

FactSheet

September 2015

District Funding for School Crossing Guards

While California law does not require school districts, cities, or counties to use crossing guards, many voluntarily establish crossing guard programs to protect the health and safety of their students. Students who walk or bike to school increase their daily physical activity, which may improve their overall health¹ and academic achievement².

This fact sheet highlights some considerations for school boards as they seek to review, expand, or establish a school crossing guard program. Since the funding and coordination of services are often based on local agreements between school districts and their respective city or county agencies, understanding the available options and how other school districts provide similar services can be beneficial. As with any other student support service, the deployment of school crossing guards should be seen in the context of broader initiatives related to student health and safety, such as Safe Routes to Schools—a program that provides federal and state grants designed to make it easy, safe, and enjoyable for students to walk and bicycle to and from school.

Considerations for school boards

School boards seeking to establish, expand, or review their school crossing guard program should consider:

1. **Coordination of efforts.** Which entity or combination of entities manages the program (school district, city, or county)? How is the deployment of school crossing guards determined?
2. **Funding sources.** Which entity or combination of entities funds the program? Funding typically comes from district, city, or county revenues. Some programs have also been partially funded through federal and/or state grants or community-based organizations.

Regardless of the agreement at the local level, it is important that school districts work together with their local agencies and stakeholders to ensure that students and families have safe and healthy routes to their schools.

Coordination of efforts

To effectively meet the safety needs of students, it is crucial that school districts and local agencies coordinate their efforts. Generally, cities and counties are better positioned to implement comprehensive safety initiatives, which may include school crossing guards. City or county programs are usually operated by the police or sheriff's department or another agency. In some cases, a school district and local agency jointly operate a program, with the district deploying its own volunteers or staff where gaps in service exist. Some school districts operate their own programs by either employing crossing guards, coordinating volunteers, or securing services of an outside contractor.

Alameda County. The Public Works Agency's School Crossing Guard Program provides adult crossing guards in school areas in the unincorporated areas of Alameda County. School crossing guard services are provided if requested. Due to limited funding availability, school crossing guard locations are limited. As a result, some schools fund school crossing guards with their own discretionary funds or work with the county's Supervising Crossing Guard to train parent volunteers.

Questions for school boards to ask:

1. What school crossing guard services are offered by the local agencies?
2. Do these services meet our district needs? Should additional services be added to meet gaps in delivery?

Funding sources

Whether the school district, local agencies, or combination of entities operate a school crossing guard program, funding can come from a variety of sources, including the district, city or county revenues, federal and/or state grants, and community-based organizations. The main expenses associated with such programs often include staff salaries and insurance for employees and volunteers.

School district revenues. While full funding from district revenues more often occurs with district-operated programs, in some cases districts might pay a fee to local agencies for services provided. Each school district can negotiate funding amounts with their respective city or county.

Elk Grove Unified School District. The Elk Grove Unified School District has a contract with a private company to provide crossing guards at eight sites with the highest traffic and/or larger streets that present a greater risk to student safety. Crossing guard duty at remaining sites is provided by school staff or parent volunteers. Expenses for the services are covered by the district.

City or county revenues. City or county revenues may be used to fully or partially fund school crossing guard programs, even when district operated. School boards may engage with and encourage city and county officials to support school crossing guard programs. Such requests, when linked to the public safety responsibilities of the city and county, offer compelling rationale for support. Identifying specific funding streams would also facilitate the support. Examples of city and county funding stream that could support school crossing guard programs include misdemeanor

and forfeitures collected by the cities and counties under state law, such as Education Code 45451, Vehicle Code 42200, and Vehicle Code 42201. While not a requirement, there is an argument to be made for the responsibility of the city or county to support the safety of its residents, including the provision of school crossing guards.

Federal and state grants. There are several state and federal grants that local agencies can access to provide school crossing guard services to school districts. The Safe Routes to Schools program is one of the most prominent funding sources. While this is a broader program focused on infrastructure, a portion of funds may be used for the training (but not the salaries) of school crossing guards in the community.

- » **California Safe Routes to Schools (SR2S).** SR2S allows up to 10% of expenditures to be used for non-infrastructure activities. Only incorporated cities and counties are eligible to apply for the SR2S program. Therefore, it is very important that school districts, school site staff, and parents work together with their local agencies to maximize the benefit of the program. The state of California has provided approximately \$24 million per year for the SR2S program since 2000 and the program was extended indefinitely by AB 57 — Highways, Federal Funds: Safe Routes to School in 2007.
- » **Federal Safe Routes to Schools (SRTS).** Funding for this program is available through CalTRANS and allows 30% of funding to be used for non-infrastructure projects. State, local, and regional agencies are eligible applicants, while school districts are required to partner with a city or county to serve as the responsible agency to manage the funding and the program. After 2012, the Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) replaced several federal transportation programs, including SRTS. While dedicated funds are no longer available, SRTS projects are eligible to apply for TAP funds.

Community-based organizations. In several cases, school districts partner with community organizations, such as rotary clubs, and other local funding sources to fund school and district specific projects.

Walking School Bus Program. A walking school bus is a group of children who walk to school with one or more adults. It can be as informal as two families taking turns walking their children to school or as formal as a planned walking route with meeting points and a schedule of trained volunteers. This program can be an alternative to hiring and training crossing guards while also increasing parent participation. For more information, visit www.walkingschoolbus.org.

Questions for school boards to ask:

1. What resources are available in my city and county to support school crossing guard programs? Has the city and/or county received SR2S or TAP funds that can support our needs?
2. Are there community organizations that can support the safety needs of schools within the district?

Next steps for school boards

While each school district might have different coordination and funding arrangements with its city or county to support a program for school crossing guards, it is imperative that school boards understand the agreements within their district and coordinate efforts with parents, community organizations, and local agencies to ensure the safety and health of their students.

CSBA will continue to provide guidance on effective governance and coordination of efforts to promote the health and safety of students. CSBA partners can also be a valuable resource. For example, the Cities Counties and Schools Partnership works with CSBA and other organizations to foster coordination of local services among cities, counties, and schools.

Helpful resources

California School Boards Association. Provides sample board policies, policy briefs, and other resources on student wellness, transportation, and establishment of a Safe Routes to School program. See BP/AR 5142.2—Safe Routes to School Program and CSBA's policy brief *Safe Routes to School: Program and Policy Strategies* (August 2009). www.csba.org

The Cities Counties and Schools Partnership. Provides resources focused on improving conditions of children, families, and communities at the local level by promoting and encouraging coordination, integration, and increased efficiency of local services and joint facilities use among cities, counties, and schools in all California communities. www.ccspartnership.org

The Safe Routes to School National Partnership. Provides an overview of best practices for establishing Safe Routes to School programs. <http://saferoutespartnership.org/state/bestpractices>

CalTRANS. Provides information on the federal and state Safe Routes to School programs, including a project list and legislative updates: www.dot.ca.gov/hq/LocalPrograms/saferoutes/saferoutes.htm

Crossing with Confidence: Managing Risk When Creating Crossing Guard Programs in California (October 2014). This fact sheet by CA4Health and ChangeLab Solutions discusses the legal implications of establishing a crossing guard program and identifies concrete steps that school districts can take to minimize their exposure to liability. http://changelabsolutions.org/sites/default/files/SRTS_Crossing-Guard-Programs_FINAL_20140926.pdf

Endnotes

- 1 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. *Physical Activity Guidelines Advisory Committee Report*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2008.
- 2 California Department of Education. *A Study of the Relationship Between Physical Fitness and Academic Achievement in California Using 2004 Test Results*. Sacramento, CA: California Department of Education, April 2005.