

From the Health Officer

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Walking to School is Good for Kids

If you grew up in the 1960s, as I did, chances are you walked or biked to school.

Back then, childhood obesity was rare. Most kids had a regular dose of exercise every day, just walking or biking with friends to school, or rambling down country lanes to the big yellow school bus.

Today the picture is very different. Streets around our schools are congested with the cars of parents dropping off and picking up their kids.

Fewer than 15 percent of children now walk or bike to school on a regular basis. Many kids never go anywhere unless someone drives them.

During the same time, childhood obesity rates have tripled. Is there a connection?

That's a question that parents, educators and public health experts are starting to ask. Are we depriving our kids of an easy opportunity to get physically fit, burn some fat and develop personal responsibility by providing them with private curbside transportation everywhere they go?

Earlier this month many parents, teachers and others joined kids from schools throughout our region in the annual Walk to School Day, a celebration of the joys of putting one foot in front of the other to get to and from school. For many adults who participated, the health benefits that kids get from walking were of greatest importance.

But the payback from walking to and from school doesn't stop there. Kids who are physically fit from a daily walk to school have been shown to do better academically than their peers in mom's taxi.

Children who walk to school also develop a stronger relationship with the natural world. Young people who spend unstructured time exploring the natural environment are better able to use parks, gardens and other green spaces to cope with stress throughout life.

By contrast, kids who ride everywhere in cars are said to suffer from "nature deprivation syndrome."

Having more kids walk and bike to school also reduces traffic congestion around schools, and cuts down on air pollution and pedestrian injuries in surrounding neighborhoods. More than one-quarter of morning traffic is now school-related. Wouldn't it be great to get those cars off the road?

Of course, we can't ask kids to walk to school where it is unsafe to do so. Fears of child abduction and other crimes against children are not unfounded, but the risk – especially in our local communities – may be overestimated by many parents.

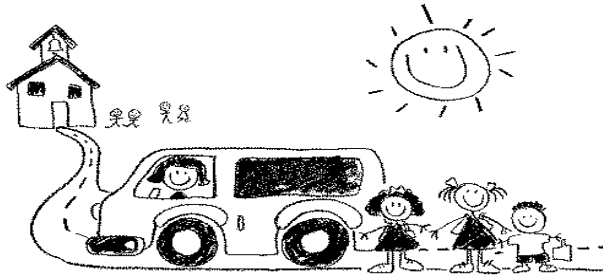
A more realistic barrier to walking is a lack of physical infrastructure, such as sidewalks, bike paths and protected crosswalks. Too often our schools have been located beside heavily traveled roads without adequate sidewalks linking them to neighborhoods where children live.

El Dorado County is fortunate to have professional transportation planners who are currently examining deficiencies in the pedestrian network around schools. They are committed to making it possible for every child who wants to walk to school to do so, as funding for new sidewalks and other improvements is found. They deserve our support.

In the meantime, the non-profit 50 Corridor TMA has teamed up with the elementary schools of El Dorado County and the Folsom Cordova Unified School District to launch a program called Smart Routes to School. The program's website is kid-friendly and very informative. Check it out at www.smarttroutestoschool.com.

If you have a question about this topic, you may contact Dr. Eberhart-Phillips at jeberhart-phillips@edcgov.us.

10 Ideas for SchoolPoolers



Schoolpooling is going to save you money, reduce your stress level, and improve the quality of the air you breathe.

To get the most out of your arrangement, we suggest that you read over the following tips for carpoolers. They will help you develop a plan for your schoolpool and get the group in the right direction.

1. Have lunch with a potential schoolpool parent before you start pooling.

A personal meeting is more helpful than a phone conversation when establishing schoolpool policies.

2. Draw up a driving schedule.

If you decide to share driving duties, assign a particular day (or days) of the week to each driver. This way others in your family can use the car regularly. Many poolers find rotating drivers weekly or monthly to be the most practical carpool arrangement.

3. Agree upon a regular pick-up schedule and be punctual.

Each pooler should know when and where to meet the schoolpool every day. Agree to wait five to ten minutes for all poolers to arrive. Be sure to call your poolers if you are running late.

4. Keep your fellow schoolpoolers' home and work phone numbers handy.

That way you can notify them when your student(s) will not be going to school, or in cases of emergency. Let pool partners know if you your students will miss a day's ride, either to or from school.

5. Keep your car in good mechanical condition.

Perform all regular maintenance to reduce emissions and prevent breakdowns.

6. Select an afternoon meeting spot or have the school designate one.

All of the students in the SchoolPool should know exactly where and when to meet the driver after school. The spot should be in a safe area from which it is easy for them to get into the car and that doesn't require crossing the street, if possible.

7. Consult your insurance agent.

Find out if your company offers lower rates for reduced driving or requires increased coverage for higher liability limits. Discuss with other drivers to find out if their coverage is adequate. Use this opportunity to address safety and driving records.

8. Plan to run your errands on your own time.

Your carpool is for taking children to school. Stopping for "quick errands" on the way can drastically increase commute time and lessen the value of a carpool.

9. Lay a few ground rules if necessary.

Set some rules on things like radio station and volume that may make the commute uncomfortable.

10. Establish a policy for driver reimbursement.

SchoolPools work best when everyone contributes to the carpool's operation and receives equal benefit. Agree upon a cost per mile for gas, add parking fees, and divide by the number of riders in your pool. Schedule payments on a weekly or monthly basis. If everyone takes turns driving, you shouldn't need to calculate driving expenses.

AUDIT FORM

Walk and Bikeability Audits of El Dorado County Schools

Auditor: _____

School Name: _____

Nearest Cross Streets: _____

I. Pedestrian and Bicycle Facilities/Conditions

Informal Walkways: Yes No
_____ Points

_____ Excellent (4) Good (3) Adequate (2) Poor (1) Inadequate (0)

Bike Lanes (with limits, from, to)
_____ Points

_____ Yes No

Shoulder Width (with limits from, to)
_____ Points

2 – 4 foot shoulder (2) 1 – 2 foot shoulder (1) No shoulder (0)

Sidewalks (with limits from, to) Yes _____ No _____
_____ Points

Excellent (4) Good (3) Adequate (2) Poor (1) Inadequate (0)

Bike Path Yes No
_____ Points

Crosswalks (locations) _____

Points

Crossing Guard (3)	Stop Controlled (2)	Mid-Block (1)	None (0)
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Signage (locations) Yes _____ (1) No _____ (0)

Points

Special color or signage (1)

Speed Limit _____

Bicycle Parking _____

Points

Yes (1)	No (0)
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ADA Compatibility/Curb Cuts Yes No

Points

Excellent (4)	Good (3)	Adequate (2)	Poor (1)	Inadequate (0)
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FACILITIES/CONDITIONS OVERALL RANKING _____ of 25

II. Issues of Concern

III. Walkability

Description of Nearby Residential

Density/Land Use

Points

Very Rural (0)	Rural (1)	Suburban (2)	Dense Suburban (3)
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Nearby Activity Centers

Points

2 miles (0)	1.25 Miles (1)	.75 Mile (2)	.5 Mile or less (3)
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Nearby Drop Zones for Walking School Bus Yes No

Points

Excellent (4)	Good (3)	Adequate (2)	Poor (1)	Inadequate (0)
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WALKABILITY OVERALL RATING of 10
