



Helping North Carolina students cross the street

Crossing guards can be a big asset to a school and community. They can help students cross the street safely and can make parents feel more comfortable letting their children walk to school. At the same time, crossing guards are not the answer for every situation. There are different ways to slow down traffic and motivate drivers to stop for walkers and bicyclists. The purpose of this information brief is to provide guidance for how to determine if a crossing guard is needed, and, if so, how to go about getting one. For communities with no crossing guard program, the second part of the brief is meant to be shared with the person responsible for setting up a crossing guard program. It provides examples of how communities around North Carolina run their programs.

Deciding if a crossing guard is needed

Understanding a school's current circumstances is the first step. Perhaps the school has students and families who already walk to school and have to cross a busy roadway that feels unsafe. Or maybe the school has students and families who would like to walk to school but concerns about safety keep them in the family vehicle or school bus. Strategies to address road crossing safety include: changes to the physical environment, enforcement of traffic laws, and driver, pedestrian and bicyclist safety education. A crossing guard might very well be an important part of the solution. Transportation professionals, law enforcement officers, parents and school administrators all have perspectives to bring to develop the right approach.

The first step is to find out whether there is already a system in place for assessing safety for students crossing a road. In larger communities there may be a municipal transportation engineer or someone with the school district transportation office who can observe the crossing and offer advice on what options might be available. However, it can be beneficial to get support from others and gather some background information before requesting assistance. There may be demand for help so having this organized approach can help the school be a priority. Regardless of whether there's a formal process for assessing crossings, bring together the people who can influence walking conditions and people who would like to see improvements at that particular crossing. It's helpful for the group to know how many students could benefit from the changes so that everyone involved has some context. Parent surveys and walkability checklists (see *Resources* at end) can be used to gather information if a more formal approach is needed. Transportation professionals may have their own criteria for determining whether a crossing guard or some other strategy might be appropriate. Criteria often include traffic speed, traffic volume, presence of sidewalks, number of students who would benefit and students' average age. Law enforcement officers can explain how they decide where to enforce speeding and yielding laws.

How to request a crossing guard

At this point, it will be clear whether or not there's a formal request process through the school, municipality, or law enforcement agency. If no schools in a school district have crossing guards then the next section gives examples of how communities around North Carolina have funded, trained and placed guards.

How communities have set up crossing guard programs

Establishing a crossing guard location and a crossing guard program requires working with partners. The seven questions included here are meant to assist you in thinking through how to get a program started. The information accompanying each question reflects practices by 11 school districts and communities around North Carolina that were interviewed to get an understanding of how their crossing guard programs operate. Communities ranged in population from less than 1,000 to more than 400,000 and are located across the state.

1. What are the functions of a crossing guard?

A crossing guard is an adult responsible for identifying or creating a gap in traffic and assisting walkers and bicyclists in safely crossing a street. In some situations, someone performing traffic control to assist in efficient movement of cars and buses during school arrival or dismissal is also available to cross students. There are a few NC communities where there are very few walkers on an infrequent basis and this is how it is handled. There are also places where teachers or other school staff walk students across a street but are not necessarily posted and serving as crossing guards.

2. Will law enforcement officers serve as crossing guards?

- If available, this is a simple, reliable option. Using law enforcement officers takes away the need to consider how to handle training, recruitment and liability. However, there may not be sufficient resources for this to be an option. There may be competing demands on officer time such that the commitment to crossing guard responsibilities is not feasible. In addition, off-duty officer pay is much higher than an hourly rate for a non-law enforcement guard.
- Recruiting non-law enforcement officers can be a challenge, particularly because of the limited number of hours needed. Four communities specifically mentioned using retired community members.
- Nearly all of the communities interviewed did not use law enforcement officers so the remainder of the questions in this brief assumes that law enforcement officers are not available.

3. Will crossing guards be paid or volunteer?

- In nearly all of the communities interviewed, the person performing crossing guard duties is paid. The remaining one uses a combination of volunteers and paid personnel.
- Volunteer crossing guards obviously offer cost savings and a way for community members to give back to their communities. However, paid crossing guards may be more reliable and easier to retain.
- Liability coverage generally comes from the employer so other strategies will be necessary to insure volunteers. One NC community uses a mix of law enforcement and older adult volunteers. The volunteers are insured through a volunteer service agency.

4. If crossing guards are paid, who funds the position?

- More than half of interviewed communities used municipal/law enforcement funds, almost one-third of communities used school district funds and one used a combination of the two.

5. Who will train the crossing guards?

- The NCDOT Division of Bicycle and Pedestrian Transportation states that: *According to the office of the North Carolina Attorney General, school crossing guards may be considered traffic control officers when proper training is provided. Law enforcement agencies responsible for recruiting and training school crossing guards are expected to adhere to the requirements of Statute 20-114.1, which governs traffic control officers.*

Highlights (see Statute for exact language)

- Traffic control officers are required to have three hours of training under law enforcement officer supervision.
- They must wear a uniform or jacket indicating the individual is a traffic-control officer and must possess a valid authorization card issued by law enforcement.
- Training generally includes a mix of on-location field practice and presentation or video. Communities interviewed emphasized that the guards received supervised practice time at their posts.
- Many communities offer annual refresher trainings for existing guards.

6. Who will manage the program?

- The school district or local law enforcement agency generally oversees the program. In a few communities, day to day management and staffing are outsourced to private companies.
- The managing organization recruits, hires, trains, provides equipment and uniforms (typically a stop paddle, high visibility retro-reflective jacket/vest and sometimes high visibility gloves), determines locations, insures and pays the guards.



7. How are crossing guard locations determined?

Communities used four different methods:

1. **Observation:** One-third of interviewed NC communities had staff that would perform a field visit to observe traffic conditions upon request.
2. **Criteria:** One community currently looks at the number of students crossing and the appropriate mix of engineering changes to improve the safety of a crossing. Two communities formerly used criteria including age and number of students crossing, traffic speed, traffic volume, number of traffic gaps per hour. One of these communities is now using the request method (#3, below) and the other experienced funding cuts so no additional guards will be placed (now part of #4, below).
3. **Request:** A few communities provide crossing guards to schools that request them.
4. **Historical reasons:** One-quarter of communities reported that the locations have just always had crossing guards and one additional community does not have funding to expand to new locations and will maintain the crossings currently guarded.



Conclusion

The ability for students to safely travel between their homes and schools is a basic necessity for successful learning. Those who take the time to work with others to find the best solutions for their schools and communities provide a valuable service. While it may take time to get all the pieces in place, there is the potential for great impact.

Resources

Parent Survey. National Center for Safe Routes to School (2007). Available at <http://saferoutesinfo.org/program-tools/evaluation-parent-survey>

Walkability Checklist. Pedestrian and Bicycle Information Center (ND). Available at <http://www.pedbikeinfo.org/data/library/details.cfm?id=12>

School Crossing Guard Training Program. North Carolina Department of Transportation (1999). Available at http://www.ncdot.gov/bikeped/about/training/school_crossing_guard/

Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices, Chapter 7D. US Federal Highway Administration (2009). Available at <http://mutcd.fhwa.dot.gov/htm/2009/part7/part7d.htm>

Adult Crossing Guard Guidelines. National Center for Safe Routes to School (2009). Available at http://guide.saferoutesinfo.org/crossing_guard/

