



# Thank You for Taking the Lead in Your Neighborhood!



Thank you for volunteering to be the captain for your neighborhood. This guide is to help you and your neighbors in forming SchoolPools.

## **What is a SchoolPool?**

A Neighborhood SchoolPool Network is formed by a group of families within a neighborhood who all travel to the same school at the same time. By sharing the responsibility of getting your children to school you save yourself valuable time while reducing vehicle trips, traffic congestion and the related greenhouse gases and other polluting emissions.

## **A SchoolPool can be one or a combination of the following:**

- **Walking school bus:** Parent-led groups of children walking together safely to school
- **Bike train:** Parent-led groups of children riding bicycles together safely to school
- **Carpool:** Organized groups of parents from your neighborhood driving children safely to school
- **Park and walk:** Parents park their cars in designated parking areas (along school routes), walk the rest of the way to school with children, and walk back to their car.

**A SchoolPool Network** is a group of parents who exchange contact information so they can form SchoolPools among their group.

**A Street Coordinator** organizes a SchoolPool network with the families who live on their street or the nearby cross streets.

# How to Get Started:



*In 2006, when our kids were in kindergarten and third grade, we were contacted by a neighbor to get together at her house to discuss ways to get our kids to school together instead of us all driving them by ourselves. She had volunteered on a Safe Routes to Schools committee at our school to organize our neighborhood school pools. Three families agreed to bike once a week on Walk to School Day Wednesdays. It worked so well that now we bike with them whenever we can if the weather permits. We don't use a formal system; we just call each other the night before or sometimes in the morning. And when we can't bike we set up carpools. My daughter has made a good friend whom we might not have met without the SchoolPool. My son now walks to the middle school and we all still bike with the younger kids to school whenever we can.*

– Sheri, Sycamore Park mom, Mill Valley

1. The Safe Routes to Schools' SchoolPool on-line program has identified the families who live in your neighborhood and registered to participate in the program. We recommend working with your school to help to send out the initial email to solicit interested parents and Street Coordinators within your area in order to increase participation. The SchoolPool program will then supply you with a list of the parents who responded.
2. We highly recommend bring people together initially. Host an initial gathering either in your home or another location within your neighborhood. People are more likely to attend if it is close and convenient.
  - Contact your interested parents to invite them through both email and with follow-up phone calls. The phone calls are particularly important – people are more likely to attend if you reach out to them personally. There will be some respondents who will offer to make phone calls or host a gathering at their house. Make use of these volunteers to help you to call the people on your list and invite them to the gathering.
  - This gathering will be both a social, so you can meet each other, and an opportunity to start getting organized.
  - If you know neighbors who have not yet responded who you think might be interested, invite them as well.
3. Start the gathering informally with a social. Make sure there is food. You can make it a potluck, a tea gathering, even a barbecue.
4. After the initial social interaction at the gathering, encourage people to sit down and introduce themselves. Ask them to include their name, the ages of their children and where they live, and to share how they are currently traveling to school, and what greener mode they think might work for them.
5. Give a presentation on the SchoolPool program. Let the group know the advantages and benefits of SchoolPooling. Explain how the program will work and how you will assist people. Give them guidance on rules and agreements. Ask for questions or discussion.
6. Divide your group up into smaller groups of families that live near each other. Identify the street coordinator for each of these clusters. Some of these clusters may be larger than others, and some families may not live close enough to others to be in a cluster. Make sure everyone who is interested is assigned to a cluster so they can get started. Have each cluster create a contact list.  
(NOTE: If your initial meeting is too small to divide into networks, then develop a plan for those present and then promote it to grow your neighborhood network).
7. Provide your Street Coordinator with guidance on forming their SchoolPool Network (see handout).

# Organizing a Neighborhood SchoolPool Network

*It may take a few weeks to get things going smoothly, so be patient in the beginning. Soon you will have a neighborhood travel system in place for the rest of the year and beyond. Whether it is for carpooling, biking, walking, or a combination, you will have a pool of people to call on when you are in a bind and need help getting your children to or from school and possibly to other activities. These networks can last throughout your children's school years.*

- Determine what modes you will be using—walking, biking, carpooling, or a combination.
- Compare your schedules—bell times, work schedules, after-school activities.
- Decide if your SchoolPool will operate for rides home after school as well as morning drop-off.
- Decide how many days you will SchoolPool. You can start with one day a week, and then build upon that once you feel at ease with your new SchoolPool.
- Work out a calendar and assign responsibilities. Establish meeting places, make plans about weather, and establish how you will deal with tardiness.
- Make a weekly schedule of when each family is leading the SchoolPool. Include contact information.
- Distribute the schedule to the other families and suggest they post the schedule at home in a central family location.
- Discuss each parent's responsibilities and obligations: how to handle emergency situations, and other guidelines.
- Establish children's responsibilities: behavior, tardiness, obeying traffic rules.
- See special instructions for Walking and Bike Pools



## **FOR CARPOOLING:**

- Determine which families will carpool together initially; this may change as new families join or others drop out.
- Provide proof of automobile insurance to carpooling partners.
- Federal recommendations advise using a booster seat for children up to 49 pounds. Booster seats are for big kids too! To determine whether your child still needs a booster seat, you can visit <http://www.carseat.org>.
- Determine the procedure if one family is away on vacation or if the carpool driver is sick on the day they are designated to drive.

# Helpful Tips:



## CREATE AGREEMENTS

- Set expectations for the time to meet, the location and departure times. Discuss what you will do if another family is late.
- Consider a trial period of a few weeks to see if the new SchoolPool arrangement is working for everyone.
- Travel with each other the first few times to be sure everyone is comfortable.
- Be sure you have current contact information for all parents of all children traveling in the SchoolPool (cell phones, land lines, and email).
- Ask to see carpool driver's current license and insurance.

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## EXPANDING YOUR NETWORK

- Continue to promote your SchoolPool to others in your neighborhood. If you are walking or biking, or if there is room in your carpool, invite others to join your SchoolPool.
- Drivers can pick up others on the way to school, even if the parents cannot reciprocate regularly. Those parents might provide rides after school or at some other time. Walk and ride leaders can let other children who are riding or walking the same route, join in their groups.
- Informal SchoolPooling with your neighbors works, too. Families can call their neighbors to see if their kids are walking or biking or can carpool that day. Create a Neighborhood Roster for informal SchoolPooling or to carpool on stormy days.
- SchoolPool does not need to be every day or both to and from school to have a positive impact. But, please carpool, walk, bike, or park and walk as often as possible. Every motor-vehicle mile reduced is significant. Walkers and bikers can carpool when it gets stormy.



# Walking School Buses and Bike Trains

- A **Walking School Bus** is a group of neighbors who walk to school picking up kids along the way or meeting at a set location. The rule of thumb is to have one adult for six children. Be sure a large group has an adult at the front and one at the rear as well.
- A **Bike Train** is a group of kids who bike together to or from school. If the group members are under age 12, there should be one adult for each four children, one in front and one in back. Young children biking to school should always be accompanied by an adult.



## BEST PRACTICES

### Routes Selection:

Spend a weekend day walking or biking the route you will take to school. Time how long it takes. Note any safety concerns and be sure to establish how each will be handled. For instance, if there is no sidewalk on part of the routes, children will walk single file with adults in the front and the back. Report any safety concerns along your route to your Safe Routes to Schools committee.

### Bike Trains

Bike trains are only recommended for children who are proficient at riding—usually aged 8 or up although some children learn faster than others. It is the parents' responsibility to assess their child's ability. Those who are not proficient can ride a "trailer bike" (third-wheel bike attached to parent's bike). Consider organizing a Riding with Youth Class for your bike trains. You can request this class from Safe Routes to Schools by contacting [peggy@marinbike.org](mailto:peggy@marinbike.org). 415-456-3469 ext 8#.

### Rainy Days

You may decide to walk rain or shine. If not, then plan in advance: In the event of a rainy day, what will the backup plan be in order to carpool all students to school? This may require some networking the evening before so parents know who the drivers are and where to meet.

## SAFETY TIPS:

- Discuss and practice road safety and traffic rules
- Make sure that parents do not leave their children alone while waiting for the group; the supervision of each child must be transferred to a responsible adult.
- Don't let children get too far ahead or behind.
- Encourage children to wear bright or fluorescent colors or reflector tape on their backpacks or jackets
- Yellow vests or armbands help with visibility. You can get them for all participants or just for the adults.
- Bring along a wagon for books, musical instruments and projects

## BIKING TIPS:

- Make sure that the bikes are in good working condition
- Make sure that the bike fits the rider
- Ideally have an adult at the front, one at the back and one in the middle.
- Every rider is wearing a helmet, including the adults.
- One adult can pull a trailer with backpacks, instruments or projects.

# 5 top reasons why you should get involved in a Neighborhood SchoolPool program



## 1. SAFETY

Traffic in school parking lots and drop-off zones can become dangerous when several hundred parents are trying to get their children to and from school at the same time. Fewer cars on our streets means a safer commute environment for our children.

## 2. COST SAVINGS

Getting involved with your Neighborhood SchoolPool program can save you money by reducing the amount of driving you do. You will use less gas and save on the wear and tear of your car.

## 3. TIME SAVINGS

Save time by reducing the number of days you drive your children to and from school.

## 4. CLEAN AIR AND IMPROVED HEALTH

Fewer cars on our streets translates into cleaner air for all of us. Walking and biking to school provides the minimum daily exercise children and adults need.

## 5. MEETING NEW FRIENDS

Getting involved with your neighborhood SchoolPool program is a great way for you and your children to meet neighbors who are also local school parents and students. This can lead to other activities like play dates, neighborhood gathering and disaster preparedness.

## NEIGHBORHOOD SCHOOLPOOL CREATES LIFELONG FRIENDS

*When my daughter was in first grade in 2001, I started a carpool with one of her classmates who lived in the same neighborhood. That carpool soon grew into four families. We started carpooling together because it made sense since we traveled the same route every day, but we were also motivated to make it work because we wanted to drive less.*

*We organized an easy schedule and each mom picked one day to drive. From then on, I only had to drive to school once a week—what a timesaver! Every Wednesday, we all biked to school with our kids. We took younger siblings on bike extensions while we taught the first graders how to ride safely.*

*As the kids grew older they continued to bike every Wednesday on their own as it became less and less cool to bike with Mom or Dad. But I still loved waving goodbye to my daughter every Wednesday (with a cup of coffee in my hand) as she confidently rode away on her bike to join the other neighborhood kids.*

*It's now 2010 and we carpool our children to Middle School, two miles away. As they move into high school, they plan to walk, thanks to our neighborhood habit of traveling to school together.*

- Laura, Deer Park neighborhood, Fairfax, California



Safe Routes to Schools is a program of the  
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