

Topic of the Month: School Safety

With summer winding down and families across North Texas preparing for a new school year, thoughts turn from vacations and pool parties to classrooms, school buses and morning routines.

It's the perfect time to put school safety top of mind. Creating a safe trip to and from school is a responsibility we all share, and whether students walk, bike, ride the bus or drive themselves to campus, everyone has a role to play in helping ensure they arrive safely every day.

For our August Topic of the Month, we delve into how the North Central Texas Council of Governments (NCTCOG) is helping communities create safer routes to school and how parents, students and drivers can all do their part to make the journey to and from the classroom a safe one.

NCTCOG is Helping Make School Travel Safer

One of the ways NCTCOG works to ensure smoother travel is through Safe Routes to School, a nationwide movement that encourages students to walk or bicycle to school safely. Walking and biking not only help students establish healthy physical activity habits that can improve their health and even academic performance, but they also reduce traffic congestion around schools and improve air quality.

NCTCOG partners with schools and local governments throughout the region to provide technical assistance, planning support and funding for Safe Routes to School initiatives. These efforts include developing Safe Routes to School plans, providing education about Safe Routes to School, and funding infrastructure improvements such as sidewalks, shared-use paths, pedestrian crossings and other enhancements that make it easier and safer for students to travel actively.

Schools are also encouraged to participate in **Walk & Roll to School Day** on October 7, a celebration of active transportation for students across the region. Participating schools will be entered into drawings for the chance to receive free safety-themed giveaways to help build excitement and reinforce safe travel habits. Keep an eye on [NCTCOG.org/walkbikeroll](https://nctcog.org/walkbikeroll) for information about how to participate.

Parents Set the Example

Parents and caregivers can make a significant difference by reviewing the route to school with their children before the first day of class. If children ride the bus, make sure they know exactly where their bus stop is located and understand safe behaviors while waiting for and boarding the bus.

Parents can also work with schools and neighbors to create safer routes by organizing programs such as Walking School Buses or identifying volunteer "Corner Captains" who supervise key crossing locations along established walking routes.

Most important, parents can model safe behaviors themselves. Using designated crosswalks, wearing bicycle helmets, obeying traffic signals and staying alert while walking or biking are habits children are more likely to adopt when they see adults practicing them. Parents can reinforce those lessons by reviewing [NCTCOG's downloadable pedestrian and bicycle safety materials](#) with their children.

Students Play a Role, Too

Students also play an important role in creating safer school communities. Walking or bicycling with friends, siblings or family members makes the trip to school more enjoyable while increasing visibility. Students should always obey traffic laws, use designated crosswalks when available, remain aware of their surroundings and stay especially cautious around buses and vehicle traffic.

Older students can set a positive example by helping their younger brothers and sisters learn safe walking and bicycling behaviors and accompanying them along established routes when possible.

Student Drivers - and All Drivers - Share Responsibility

For high school students who drive to campus, safety starts before leaving home. Allowing extra travel time helps reduce the temptation to speed or make risky driving decisions. Student drivers should follow all traffic laws, eliminate distractions and remember the responsibility that comes with operating a vehicle, especially around younger children.

All motorists should be prepared for increased traffic during school arrival and dismissal times. Children can be unpredictable near schools, bus stops and crosswalks, making it essential to slow down, obey posted school zone speed limits and watch carefully for pedestrians and bicyclists.

Tips on How Drivers and Students Can Stay Safe

NCTCOG also supports school safety through its Look Out Texans campaign, which promotes safe driving, walking and bicycling behaviors across North Texas. Through education and outreach, the campaign encourages drivers, pedestrians and bicyclists to adopt simple habits that can help prevent crashes and save lives. The campaign includes a free third to fifth grade school kit that schools can request, containing resources to educate students about pedestrian and bicycle safety.

A few back-to-school safety tips include:

- Slow down and obey posted speed limits in school zones. Children can be unpredictable, especially during school arrival and dismissal times.
- Stay alert for children's unexpected movements near schools, bus stops and crosswalks.
- Before crossing the street, stop and look left, right and left again. Watch for turning vehicles and avoid distractions such as phones or headphones.

Whether you're a parent, student, teacher or commuter, every trip through a school zone is an opportunity to help protect North Texas' youngest road users. By planning ahead, staying alert and looking out for one another, we can help ensure students enjoy a safe and successful school year.

For additional safety resources, visit [NCTCOG's Safe Routes to School webpage](#) and explore the [Look Out Texans campaign](#) for tips on walking, bicycling and driving safely.