

ACTIVE SCHOOL TRAVEL

*Policy and Practice Recommendations for Alberta
School Jurisdictions*





WHY ACTIVE SCHOOL TRAVEL?

Active School Travel (AST) is ideally positioned to address many concerns that school jurisdictions share. These include traffic safety and air quality in school zones, rising transportation costs, as well as pro-social behaviours, increased physical activity and preparedness to learn for students.

Physical activity presents many additional benefits for children and youth, from positive mental health and social development to promoting improved physical health and mind-body awareness moving into adulthood. The World Health Organization recommends that young people aged 5-17 accumulate at least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity daily (Global Strategy on Diet, Physical Activity and Health, World Health Organization, 2020). One way schools can promote physical activity is to encourage active school travel (AST), such as walking, biking or wheeling to school.

This document seeks to inform school boards wishing to promote AST among their school communities. These recommendations are meant to be used within each unique school board's context, anticipating that each location will adapt these recommendations to fit their own needs. Some recommendations may be easier to implement in certain school districts based on the existing foundations in policy, community support and/or committee organization. Other recommendations may be longer term goals to work toward.

BACKGROUND

This document is organized according to key findings from a scan of school district policies completed by members of the AST subcommittee of the Alberta Policy Coalition for the Prevention of Chronic Disease. The scan was originally completed in 2018 and updated in January 2020. The scan involved a manual website search of Alberta's public (42), separate (17) and charter (13) school authorities to identify publicly available policies relevant to AST. ChangeLab's Safe Routes to School Policy Workbook 2018 was adapted to determine policy relevance to AST, informing both the scan as well as policy and practice examples. Wellness and active living policies with broad relevance to AST were also included in the scan.

FINDING:

Few, if any Alberta school board policies explicitly reference active and sustainable school travel. More schools and boards can normalize this as a consideration in a range of policy documents, including transportation policies, safety policies and physical activity/wellness policies.

POLICY RECOMMENDATION	EXAMPLE OF POLICY/PRACTICE
<p>Give weight to active and sustainable travel modes by recognizing them in school board policies and through encouraging practices to facilitate their adoption.</p>	<p>The school district supports safe, active transportation, including walking and wheeling (bicycling, scootering, skateboarding, using a wheelchair), to and from school.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incorporation of Active Transportation/Active School Travel Policy into school Student and Parent Handbooks • Inclusion of AST in Transportation section of school board websites (for example, EPSB includes the definition and benefits of active transportation to encourage AST as a transportation option: https://epsb.ca/schools/gettoschool/transportation/active/) • Encouragement of AST on school websites, perhaps as an accompaniment to walk zone information: https://www.cbe.ab.ca/schools/find-a-school/_layouts/15/cbe.service.spm/viewprofile.aspx?id=244 • Inclusion of a transportation map application on school websites to identify all transportation options to and from school: https://epsb.maps.arcgis.com/apps/MapJournal/index.html?appid=77737eccc15a48acabde356c54b421f2
<p>Create easy ways for school boards and schools to engage with AST.</p>	<p>The school board encourages schools to use promotional events to build support for AST programs and activities, such as International Walk to School Day (first Wednesday in October), Winter Walk Day (first Wednesday in February), and Wheel Week (includes the first Wednesday in June) and Bike to School Day (June).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Such events can be promoted as extracurricular activities or incorporated into school curricula (pedestrian safety, sustainable transportation, etc).



Few school board policies and procedures that reference factors related to active travel have an **enabling effect** on AST.

POLICY RECOMMENDATION	EXAMPLE OF POLICY/PRACTICE
<p>Focus on policies that facilitate and enable active school travel, while making physical school spaces more accessible to all people.</p>	<p>School siting and design planning influence the opportunity for safe, active school travel. When considering locations and designs for new schools, the school board ensures consideration of the walkability and wheelability of a district’s attendance zones and assignment policies. School siting options that are carefully considered can reduce transportation costs.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Example: Policy 17: Student Transportation Services: Eligibility for transportation is extended to those ineligible students who would otherwise have to: cross an uncontrolled railroad track; cross a primary highway with posted speeds of 80 km/hr or higher; cross a road with posted speeds of 80 km/hr or higher without standard traffic light protection; and/or walk along a road with posted speeds of 60 km/hr or higher, without the benefit of sidewalks. <p>Current school design models commonly locate secure storage facilities for bicycles, scooters, and/or skateboards close to the front entrances of schools, an already congested space of mixed pedestrian, wheel, bus, and vehicle traffic.</p> <p>To remedy this, the school board requires schools to consider a variety of options for facilitating active transportation on school grounds. This support could be provided through the creation of safe, separated routes, designated for wheeled active transportation through school grounds. Effective design would eliminate the need for policies such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Example: AP 360: Student Use of Bicycles: The Division recognizes the use of bicycles as a means of student transport to and from school. Students are not permitted to ride bicycles on Division property. <p>Priority access given to motorized vehicle transportation in school zones (student loading zones) increases the likelihood of congestion and excessive vehicle idling which negatively impact safety and air quality. The school board will support priority access for those choosing active travel modes for their school journey and provision outlining concrete measures regarding idling on or near school grounds.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Example: City of Edmonton bylaw 15982, prohibits vehicles from idling in designated areas outside of schools and hospitals: Be Idle Free - City of Edmonton

Many school board policies and procedures that reference factors related to AST have a prohibitive effect on AST, though many could be altered to be facilitative. **The difference between a barrier and a facilitator sometimes comes down to a few words in a policy.**

POLICY RECOMMENDATION	EXAMPLE OF POLICY/PRACTICE
<p>Consider how existing policies may be a barrier to active school travel (e.g., no riding bicycles or scooters on school property) and if small or large changes are needed to make them facilitators.</p>	<p>The school board will prohibit individual schools from restricting any mode of active transportation used to travel to and from school.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • According to school board regulations, skateboards, rollerblades and scooters are prohibited from school board property. Please do not bring these items to school. Bicycles should not be ridden on school grounds at any time. (Tuscany School 2019-2020 Parent/Student Handbook) <p>The school board will review existing policies that impact AST to ensure language is facilitative rather than prohibitive in nature.</p> <p>Example #1 School Bus Rules and Regulations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prohibitive language: As the following items cannot be secured they will not be allowed on the school bus: skate boards, skis, hockey sticks, scooters, large hockey bags. • Facilitative language: Items, such as skateboards and scooters, that can be secured properly, either in a closed duffle bag or stored under a seat, will be allowed on the school bus. <p>Example #2 Student Use of Bicycles</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prohibitive language: Students are not permitted to ride bicycles on division property. • Facilitative language: Students are encouraged to ride bicycles, scooters, and/or skateboards to and from school but must dismount and walk with equipment when on division property. <p>Equitable access for all students to appropriate equipment, to safe, accessible routes, and to sufficient storage facilities is key to participation in AST. The school board ensures schools provide sufficient storage facilities for bicycles, scooters, skateboards, or similar human-powered devices to encourage active transportation to and from school.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Currently, in most school jurisdictions, the purchase of additional storage equipment is the responsibility of the school and the school’s fundraising committee. Purchase of such equipment is at the discretion of the school and subject to cost and determined priorities. • As a lower cost, temporary solution, districts could support Lend a Lock programs at schools awaiting additional and/or upgraded storage facilities.

FINDING:

Many school boards have implemented wellness policies, which have implications for active living and AST. However, to the best of our knowledge, **no wellness policy explicitly references the role of, nor support for, AST.**

POLICY RECOMMENDATION	EXAMPLE OF POLICY/PRACTICE
<p>Modify existing or write new wellness, physical activity or transportation policies to explicitly include AST as an opportunity to promote student well-being.</p>	<p>The school board supports the incorporation of AST into School Wellness Policy. For example, current wellness policies could be revised to include the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Safe Routes to School. The school board will assess and, if necessary and to the extent possible, make needed improvements to make it safer and easier for students to walk and bike to school. When appropriate, the board will work together with local public transportation, public safety, police departments, and/or organizations experienced in active school travel program delivery in those efforts. (schoolwellnesspolicies.org)
<p>Explore existing policies to see if small changes could explicitly reference active and/or more sustainable school travel options.</p>	<p>The school board supports outlining efforts to decrease the number of vehicles arriving and departing schools by promoting active transportation, public transit, and carpooling.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If parking provisions are in place, alter the language to promote concurrently more active and environmentally sustainable ways of travel, for example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preferred parking locations will be available for staff members and students who participate in the carpooling plan. There will be 3 staff carpooling spots and 6 student carpooling spots (Living Waters Catholic RD 42: Carpooling Management Plan). • In addition to school bus service, encourage active and municipal transit service travel options for trips before, during (field trips), and after school. Municipal transit service travel requires trip-chaining (travelling to and from bus stop locations), so there is potential for increased physical activity. Edmonton Public Transit offers youth fares where children 12 and under ride free when accompanied by a fare-paying adult (https://www.edmonton.ca/ets/youth-fares.aspx)



Policy intentions that are designed for one outcome (e.g., safety) have **unintended implications** for other outcomes (e.g., health). For example, provision of busing may limit alternate travel forms.

POLICY RECOMMENDATION	EXAMPLE OF POLICY/PRACTICE
<p>Review and update existing policies to encourage both the goal outcome (e.g. safety) and supports provided for AST.</p>	<p>The majority of existing school district transportation policies target safe, efficient school busing practice. However, practices such as increasing busing eligibility for those who live within a school’s walk zone reduce the opportunity for active school travel. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For a fee, students who reside less than 1.6 km from their designated school are eligible to ride the bus provided there is room and there is an existing bus route (AP No. 202: School and transportation fees).
<p>Work with other partners (students, families, other stakeholders) to brainstorm creative ways to meet safety and other goals using AST as a positive driver of change.</p>	<p>Creating policies that support active school travel also improve student health, school zone safety and air quality. The school board supports AST programs and activities, as well as efforts to increase participation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage schools to engage in an individualized, comprehensive review of the current and future travel needs and challenges of students and staff, with the input and support of a diverse advisory school team. • Mobilize funding to promote active travel. • Encourage school personnel, students, and families to follow provincial and local traffic laws and related safety guidelines while traveling to and from school. • Assess common routes to school by performing a walkabout. • Encourage and support the provision of traffic safety education and training on active transportation skills for all weather conditions to all students, teachers and school leaders. • Encourage schools to commit to enforcement of AST policies and existing traffic safety laws through collaboration with jurisdiction personnel and local law enforcement. • Provision to increase safety through arrival and dismissal procedures that facilitate the orderly flow of traffic to and from school. <p>The school board will support the encouragement of schools to adopt the AMA Student Safety Patrol program, provided they meet the AMA School Safety Patrol program requirements.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • While developing leadership skills and improving safety in school zones, the employment of an AMA School Safety Patrol program increases the occurrence of active school travel, which improves student health.

FINDING:

Busing is a primary mediating factor for AST in the province, creating a great opportunity for small changes with big impact.

POLICY RECOMMENDATION	EXAMPLE OF POLICY/PRACTICE
Review policies such as distance walked from buses and determine whether walking school busses or bike trains could support more active travel to school	<p>The school board supports the organization of Walking School Buses and Bike Trains as a means to decrease transportation costs and increase use of active transportation.</p> <p>The school board encourages student transportation and administrative staff to consider the long-term costs of busing service, and to encourage walking and bicycling as alternatives within the areas that could reasonably be walked or wheeled.</p>

FINDING:

Existing policies and collaborations can be drawn upon to create, modify or enhance new and existing policies across school boards and municipalities.

POLICY RECOMMENDATION	EXAMPLE OF POLICY/PRACTICE
Create a jurisdiction task force and draw upon existing municipal committees and policies from other divisions	<p>The school board supports the establishment of an Active School Travel District Task Force or Steering Committee to develop and implement strategies that support active transportation/safe route to school.</p> <p>Audit municipal committees to understand which support active transportation and how. In many municipalities, these committees are already formed: Edmonton Traffic Safety Committee (Edmonton), Traffic Advisory Committee (Leduc), and Livable Streets (Calgary) are just a few examples.</p>



Launching new ideas, like an active school travel policy or program, is not always easy. The Idea Readiness Tool (ideareadinesstool.com) can help by providing process tips and resources to help support adoption of new ideas in your school community.

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REFERENCES

ChangeLab Solutions. Safe routes to school district policy workbook. 2018 [cited 2018 July]. Available from: <http://changelabsolutions.org/safe-routes/welcome>
(The most recent version of the workbook is available here: <https://www.changelabsolutions.org/product/safe-routes-school-district-policy-workbook>)