

# Walking

## WITH A PURPOSE



Walking is a great way to be physically active. Walking is free, easy to fit into daily life, and can be a great form of transportation. The benefits can even be accumulated in short bouts in order to reach the target of 60 minutes of daily activity for children. Everyone benefits from walking, but walking needs to be safe and easy. Communities are looking to improve the pedestrian environment as a strategy for revitalizing business districts, increasing the safety and ability of children to walk to school, improving the health of residents, and creating a greater sense of “place” and community character. According to the Smart Growth Network, walkable communities make pedestrian activity possible, thus expanding transportation options, and creating a streetscape that better serves a range of users including pedestrians, bicyclists, transit riders, and automobiles.

A walkable community is essential for our children too. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in 1969, approximately half of all school children walked or bicycled to or from school and 87 percent of those living within one mile of school walked or bicycled. Today, less than 15 percent of children and adolescents walk or bike to school. This decrease in physical activity is impacting Iowa’s children. Beginning in the fall of 2005, the Iowa Department of Public Health has measured the height and weight of over 4,000 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, and 5<sup>th</sup>



grade students in 12 schools across the state. Of those children measured, 62.3% had a normal Body Mass Index (BMI), 19.6% were at risk for overweight, and 18.1% were overweight. This decrease in physical activity and increase in weight has taken a financial toll on Iowans. Total annual health care costs attributable to adult obesity in Iowa are estimated at \$783 million.<sup>1</sup>

This resource will help your school conduct a walkability assessment of its neighborhood. The checklist will help assess what makes the walking environment inviting and safe, as well as identify barriers that exist. After the assessment, school staff can help students become advocates for a more walkable community.

1. Finkelstein EA, Fiebelkorn IC, Wang G. State-level estimates of annual medical expenditures attributable to obesity. *Obesity Research*. 2004; 12 (1): 18-24.

## Where to complete the assessment:

- Along the main routes that students would use to walk to school.
- Other destinations in town:
  - a community park
  - the library
  - a local business
  - the police station
  - city hall
  - wellness center
  - sports complex
  - pool/aquatic center



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## Community members to invite to the assessment:

### School

- Principal and other administrators
- Parents and students
- Teachers (physical education or health teachers are a good place to start)
- PTA/PTO representative
- School nurse
- School district transportation director
- School improvement team or wellness council member
- Adult school crossing guards

### Community

- Community members, including children, adults and senior citizens
- Neighborhood or community association members
- Local businesses
- Local pedestrian, bicycle and safety advocates

### Local Government

- Mayor's office or council member
- Transportation or traffic engineer
- Local planner
- Public health professional
- Public works representative
- Law enforcement officer
- State or local pedestrian and bicycle coordinator
- Parks and Recreation

# Walkability Audit Checklist

CONCERNS	LOCATION	COMMENTS
<p><b>1. Do you have room to walk?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> No sidewalks or safe alternative for pedestrians/bikes</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Sidewalks broken, cracked or uneven</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Sidewalk blocked or snow, leaves, debris or soil covering the route</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Sidewalks blocked with poles, signs, shrubbery, etc.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Sidewalks too close to fast-moving traffic</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Not enough room for two people to walk side-by-side</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Sidewalks lack ramps (curb cuts) for wheelchairs, strollers and wagons</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Cars or trucks blocking the sidewalk</li> </ul>		
<p><b>2. Is it easy to cross the streets?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> No traffic signals/crosswalks</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Traffic signals don't allow enough time to cross</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> View of traffic blocked by parked cars, trees, plants or snow banks</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Road too wide to cross safely</li> </ul>		
<p><b>3. Do drivers behave safely?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Drive too fast</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Ignore traffic signals and stop signs</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Back up without looking</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Speed up to make traffic light or run red lights</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Drivers do not yield to pedestrians</li> </ul>		
<p><b>4. Do walkers/bikers behave safely?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Don't look both ways before crossing</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Not using the crosswalks to cross streets</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Not walking on sidewalk, or on shoulder facing traffic where there are no sidewalks</li> </ul>		

CONCERNS	LOCATION	COMMENTS
<p><b>5. Is the route pleasant to walk/ bike?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> No separation between the car traffic and walkers</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Landscape unpleasant (lack of trees, grass, flowers)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Scary dogs</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Poorly lit</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Littered or dirty</li> </ul>		
<p><b>6. Do the sidewalks let you walk to places you want to go?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> School</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Other places in your community</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Library</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Swimming pool</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Parks and trails</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> City offices and municipal buildings</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Churches</li> </ul>		

**Discussion questions after the walk:**

- What areas of the walk or ride were the most enjoyable? Least enjoyable? And why?
- What things would make it hard, unpleasant or impossible to walk or bike in general? What barriers or things might prevent someone from choosing to walk or bike and instead drive?
- What things make a walk or bike ride more enjoyable?
- What places would students think people might like to be able to walk or bike to in the community or surrounding area?
- Who else in the community would be concerned about walkability? Who could help make our community more walkable?



**To truly make a community walkable, the results of this assessment need to be shared with key decision makers. Assist and encourage your class to do the following:**

- 1** Write or contact the property owner where there is an issue to notify them of your concern and request that they address the issue.
- 2** Write or contact the city/county/ state to request they look into and address the issue. This could start by contacting the council person, county commissioner, or legislator who represents that area.
- 3** Contact the school board and ask them to direct the request to the appropriate entity. This could also be presented at a PTA meeting to get parents involved in the matter.
- 4** Contact the media about the concerns.
- 5** Start a group or contact a group, such as the Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, Civic or Service Club, or neighborhood group, to clean up, correct or raise funds to address the issue.



<b>POTENTIAL CLASS PROJECT TO CONSIDER:</b>	
Government/Civics	Attend a City Council meeting (or invite a council member to your class) and address the elected officials with the concerns. Follow-up to understand the process of decision making.
Math	Calculate and measure the problem areas. Calculate the cost of driving a car to school.
English	Draft persuasive letters to government officials, property owners, or groups to take action on the issues.
Journalism	Prepare an article for the local newspaper raising the attention of the issue to the general public.
Speech	Present concerns at the appropriate government’s public meeting, School Board or PTA meeting. Research “walkability” on the internet for debate points.
Construction Class	Look at what caused the problems with sidewalk failures and investigate possible solutions. Run cost estimates of the repair work.
Geography/Computer Drafting	Map the locations of the problem areas and develop a key for different types of problems, i.e., sidewalk heaved up, sidewalk missing, blocked and missing sidewalks.
Computer Research	Research the Internet to find supportive information for the resolution of the issue, i.e., police records of accidents, possible funding sources, alternative solutions other city/counties or schools have implemented for similar issue, design standards, etc.

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## Additional Resources:

- Department of Transportation [www.iowadot.gov/saferoutes](http://www.iowadot.gov/saferoutes)
  - Safe Routes to School (SRTS) workshops are readily available to communities/schools requesting one, and it's FREE. The Iowa Bicycle Coalition provides these workshops for the DOT. For additional information, go to their web site at: [www.iowasaferoutes.org](http://www.iowasaferoutes.org) and click on Workshops. There is a lot of useful information on the web site to encourage children to walk or bike to school.
  - “Iowa Kids on the Move” is a bicycle and pedestrian safety curriculum for schools and other groups interested in teaching children how to safely walk and bicycle. Go to [www.iowasaferoutes.org](http://www.iowasaferoutes.org) and click on Resources.
  - Iowa’s Bicycle and Pedestrian Encouragement Guide explains various encouragement programs such as Walking School Buses, Bicycle Trains, Walk and Roll to School Day, etc. Go to [www.iowasaferoutes.org](http://www.iowasaferoutes.org) and click on Resources.
  - No-Cost or Low-Cost SRTS Projects. These are things that communities can implement at very little cost to help get more children walking or biking to school. You can find the list at: [www.iowadot.gov/saferoutes](http://www.iowadot.gov/saferoutes). On the right, scroll down to No-Cost or Low-Cost SRTS Projects.
- Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation [www.inhf.org](http://www.inhf.org)
  - Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation provides assistance to communities interested in developing or promoting multi-use trails. Our web site provides maps and information on Iowa’s extensive multi-use trail network.
- Iowa Bicycle Coalition [www.iowabicyclecoalition.org](http://www.iowabicyclecoalition.org)
- Iowa State University Extension [www.extension.ia.state.edu/programbuilder](http://www.extension.ia.state.edu/programbuilder)
  - Program Builder is an online marketplace where community leaders can review and make selections from a variety of technical assistance, consulting and educational programs that will improve the quality of life in their communities.
- Live Healthy Iowa Kids [www.iowasportsfoundation.org/LiveHealthyIowakids](http://www.iowasportsfoundation.org/LiveHealthyIowakids)
  - A free, 100 day program for Iowa youth to learn the importance of healthy eating and being physically active. Live Healthy Iowa Kids has lots of nutrition and physical activity resources.
- KidsWalk-to-School: A Guide to Promote Walking to School [www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/kidswalk/resources.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/kidswalk/resources.htm)
- Active Living By Design [www.activelivingbydesign.org/events-resources/resources/safe-routes-school-toolkit](http://www.activelivingbydesign.org/events-resources/resources/safe-routes-school-toolkit)
- Americans with Disabilities Act [www.ada.gov](http://www.ada.gov)

