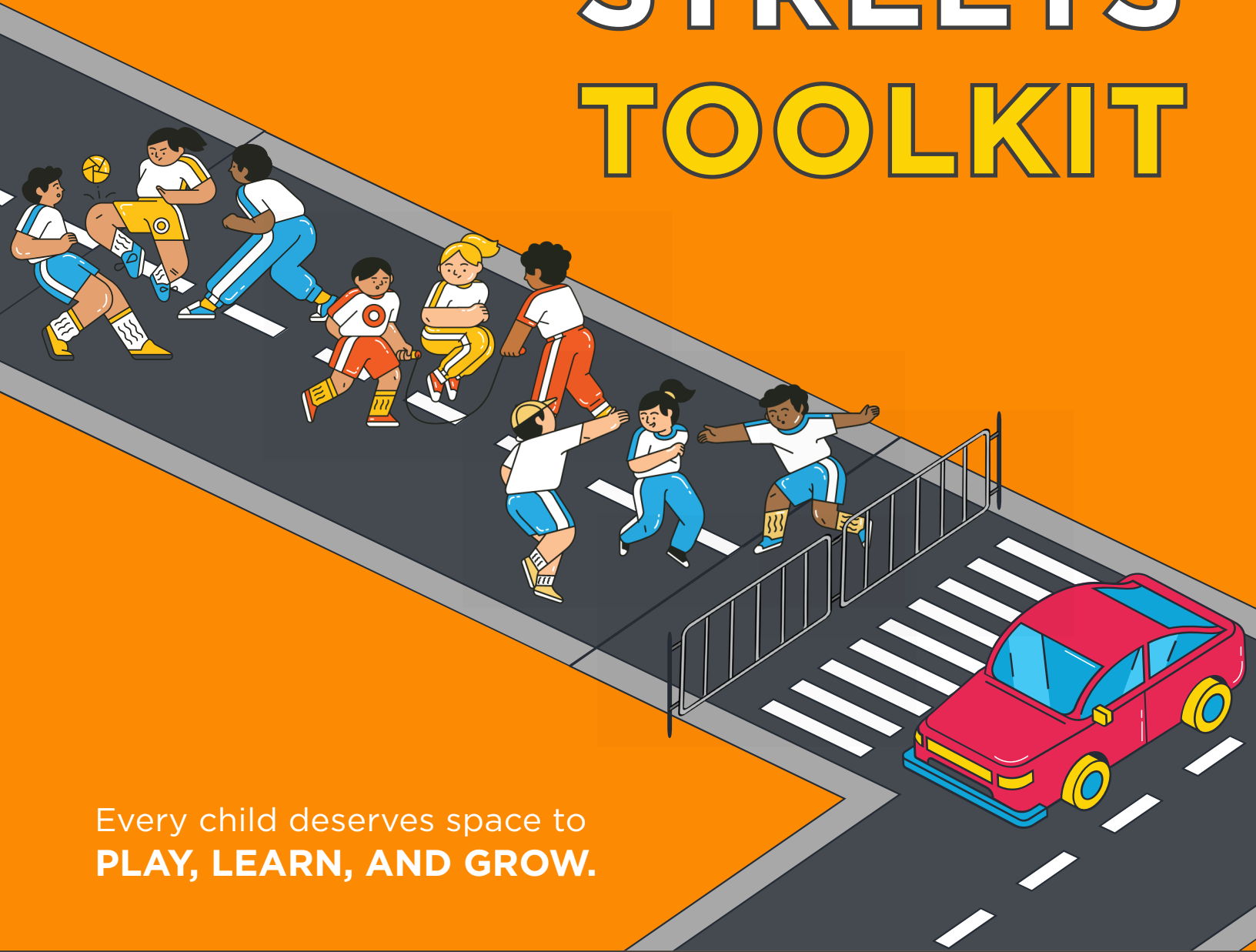


# SCHOOL STREETS TOOLKIT



Every child deserves space to  
**PLAY, LEARN, AND GROW.**



TRANSPORTATION  
ALTERNATIVES



OpenPlans

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# WHAT IS THE SCHOOL STREETS TOOLKIT ?

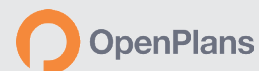
**Is your school concerned about traffic safety during arrival and dismissal? Need more space for play? Do you want to have music, science experiments, or games outdoors?**

Congratulations! You have taken the first step towards making your school community a safer and more energetic space. This kit is designed to simplify the process of applying for a school street (and hopefully be fun along the way). Within this resource, you will learn exactly how to submit an application, how to engage with and organize fellow community members, and how we at Open Plans and Transportation Alternatives can assist you in using this information to make real, tangible change at and around your school.

This toolkit is a practical guide created to help school administrators and community residents develop school streets in their communities. We have compiled the expertise and experiences of administrators, transportation professionals, teachers, students, parents, organizers, and the wider school community. This is your step-by-step guide to implementing, programming, and maintaining a school street.

This toolkit is meant to empower and guide YOU as you start the journey advocating for a school street in your community. When you're ready, we can even work with you to complete the Open Streets for Schools application.

This is not a one-size-fits-all process, but we are here to help you along the way. Not every school street application gets approved and sometimes it may take more than one try to make the school street dream come true. But it's worth the effort, we promise.



# SCHOOL STREETS TOOLKIT

## WHAT IS A SCHOOL STREET?

A school street is a street near a school building that is closed to car traffic for certain hours during the school day. Popular in cities across the globe, they reimagine a roadway not dominated by cars but instead one where children play, learn, and thrive. The NYC Department of Transportation's (DOT) official program for this type of street is called Open Streets Full Closure: Schools. These Open Streets are run, maintained, and programmed by the applying school. This program [has been proven to increase safety](#) on the streets that New York City students use daily to get to school.

### TIMELINE

DOT will take about 90 days to deliver a response after the submission of your application. We recommend allocating additional time prior to submitting the application to gather data and engage with school community members. Keep in mind that receiving letters of support may take longer than expected, so plan ahead.



# SCHOOL STREETS TOOLKIT

**“ My success story is that [without an Open Street] my son’s school would have zero outdoor space. There was nowhere else they could have gone. We met our goal. That is my success story. ”**

— Noelia Plaza,  
Former P.S. 222 Parent

## LOCATION CONSIDERATIONS

There may be more than one street adjacent to your school that could be designated as your Open Street. It is important to consider traffic impacts, daily routines, and accessibility when you are considering the potential location of a school street. In your application, DOT will want to know that you understand these issues and have chosen the best possible location for your Open Street. Also, while it is good practice to have a preliminary idea of the proposed Open Street prior to speaking to community members, you may find that feedback influences the final location and operational hours.

### CONSIDERATIONS

### REASONING

<b>Public Transportation</b>	Consider which streets adjacent to your school are traffic-sensitive or MTA bus routes. Closing these roads, which carry higher volumes of traffic, is more complex than a less traffic-burdened street.
<b>Traffic Safety</b>	Consider where traffic safety data shows a greater number of traffic injuries or deaths within 500 feet of the school grounds over the last five years. This could provide clear evidence of an existing traffic safety problem.  *Data provided by TA upon request. <a href="mailto:research@transalt.org">research@transalt.org</a> *
<b>Air Pollution</b>	Consider where there are high air pollution levels outside of schools (high levels of traffic or manufacturing). This could get stakeholders invested in the public health benefits of an Open Street for the school.
<b>Arrival and Dismissal Location</b>	You want the use of the Open Street to be incorporated into your school routine. Placing it on the street used for arrival and dismissal would keep students safe from traffic crashes and encourage families to engage with the school community.

# STEP 1: DETERMINE LOCATION AND USAGE

## DETERMINING USAGE

Talk with your internal school community – teachers, administrators, paraprofessionals, and more – to determine the best ways to use your school street.

### PROGRAMMING

### REASONING

<b>Arrival and Dismissal</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Many schools ease arrival and dismissal by closing off the street from cars during select hours. This strategy is:</li> <li>• Modifiable &amp; low maintenance: some schools allow school buses to pass through</li> <li>• or permit teacher parking.</li> <li>• Safe: reduces car fatalities and injuries.</li> <li>• Social: allows for safe socializing at arrival and dismissal.</li> </ul>
<b>Community programming</b>	School streets can benefit the entire community. Many schools host neighborhood programming such as voter registration drives, health fairs, and street vendors.
<b>Afterschool programming</b>	Programming can include dance, chalking, and other wellness activities. On the 34th Avenue Open Street, organizers partner with DOT to provide a range of afterschool programs.
<b>Recess</b>	Schools lacking a play yard or ample space for children to play might need additional space for recess and can set up cones and portable equipment for outdoor recess.
<b>Overcrowding</b>	Many schools need additional space to navigate overcrowding and social distancing. During COVID-19, Open Streets have allowed students to have more free space for learning.
<b>Outdoor learning</b>	Some schools extend the classroom to the entire community. The WHEELS School uses the school street as a community science lab and hosts climate justice teach-ins. Other schools host ‘learn to ride’ biking programs.

# → STEP 2: ENGAGE STAKEHOLDERS

As of 2022, DOT requires all schools who are applying for an Open Street to obtain three letters of support from community stakeholders. A stakeholder is any individual, group, or organization that would be impacted by the implementation of a school street. One of the keys to success in developing an Open Street for your school is to consider a diverse range of potential stakeholders, both within and outside of your school.

Informative and ongoing communication with residents, parents, and school staff is essential. It bolsters your application and, most importantly, allows the school street to reflect the broad needs and input of the entire community using both community and school resources. You can communicate with stakeholders in various formats including letters, emails, social media, and videos. It is an important process at every project stage, from consultation to notification of events or changes.

## Stakeholder Collaboration and Engagement





# STEP 2: ENGAGE STAKEHOLDERS

- Create a plan which dictates how (and who) will directly engage with community members and partner organizations as early as possible for each stage of your project. Share with partner organizations you may be working with.
- Where possible, offer in-person engagement events to listen to and address concerns raised by local residents. Events should be scheduled at different times and days to accommodate as many people as possible.
- Consider the local community and if any communications should be distributed in languages other than English.
- Speak to any businesses directly impacted by a timed road closure face-to-face to help explain the benefits and address concerns.
- Be mindful of common questions and concerns: share an FAQ document directly with key stakeholders and at public-facing events.
- Arrange meetings with neighboring business owners, religious institutions, afterschool programs, etc., to inform them directly about the School Street ahead of launching to answer any questions or concerns.
- Meet with your school custodial staff about trash removal on the proposed Open Street and create a plan of action.



# → STEP 3: MOBILIZING COMMUNITY MEMBERS

What are different strategies that people can use to make community members excited about school streets? Engaging neighbors helps mobilize new organizers, finds parents to help with the application process, and builds partnerships to navigate community feedback.

## STRATEGY

## REASONING

<p><b>Canvassing or tabling</b></p>	<p>Canvassing or tabling can be a good strategy to use for broader education around school streets. This can be used before applications are submitted and to let their neighbors know about this upcoming community amenity after approval. Make sure to have a quick pitch that you can share with community members explaining:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What a school street is</li> <li>2. Why your neighborhood needs a school street</li> <li>3. How they can get involved in the process</li> </ol>
<p><b>Collaborate with schools that share buildings</b></p>	<p>If your school is co-located, make sure you're collaborating with the other school(s) to make your application simpler and shorter, and to lessen the burden of staffing and administrative labor. Plus, you can build community between your schools in the process.</p>
<p><b>Temporary activations</b></p>	<p>Hosting temporary activations, such as programming for children, reading libraries, chalking, music, and dance, can show community members the benefits of an open street as a resource and can provide you with the opportunity to do popular education about school streets.</p>
<p><b>Identify key local allies and work with local elected officials</b></p>	<p>Reach out to Council Members and local representatives to support your application. During the Brooklyn Prospect International Elementary School's application process, their local Council Member visited the school street and contacted the DOT to recommend their proposal. Their support benefitted the school and was a great way for the Member to learn more about the benefits of open streets for schools.</p>

# STEP 3: MOBILIZING COMMUNITY MEMBERS

<b>Letter writing</b>	<p>In order to build community with neighbors on their block, P.S. 34 sent letters to residents adjacent to the school street to tell them what to expect in the coming year. Send a letter to residents to help them feel included in the planning process, particularly when you want them to move their cars or otherwise cooperate with the school street.</p>
<b>Town Halls</b>	<p>Parents from P.S. 222 recommended starting by hosting a town hall in multiple languages. Make sure to bring food and coffee to the meeting.</p> <p>Use this as an opportunity to build a case by talking to administrators, parents, and students in your neighborhoods who already have school streets and ask questions like: what do you love about this program? What resources do you need to make this program as useful to you as possible? What did you think about the application process? Do you have a story that you love about how your students used the open street?</p> <p>This is also a good opportunity to solicit signatures for a petition or letter of interest.</p>

# → STEP 4: INSTALL AND MANAGE

**Once your application has been approved, you'll be responsible for maintaining and programming the space.**

The success of a school street is dependent on reducing the number of motor vehicles entering the zone. In order to achieve this, there will need to be a deterrent to ensure drivers keep out.

Upon request, the DOT can provide metal barricades for school use. Schools will be responsible for placing and removing the barricades daily. You will communicate this process in the “Operation Plan” component of the application.

If your school houses an afterschool program not staffed by school teachers, speak with them about potentially expanding the hours of afterschool staff (with compensation) to assist in the management of the School Street.



PHOTOGRAPH: SCOTT HEINS

## PROGRAMMING

[NYC DOT's Public Space Programming](#) initiative brings a wide variety of activities and events to public spaces, such as plazas, Open Streets, and other DOT-managed public spaces.

Programming brings arts, culture, fitness, educational experiences, and more to neighborhoods in need. Providing programming to Priority Investment Areas, as identified in the NY Streets Plan, encourages the positive use of public space, and supports community outreach efforts.

Contact information for each organization is listed in the programming guide along with their offerings: please feel free to reach out to them to discuss this in more detail. As you book programming partners, please email DOT to let them know where and when you will be engaging these organizations by emailing [programming@dot.nyc.gov](mailto:programming@dot.nyc.gov).

## → **STEP 5** (OPTIONAL): **MONITORING TOOLS**

Help schools gather data on the volume of traffic and mobility of students and families. With this data, you can create mental and actualized images of the most pressing traffic issues when discussing the benefits and necessity of an Open Street for your school with community stakeholders. **Contact us by phone or email at this stage, and we can help you narrow down your intersection choices.**

### **Questions to consider when deciding on monitoring location and methodology:**

- What makes you feel unsafe while walking?
- What are the most common traffic violations at the study location?
- What violations can you easily identify at your study location?
- What traffic violations are you unsure that you can identify correctly?

### **Guidelines:**

- Choose no more than three traffic law violations to observe.
- Observe only for traffic measures that are easily identifiable.

# SCHOOL STREETS TOOLKIT

**“ The school street helps our kids feel a connectedness to the neighborhood around us and the community we’re in. ”**

— Administrator at  
Brooklyn Prospect  
International  
Elementary School

# SITE PLAN EXAMPLE



On Street:

Cromwell Avenue

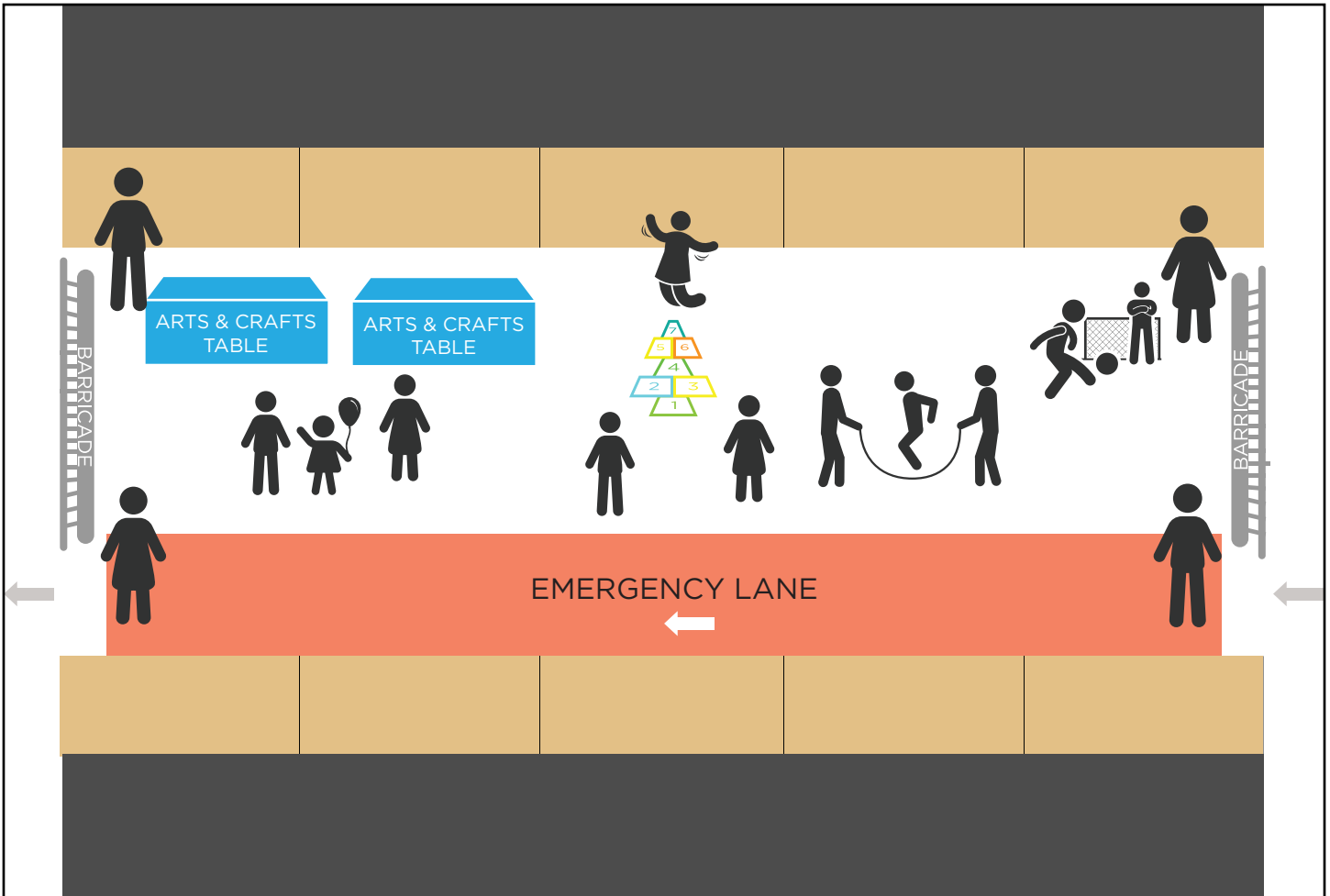
From:

East 167th Street

To:

McClellan Street

Organizing Partner: School Name



**A thorough operational plan will include detailed information about the following:**

- Detailing how barricades will be managed and monitored
- Describing cleaning and trash disposal procedures (Full Closures only)
- Listing how partners will ensure the site is clear and roadway is opened at the end of each day
- Plans must indicate description of how staff will be readily available to move barricades in the event of an emergency
- Applications from schools must include protocols and plans to adequately staff the Open Streets, including barrier management and supervision

## OUTREACH PLAN

Here, you will detail how you engaged with stakeholders about the proposed Open Street for your school. Use this section to discuss the different methods of communication you used (letters, door-to-door, social media, etc.).





## COMMON MYTHS ABOUT SCHOOL STREETS

## REALITY

<p><b>Open Streets for Schools prevent teachers and other school staff from accessing their place of work and/or street parking.</b></p>	<p>Operational hours coincide with school opening and closing times. In most circumstances, teachers will have already arrived at school before the restrictions come into effect and therefore will not be negatively affected by the time constraints regardless of whether they drive to work or not. All cars already parked inside the zone when the restriction comes into effect are permitted to exit at their leisure.</p> <p>DOT may also shift reserved teacher parking to an adjacent street if necessary.</p>
<p><b>Full Closure Streets mean that emergency services can't get through.</b></p>	<p>Emergency vehicles are exempt from Full Closure restrictions – they are able to access addresses within the Open Street zones, and are also able to pass through Open Street zones when responding to an emergency.</p>
<p><b>School Streets are only possible in high-density neighborhoods, where school community members live within walking distance.</b></p>	<p>School Streets are possible in lower-density areas. Think of ways to encourage cycling and the use of public transit, and allow drop-off by car at the corner of a school street.</p>



## STEP 1

### INTRODUCE YOURSELF

Hi there, my name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I'm trying to help create new open spaces to reduce fatalities, decrease traffic, and provide students with space for exciting educational opportunities.

The Department of Transportation turns car-centered streets, like the one we're on now, into pedestrian-only spaces that schools can use for programming, pick-up and drop-off, recess, or community events.

Open Streets for Schools are run and maintained by adjacent or nearby schools to allow the students to use streets that are otherwise given to cars

## STEP 2

### TELL THEM ABOUT SCHOOL STREETS

(regardless if they've heard of them or not)

Have you heard of school streets or open streets?

Amazing, we think that this school would be a great fit for a school street because \_\_\_\_\_.

- **Traffic:** Pick-up and drop-off at this school are often dangerous, congested, and crowded. Closing off the street from cars at the start and end of the day would make it safer for students to walk home, and reduce traffic for all community members nearby.
- **Open space or play space:** This neighborhood and school need more play space for students. Providing this school street would allow room for recess, wellness, and having fun outdoors.
- **COVID-19, overcrowding, and classroom space:** This school needs additional classroom space particularly when COVID-19 spikes hit our neighborhood. A school street would give more space for kids to learn and teachers to teach.
- **Community programming:** Our community needs more spaces for community events, like voter registration, parties, and socializing. A school street allows spaces for those events to occur within walking distance of this school.
- **Anything else.**

## STEP 3 MAKE THE HARD ASK!

- **If administrator or teacher:** We'd love to continue this conversation with a representative from my organization who can tell you more about the program. Can I write down your name and email or phone number to follow up?
- **If parent, guardian, or PTA member:** We'd love to continue this conversation and think of ways that parents and PTA members can help to encourage the administration to pursue this program. Can I write down your name and email or phone number to follow up?
- **If community member:** We'd love your continued support for this program, and your help convincing other community members that this is an exciting opportunity. Can I write down your name and email or phone number to follow up?



# APPENDIX B: LETTER TEMPLATES

(Month) (Day), (Year)

(Your First Name) (Your Last Name), (Office),

(Address)

RE: (state the topic, author, and subject)

Dear (Council Member) (Last name),

My name is (your first and last name) and I am a (principal at, family member / service provider/advocate/community member) who resides in your district.

(State why you are writing here).

(Choose up to three of the strongest points that support your position [obtaining a School Street] and state them clearly.)

(Include a personal story. Tell your representative why the issue is important to you and how it affects your school community. Tell your representative how you want her or him to write a letter of support.)

Sincerely,

(Signature)

(Print Your Name)

(Your Address)

# APPENDIX C: TIPS FOR WRITING, SENDING AN EMAIL, OR CALLING A LEGISLATOR

- Be courteous and informative in your communication.
- State the purpose of the letter in the opening sentence.
- If you live in the elected official's district, be sure to say this in the opening paragraph as well.
- Focus on the message and key points.
- Personalize the letter by including examples of how the school street might impact you and your school community.
- Keep the letter brief – not more than one page. Restate your request at the end of the letter (for example, urging them to write a letter of support).
- Thank the legislator for their support and offer to address any questions that they might have.
- Be sure to include your contact information and signature.

## SENDING EMAIL COMMUNICATION TO LEGISLATOR:

- The same guidelines apply to email as to written letters.
- Before sending an email, you might want to call the legislator's office and ask if a letter sent by email is effective. If you do send an email, send it to the representative.
- Do not copy other representatives or send a mass email. Make it a brief message with no special layouts or graphics. Do not include attachments.
- Ask for a response.
- If you decide to call, have your thoughts organized in advance, which will help you to keep the call brief and to the point. It is also very helpful to share how the issue affects your school personally. Thank them for their support.

# SCHOOL STREETS TOOLKIT

Every child deserves space to  
**PLAY, LEARN, AND GROW.**



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