide. *Epidemiology* 2005;16(6):737-743. doi:10.1097/01.ede.0000181308.51440.75.
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- ¹² U.S. Department of Transportation. *Congestion: Who Is Traveling in the Peak?* Washington, DC; 2007.
- ¹³ McDonald NC, Brown AL, Marchetti LM, Pedroso MS. U.S. school travel, 2009: An assessment of trends. *Am. J. Prev. Med*. 2011;41(2):146-51. doi:10.1016/j.amepre.2011.04.006.
- ¹⁴ U.S.C. 1758b(b)(1) (2014).