

Walk Audit

Subject: Language Arts/Social Studies



OBJECTIVES:

- To assess the neighborhood using a tool that analyzes safety and traffic concerns.
- To understand the process of making community improvements by writing letters that address safety concerns.



MATERIALS:

- Walk audit worksheet
- Extra 2-4 adults
- Walking field trip permission slips



SETTING: outdoors, around the school



ESTIMATED TIME:

30 minutes for the walk audit, 1 class session for the letter-writing part



VOCABULARY:

- Route, hazards



ACTIVITY SOURCE:

Transportation Authority of Marin's Safe Routes to Schools; online lesson plans

OVERVIEW:

Students will conduct an audit of the school neighborhood, assessing it for safety and traffic concerns. They will then write a letter to the City Council or PTA to make specific recommendations that address these concerns.

BACKGROUND:

Why do so many children get driven to school? In many areas it is estimated that 20 to 30% of peak morning traffic is school-related. The reasons are obvious: The journey between home and school has become longer and more treacherous because of decades of auto-oriented suburbanization. Parents are concerned that their children will be exposed to dangerous strangers. Sidewalks, crosswalks, and bike paths are scarce.

Conducting a walk audit around the school neighborhood helps children, parents and teachers to see first-hand what the hazards and barriers are in the area. Sometimes the fears are real: speeding traffic is dangerous. Other times this exercise can help students and parents alike realize that the perceptions are more emotionally-based than reality-based. *Marin County Safe Routes to Schools*

Walk audits are actual tools of the Safe Routes to Schools program. Conducted by an experienced planning and design firm, this activity engages parents, school staff, and other community leaders in identifying needed improvements for safer walking and biking routes to school. This lesson simulates the adult walk audit, but if your school is conducting one for adults, sending a student along to report back the results to the rest of the class would be an excellent lesson as well.

LESSON SET-UP:

1. Recruit 2-4 adults to help out with this lesson (Safe Routes staff may be available to help; call 707-545-0153 to request assistance).
2. Photocopy Walk Audit sheet for each group.
3. Send home a walking field trip permission slip, if required by your school's administrators.

STATE STANDARDS

Language Arts:

- 2.4: Write a persuasive letter or composition.
- A. State a clear position in support of a proposal.
 - B. Support a position with relevant evidence.



Walk Audit

BUILDING BACKGROUND/ DISCUSSION:

1. Ask the class how many people usually walk or ride (or ride a scooter, skateboard, etc.) to school.
 - Ask how many people regularly carpool (carpool means more than one family sharing a ride) or take a bus to school.
 - Ask students who don't walk or bike to school what kinds of barriers there are to not walking or bicycling.
 2. Ask students who do walk or bike how safe they think their routes are.
 3. Brainstorm with the students a list of the safety hazards there are around the school. Examples could include not enough crossing guards, too much traffic, not enough stop signs, etc.
2. crossing guards, adding signs for drivers, stop signs and bike lanes.
 2. Vote on the top three concerns and discuss specific recommendations to address these concerns.
 3. Have students write a letter to the school's City Council representative and/or Traffic Engineering Department that explains the students top three concerns and makes specific suggestions to address these concerns. Letters to the PTA president (if your school has one) might be helpful as well for certain issues.

ACTIVITY:

PART I: outside the classroom

1. Divide students into three to five groups, depending on how many chaperones you have. Distribute the walk audit handout to each group (you will be leading one of the groups).
2. Go outside and divide the students up into the groups. Instruct one group to start at one corner and the other group at another area of the school.
3. Walk on the blocks immediately around the school. Choose blocks to walk on that are frequented by students walking and riding to school.
4. Complete the walk audit handout while walking with the group.

PART II: inside the classroom

1. Have a representative from each group present the top five concerns from the walk audit. Have a discussion about the following:
 - How safe is this neighborhood for walking and biking?
 - What can the school and city do to improve the neighborhood's safety? Cite examples such as a



EXTENSION IDEAS

1. Find the school neighborhood on Google Maps or a regular city map and photocopy it for the students. Have them map out a safe route to school using colored pencils. If they live too far to walk or bike, have them map out a route from their house to a destination that they often go to, like a park or their friend's house.
2. Ask students to design a town that is bike and pedestrian friendly, writing a paragraph explaining their town's design.

Walk Audit Handout

Student Drop-Off and Pick-Up Areas;

Ask students who get dropped off the following:

- Do Drop-off/pick-up areas, either on-site or on-street, provide enough space for vehicles to line up?
- Does morning drop-off traffic move in an orderly fashion without congestion and backup?

Bus Loading Zone

- Is there a direct and safe route for kids to get from the bus drop off zone to the school?

Sidewalks and Hike Routes

- Are the sidewalks wide enough and without gaps?
- Are there accessible ramps for wheelchair access?
- Are there cars sticking out from driveways onto the sidewalk so that kids have to walk on the road to keep going?

Intersections

- Where are there high volumes of car traffic?
- Where are there high volumes of pedestrian traffic?
- Are there painted crosswalks for all crossing directions?
- Where are they needed?

- Are there traffic control signs, such as stoplights or stop signs?

- Are the lights timed long enough for crossing the street?
- Are pedestrians looking both ways before they cross the street?
- Are pedestrians crossing in marked crosswalks, or are they using unmarked locations or Jaywalking?
- How many crossing guards are present before and after school hours? Do you think that more are needed? If so, where?

Traffic Signs, Speed Control, Signals, and Markings

- Are there School Zone signs, School Crossing signs, School Speed Limit Signs, Flashing Beacons, or No Parking signs?
- Are there any school pavement markings located on the streets next to or close to the school grounds (e.g. signs that say "SLOW: SCHOOL XING")?
- Are there currently traffic/speed control measures such as speed bumps?

Driver behavior: Did you see:

- Drivers who backed cut of driveways without looking
- Did not stop at intersections, especially when pedestrians were crossing the street
- Drove too fast or sped up to make it through traffic lights

OTHER NOTES:
