



# Mott Poll Report

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## Parent Traffic Hazardous to Student Safety

The start and end of the school day can be a snarl of cars and buses which can pose safety risks to children traveling to and from the school building. The C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health asked a national sample of parents of children 6-12 about safety concerns related to car and bus traffic around their child's school.

Over half of parents (56%) report their child travels by car to get to school most days, compared to 35% by bus, 7% by walking, 1% by bike/scooter, and 1% by public transportation. Similarly, 53% of parents say their child comes home from school by car, 36% by bus, 9% by walking, 1% by bike/scooter, and 1% by public transportation.

Nearly half of parents (48%) say their child walks through an area where cars are dropping off or picking up children to get to or from the school building. Most parents (81%) say the area is always supervised by a school official or safety officer but only 69% rate the level of supervision as good. One-quarter of parents (26%) say their child walks through a bus drop-off or pick-up area to get to or from the school building. Two-thirds of parents (65%) say the level of supervision around the bus area is good.

Nearly one-third of parents (31%) worry about their child's safety going to and from school, and 28% think it is likely that a child will get hurt near the car or bus drop-off area. Parents report several major problems that pose a risk to children's safety before or after school, including drivers not paying attention (37%) or speeding (34%). Other major problems include parents parking in no-parking areas (26%) or dropping off in the wrong location (26%). In addition, parents say children not staying on the sidewalk (29%) and bus drivers not paying attention (24%) are major problems before and after school.

Nearly all parents (94%) feel that school officials should take action when parents do not follow traffic rules near the school. Two-thirds of parents (66%) think the school should put up cones, gates, or other barriers to better direct traffic flow. Many parents feel law enforcement should give warnings (61%) or tickets (58%) to parents who do not follow traffic rules. Finally, 29% of parents believe the school should suspend or ban certain parents from entering the school parking area if they do not follow traffic rules.

### School traffic safety risks

% of parents citing major safety problem

## SCHOOL

Drivers not  
paying attention 37%

Speeding 34%

Parking in  
no-parking areas 26%

Dropping off in  
wrong location 26%



Source: C.S. Mott Children's  
Hospital National Poll on  
Children's Health, 2022

### Report Highlights

Half of parents say their child walks through the car drop-off or pick-up area when going to or from school.

Over one-third of parents say drivers not paying attention or speeding are major problems around their child's school.

1 in 3 parents say schools should suspend or ban parents who do not follow traffic rules from entering the school parking area.

## Data Source & Methods

*This report presents findings from a nationally representative household survey conducted exclusively by Ipsos Public Affairs, LLC (Ipsos) for C.S. Mott Children's Hospital. The survey was administered in April 2022 to a randomly selected, stratified group of adults who were parents of at least one child age 3-18 years living in their household (n=2,002). Adults were selected from Ipsos's web-enabled KnowledgePanel® that closely resembles the U.S. population. The sample was subsequently weighted to reflect population figures from the Census Bureau. The survey completion rate was 59% among panel members contacted to participate. This report is based on responses from 923 parents with at least one child age 6-12. The margin of error for results presented in this report is  $\pm 1$  to 4 percentage points.*

*A publication from C.S. Mott Children's Hospital, the University of Michigan Department of Pediatrics, and the Susan B. Meister Child Health Evaluation and Research (CHEAR) Center.*

*Findings from the C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health do not represent the opinions of the University of Michigan. The University of Michigan reserves all rights over this material.*

## C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health

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## Implications

Many parents look forward to kids going back to school, but dread returning to the daily hassle of getting them to and from school. And parents may be sending mixed messages to their kids: preaching the need to be safe but failing to follow the school traffic rules themselves.

Most schools have a plan to manage traffic with specific lanes for parents and buses to drop off and pick up. Usually, these lanes minimize the extent to which children would have to walk in front of or between cars. Problems occur when parents park in a lane that is supposed to keep moving, disrupting the traffic flow; in response, other parents drop off or pick up their child in the middle of the road or other non-authorized locations, forcing their child to dodge between other cars. The danger is exacerbated when parents are on their phone, in a hurry, or otherwise distracted.

This Mott Poll report reflects the views of parents of children 6-12 years. These elementary school-age children may be particularly vulnerable to traffic-related injuries because they are less skilled at judging when it is safe to cross the street. Therefore, the responsibility for keeping kids safe lies primarily with the adults in the school community – parents, bus drivers, school officials, and law enforcement.

It is clear from this poll that parents want school officials to be more proactive in addressing school traffic problems. Most parents support efforts to clearly mark and direct the traffic flow using cones, gates or other barriers. They want school officials outside at the beginning and end of the school day, making sure parents and bus drivers are following the safety rules. Some schools have law enforcement officers onsite to enforce speed limits and other traffic regulations.

As a last resort, school officials may decide to suspend or ban parents who repeatedly violate safety procedures from driving onto school grounds. This should be done carefully to ensure that parents don't choose another option that would be even more dangerous, such as dropping off their child on a busy road outside of school grounds. It may be helpful to use the school newsletter and "backpack mail" to remind parents about the importance of following traffic safety procedures, and the penalties parents may face if they violate them.

One way for schools to decrease the traffic congestion near the school is to encourage more students to walk, bike or ride a scooter to school. These activities provide daily exercise for children and can increase their self-confidence. However, this Mott Poll highlights that only 1 in 10 children walk or ride a bike/scooter to school.

Some parents do not allow their child to walk or ride a bike/scooter to school because of safety concerns. Schools can alleviate parent worry by implementing specific strategies: informing parents of safe routes to school that have crosswalks and bike lanes; and working with city officials or parent-teacher associations to place crossing guards at busy intersections.

Parents can take steps to prepare their child to travel safely to and from school. An important strategy is for parents to do a test run together with their child to agree on the safest route to school and identify potential hazards. When possible, parents can point out the homes of family friends or familiar neighbors where children can go for help. Parents should make sure children consistently look both ways for traffic before proceeding into an intersection, even if there is a crosswalk. Parents can introduce themselves and their child to the crossing guard. When schedules allow, parents might accompany their child on the way to or from school make sure they are following good safety habits, and to be a part of a broader community of parents who ensure that all children can travel safely.