



Observation of a School:

Understanding Walking and Biking Safety Issues

The best way to understand walking and bicycling safety issues at a particular school is by observing students arriving or departing during a normal school day. This includes observing children as they walk or bike the routes to school, how they cross streets, the interactions they have with cars and buses on the school campus, and how they make their way to the school door. The goal is to identify two main things:

- The physical environment for walking and bicycling both on the school campus and in the surrounding area; and
- The behaviors of pedestrians, bicyclists and motorists.

A good way to start is in a neighborhood near the school. Observe the route the students are taking. When on the school campus, walk in a loop to make sure you have a chance to observe all locations and forms of behavior. Be prepared to jot down things you want to address. Be at the main entrance the fifteen minutes prior to school starting and the first fifteen minutes when school is dismissed.

1. Physical environment

Look at the physical environment and how it affects the behavior of children and adults.

Observe:

- The main door(s) where kids enter and exit the school.
- Where parents pick up and drop off their kids (Is this activity separated from children walking or bicycling? Does the queue of cars back up into the street?).
- Where buses load and unload.
- Where kids park their bikes.
- The sidewalks around the school, or if missing, the locations where they should be located.
- The intersection(s) that kids must use to access the school site; include intersections with and without school crossing guards.
- The 20 MPH School Zone signs, or if absent, where they might need to be installed.
- Driveways along the walk route
- Paths, desire lines or goat trails that indicate where pedestrians have created informal pathways.
- Other areas mentioned by the local representative(s).

2. Behaviors to observe

Motorists:

- Do they yield to pedestrians?
- Are they obeying speed limits?
- Do they follow pick up & drop off procedures?
- Are they parked legally?

Pedestrians:

- How many kids are walking?
- Are they crossing at marked crosswalks?
- Are they obeying crossing guards?
- Are they crossing streets safely?
- Are they facing traffic when walking along a road?
- Are they able to walk on a sidewalk?

Bicyclists:

- How many kids are bicycling?
- Are they following the rules of the road?
- Are they wearing helmets?

Crossing guards:

- Do they have safety equipment?
- Are they in the needed locations?
- Are they helping students cross safely?