

Points to Raise with Local Government Officials

If you are able to get a meeting with your local representatives to advocate for school traffic safety, these talking points may help.

Unreliable beacons put children at risk.

Flashing school zone beacons are supposed to alert drivers of lower speed limits during school drop-off and pick-up times. But many Texas school beacons are managed manually, making it difficult to:

- Accommodate sudden schedule changes for early release days or inclement weather
- Notice & fix malfunctions before the public complains
- Ensure all beacons are working when school starts

Without working and correctly-timed beacons, children walking or biking to school are at greater risk from speeding vehicles. Most collisions in school zones occur when pedestrians are crossing the road, making slow speeds vital for safety.

The numbers:

- 80-90% of drivers exceed posted speed limits in school zones¹
- 59% drivers claimed that they sped in school zones because they were unaware of the school zone until too late²
- Flashing beacons were ranked second-most influential in slowing driver speeds, after the presence of children³
- Drivers are 15% more likely to slow down for school beacon when alerted by an app⁴
- Gwinnett County, GA saw 90% reduction in public maintenance calls about school beacons after installing smart school beacons⁵
- Of the children that lived within 1 mile of school, only 35% walked or biked to school in 2005, compared to 89% in 1969⁶

¹ Strawderman, Lesley et al. "Driver behavior and accident frequency in school zones: Assessing the impact of sign saturation" (2015). *Accident Analysis & Prevention*.

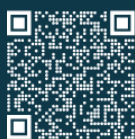
² Ash, Kelly Grant. "Increasing Speed Limit Compliance in Reduced-Speed School Zones" (2006). *Theses and Dissertations*. 415.

³ Ash (2006).

⁴ Jain, Eakta et al. "I-STREET Initiative – Evaluation of Intelligent School Zone Beacon and Vehicle-Cyclist Detection and Warning System" (2020). *Repository & Open Science Access Portal*.

⁵ Tom Sever, Gwinnett County DOT. "Gwinnett County's school beacon system presented Outside the Box Award" (2016). *Applied Information*.

⁶ University of North Carolina Highway Safety Research Center. "The Decline of Walking and Bicycling" (2015). *Safe Routes to School Online Guide*.



Scan the QR code for ways to bring smart school beacons to your community.

A Smart Solution: Automated, monitored beacons

We advocate for upgrading school zone beacons to modern systems that:

- Can be scheduled remotely to match school calendars
- Allow real-time updates (e.g., during emergencies or early dismissals)
- Alert appropriate authorities when a beacon malfunctions
- Can alert distracted drivers through an app or in-car system when they enter a school zone

These systems already exist and are in use in districts across Texas. More than 1,400 smart school zone beacons are used in Houston alone.

Real results

“When we put them in and then COVID hit, it was great for one guy to be able to go on and change a ‘start of school’ or ‘end of school’ [schedule].”

*– Juan Gutierrez
Streets and Traffic Operations Manager
Town of Addison, TX*

Tell your lawmakers about the challenges faced by your specific school, or conduct a Walk/Bike Audit to evaluate specific areas of concern before your meeting. Safe Routes to School has published guidance on conducting Walk/Bike Audits in your community.

Funding

State and federal grants may be available through a variety of programs, such as the following:

- Safe Routes to School (SRTS) – Federal Highway Administration
- Safe Streets and Roads for All (SS4A) Implementation Grants – USDOT
- Strengthening Mobility and Revolutionizing Transportation (SMART) Grants – USDOT

Take action now

- Ask your local elected officials if you have smart school beacons in your community.
- Urge your elected officials to audit and upgrade outdated beacon infrastructure, and to add flashing beacons at pedestrian crossings.
- Partner with other parents to raise awareness in your community.



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