



# 2020 Annual Report

## Seattle School Traffic Safety Committee



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# 1. What is the School Traffic Safety Committee?

The City of Seattle School Traffic Safety Committee (STSC) was created by Ordinance in 1975. This board of 11 members includes representatives of Seattle Public Schools (SPS), Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT), Seattle Police Department (SPD), King County Metro, and 5 volunteer positions filled by pedestrian advocates, bicycle advocates, parents, grandparents, and neighbors.

## When does it meet?

Meetings are open to the public and are generally held 8:30 - 10:30 AM the second Friday of every month at the school district administrative building, John Stanford Center for Educational Excellence (2445 3rd Ave S).

## What does the Committee do?

- strengthens working relationships between the stakeholders
- provides a mechanism for any community member to raise school traffic safety issues
- works to improve walking and bicycling options for transportation to schools
- recommends new school crosswalk locations and crossing guard assignments using intersection safety data provided by SDOT
- reviews traffic circulation plans for new and renovated school buildings
- reviews and responds to traffic concerns raised by parents and school staff
- updates elementary school walk boundary maps
- helps distribute information about transportation resources to parents and educators
- works to improve crossing guard recruitment

## 2. Safe Routes to School Coordinator

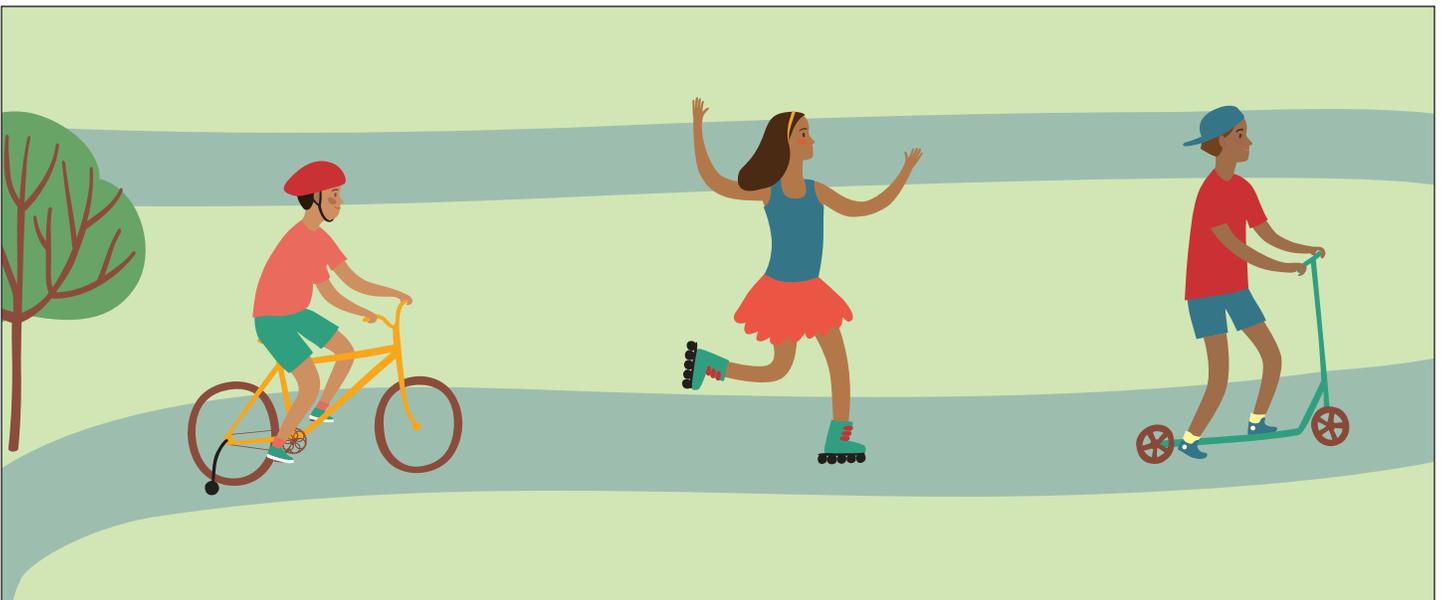
In 2019 City Council approved funding for a new position focused on supporting students who walk, bike, and carpool to get to school each day. The Safe Routes to School Coordinator will be funded by the City with SDOT oversight and housed at SPS. This was a major achievement for the Committee in 2019.

We are very grateful that the City has set aside funding for this position. We are grateful to the District for hosting the position so that the work can include access to student databases needed for the King County School Pool program to assist families in forming car, walking, and bike pools.

We will be working with SDOT and SPS in 2020 to shape this opportunity to ensure that the Coordinator is set up to succeed and to serve SPS students with maximum impact.



**Thank you!**



### 3. Coordination between SDOT and SPS

SDOT is an integral partner in the School Traffic Safety Committee's work. We appreciate the hard work by both of the representatives assigned to STSC during 2019, their supportive supervisors, and the many field crews who install and improve the sidewalks, crosswalks, roads, and lights that help create Safe Routes to School.

SDOT is a large agency. Situations arose in 2019 that revealed opportunities for improved coordination and partnership between SDOT and SPS to make physical street improvements that protect students and their families – as well as school neighbors.

#### **Crosswalk Policy creates hurdles to pedestrian improvements as seen at Queen Anne Elementary**

Queen Anne Elementary completed a major renovation during the 2018-2019 school year. The project included an addition that moves the school's front door from Boston St to 4th Avenue North. STSC had previously visited the site and provided information about the project to SDOT in 2016. The committee visited Queen Anne Elementary again while it was under construction in June of 2019 and provided input to SDOT on where infrastructure improvements, such as stop signs, crosswalks, and interventions to increase intersection visibility would help children walking to and from the school when it re-opened. The committee reiterated that the intersection in front of the new main entrance lacked crosswalk striping, and asked SDOT to install that striping prior to the school re-opening in September.

Current SDOT policy requires that a certain number of people are observed using an intersection



The new entrance to Queen Anne Elementary includes an accessible ramp, but the intersection leading up to it has poor visibility and is missing crosswalk striping.

before improvements to make that crossing safe are installed. These requirements are called 'warrants'. Even when a community institution such as a school, community center, or park is being redesigned and it is clear that main approaches to the institution will be used by pedestrians, SDOT's policy requires waiting to count how many people cross the street once a building is open before installing crosswalk striping.

At Queen Anne Elementary School this policy prevented timely installation of crosswalk striping and other pedestrian improvements around the school despite clear and repeated communication in advance that the school traffic patterns would change in predictable ways.

The School Traffic Safety Committee recommends eliminating SDOT's crosswalk warrant policy in these situations. Requiring people to cross unimproved streets in order to get approval for basic safety infrastructure opens our neighbors to unnecessary risk, and the City to unnecessary liability. We support SDOT's current consideration of modifying the crosswalk warrant rules allow infrastructure improvements for community institutions to be installed in advance or at the same time as institution construction or renovations.

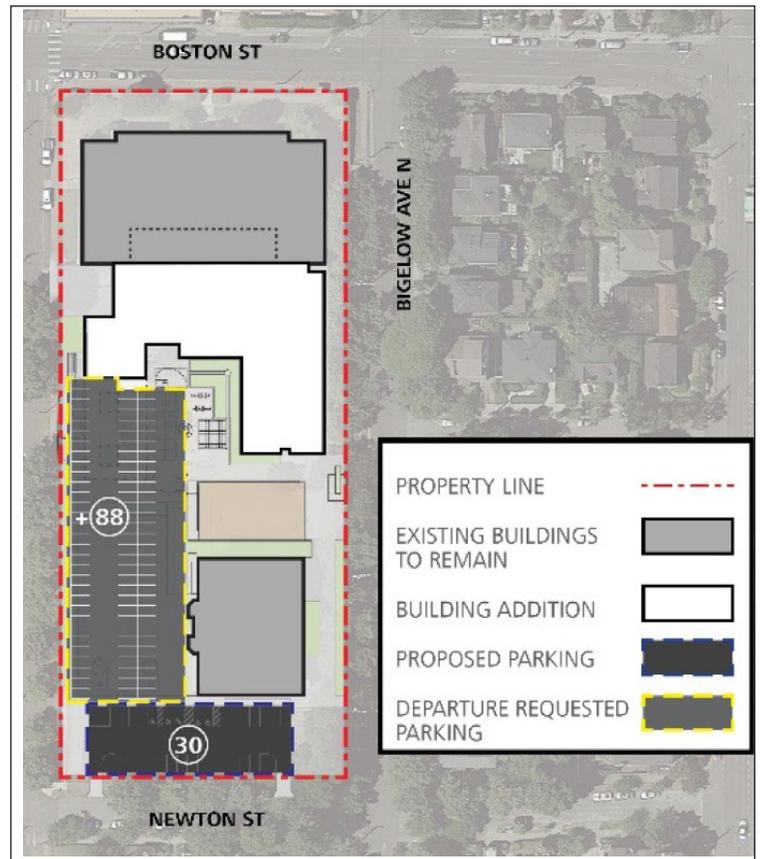
## 4. City code relating to schools needs an update

In 2019 SPS asked the School Traffic Safety Committee for input and support during the process to get a departure from City parking code in order to place portable classrooms at Roosevelt High School. STSC was happy to support SPS, but committee members wondered why questions about private car parking and strong community feelings around parking in the neighborhood came up at all in discussions about placing portables. The answer is that City code calls for an unusually high number of private car parking spaces at school facilities. This requirement triggers the need for a departure on 3 out of 5 major school projects and 1 out of 14 temporary portable placements.

### City code requires much too much school parking

City code requires parking based on the square footage of auditorium space in a building. In contrast, many neighboring districts are required to build parking only for faculty and staff, and have a parking requirement that is about half of that in Seattle. This is despite the City of Seattle being substantially more densely developed than nearby areas and having a more robust transit system and a higher proportion of students who live close enough to walk to school.

SPS has a growing population of students who must be accommodated with classroom space. Only 2 out of every 5 SPS sites that undergo renovation have space to meet the high parking requirement. Often it would be impossible to meet the requirement even if the school eliminated playground space entirely. Given that the City promotes a multi-modal transit policy, it doesn't make



This graphic from the Queen Anne Elementary Departures report shows that the required amount of parking would eliminate playground space at the school. 118 spaces are required by code, 88 more than were built.

sense for SPS to spend space and budget on huge private car parking lots even when it is physically possible to do so.

STSC asked SPS capital projects about the impact of the parking requirement on their budgets. SPS spends hundreds of thousands of dollars each year and numerous staff hours working through the departures process. SPS would love to partner with the City to update code requirements to encourage multi-modal transportation at schools and to reflect the reality of school projects in Seattle.

In addition to the parking requirement, several other code requirements trigger habitual use of the departures process. The departures SPS requests most commonly are (in order of frequency):

- 'Reduced' parking ratio
- On-street school bus load/ unload
- Install a changing image or lit sign
- Increased building height (to accommodate HVAC)

City code requires SPS to obtain a departure to continue on-street bus loading/unloading even when the size and location of the bus loading zone will not change in any way. Similarly, the reconfiguration of HVAC equipment on an existing roof on a historic structure triggered the departures process for Webster Elementary. While the departures process often facilitates valuable community input on school projects with unusual conditions, it seems clear that Seattle code as it is currently written does not adequately take into account the typical needs of school facilities.

In 2019 STSC met with Seattle Department of Construction & Inspections (SDCI), Department of Neighborhoods (DON), SDOT, and SPS Capital Projects to discuss the frequent requirement for departures for school projects.



For 2020, STSC recommends forming a working group with SPS, SDCI, DON, and the design community, charged with reviewing elements of City Code which frequently trigger the departures process. Attention should be paid to areas where requirements for other types of development have been loosened in recent years, such as parking reductions near frequent transit stops, and where similar changes could be applied to schools projects. A deadline should be set for delivery of the work product to the Directors of the relevant city departments and to the STSC Agencies.

### **Consistency between inspectors**

In the discussion of the departures process SPS raised a similar coordination issue it has experienced during construction. More than once a change in personnel assigned to work as an inspector on a project has resulted in additional requirements being added late in the process. SPS projects go through SDOT's Street Improvement Permit (SIP) process. Once approved plans are in place, SDOT has a pre-construction walk-through with an SPS inspector to look for existing conditions that will trigger improvement requirements. SPS is happy to make required street improvements, but in several recent situations additional improvement requirements have been added later that were not raised during the SIP or walkthrough process. This has delayed projects, caused costly change orders, and left students walking to school without functional sidewalks for months at a time. At Magnolia elementary school the contractor couldn't accommodate late additions to the project scope and pulled out of the project, leaving the sidewalk torn up for 6 months.

SPS would like to get a "no surprises" commitment from SDOT. STSC is working with SPS, SDOT, and SDCI to improve coordination during school construction projects and prevent late street improvement requirements.



Photo Source: [Katherine Brandt](#)

## City

# 5. School Streets

There are a number of health and safety liabilities associated with many people all trying to drive private vehicles to and from school during arrival and departure times. Schools across the world have found that temporary restrictions on private cars for the able bodied in the streets immediately around school grounds have a hugely beneficial effect on tempers, safety, and community harmony.

Temporarily restricting vehicles on certain streets immediately adjacent to schools is often called 'School Streets.' The idea originated in the early 1990s in Italy, was replicated all over Europe and more recently has been introduced in various locations in North America. Examples in North America include Victoria, British Columbia, Fair Haven, New Jersey, and San Jose, California. In Seattle, Genesee Hill

Elementary School in West Seattle temporarily prevents through-traffic on SW Dakota Street immediately adjacent to the school during pick-up and drop-offs, except for buses and access vehicles for people with disabilities.

In response to requests from schools in different parts of Seattle and building on the Genesee Hill Elementary example, the STSC would like to explore opportunities to expand this approach at other school sites. In 2020 we plan to identify communities ready to try this out, and, when the Safe Routes to School Coordinator is in place, to figure out a timeline for implementing additional school streets.



## City

# 6. School zone speeding cameras

In 2019, STSC continued our effort to make sense of the data being collected through the school zone speeding cameras. We are delighted to note several locations where the cameras record a decrease in the number of tickets and the relative velocity of the cars. We are concerned about the locations where declines have not occurred and call for a standard policy of making physical changes to locations with persistently high speeds and tickets numbers. STSC worries that leaving these locations unchanged opens the City up to charges that the cameras are intended for revenue generation rather than safety.

Thank you!

A possible policy could look like:

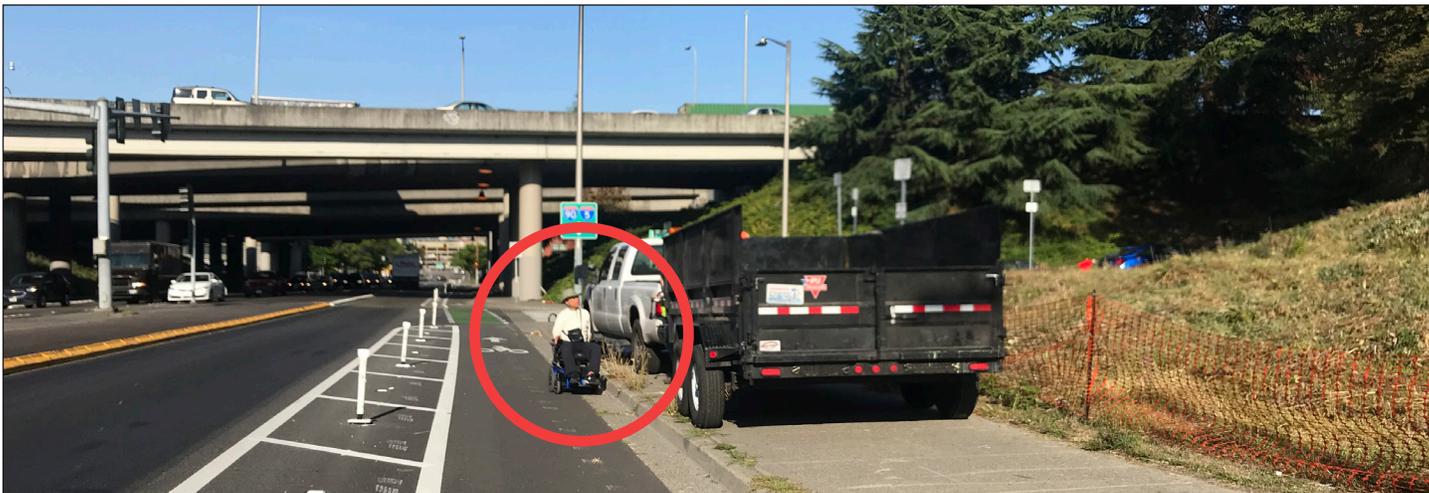
- Where speed camera data shows a high number of tickets and little or no decline after 2 years, then SDOT will prioritize engineering changes at that location to generate physical conditions that result in appropriate speeds for the school zone.



Traffic Inducing Traffic

- Where speed camera data shows an unexpected increase or decrease in numbers of tickets SDOT will perform an analysis to look for the cause of the change.

We are pleased to note that 2019 brought the promise of 5 new school zone speed cameras to be installed in 2020.



## City

### 7. Red light cameras

In previous years, a portion of the revenue from red light cameras went to the Safe Routes to School Program and other safety infrastructure improvements. In 2019, STSC encouraged the City to return that revenue, now currently going to the general fund, and were disappointed that the revenue was not returned in the final 2020 budget.

**In 2020 we again encourage the return of the red light camera revenue to safety infrastructure improvements.**

In addition, we strongly support the City’s efforts to gain State approval to expand automated red light and crosswalk blocking fines. These efforts have been shown to be the least biased way of assessing traffic infractions. Red light running and crosswalk blocking are concerns frequently expressed by families who want to walk or roll to school. We understand that the approval for these cameras may be limited to downtown Seattle at first but encourage Seattle to continue to push for expansion and approval so these tools can be added to School Routes as well.



Cameras are one of the most equitable modes of enforcement. City employees and contractors should not be exempt from traffic laws, as these photos show. Note red circle around wheelchair user.

## 8. Design standards for Seattle Public Schools

Safe Routes to School are a multi-agency puzzle. In 2019 it became clear that changes in the Seattle Public Schools standard building design guidelines are necessary to set school communities up for safety and success.

### School entrances should be located at street corners

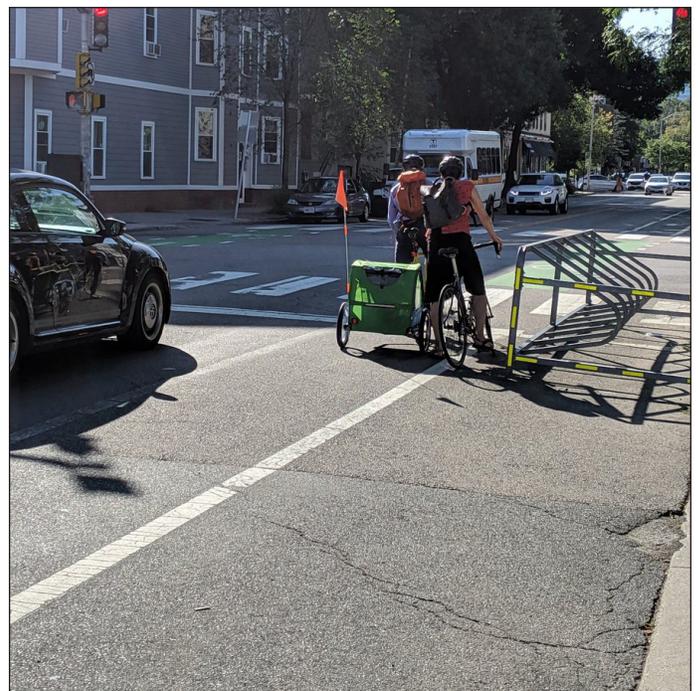
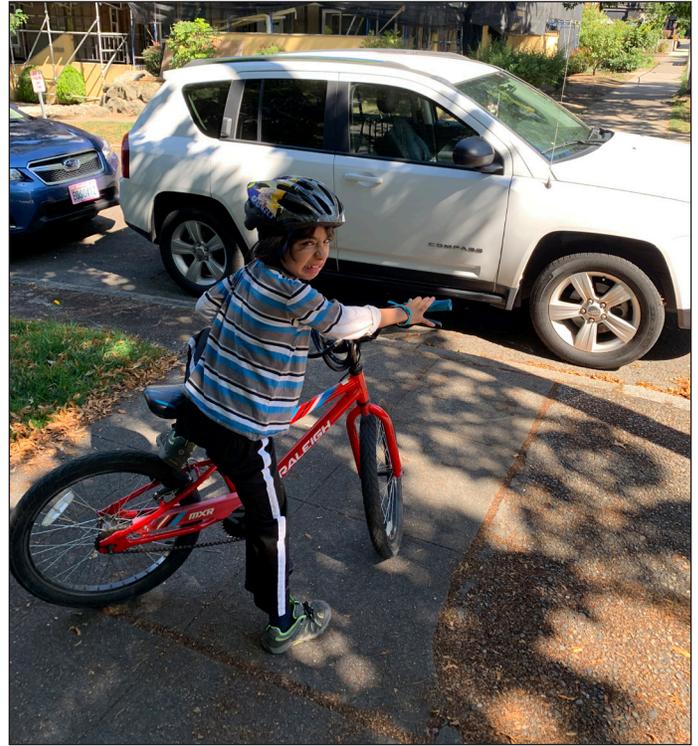
STSC reviews plans for schools that are being renovated and rebuilt. It is clear that placing the main entrance on a corner is beneficial for student safety. Mid-block entrances may have architectural appeal, but they result in mid-block street crossing that puts people walking in conflict with people in cars.

Many parents also report that they are happy to pull over farther from the school and allow their kids to walk the last block unattended as long as they can watch their kids enter the school.

To reduce conflicts between vehicles and pedestrians and to allow parents to see their kids walk into the school building STSC recommends that SPS adopt a formal standard that school entrances should be located near street corners.

### Private vehicle loading zones should be avoided

Where there are load and unload zones for private vehicles at schools, two common problems reported to SPS Risk Management are the number of SPS staff who must spend time attempting to manage the behavior of guardians trying to drop off and pick up their students in private vehicles and the number of injuries and

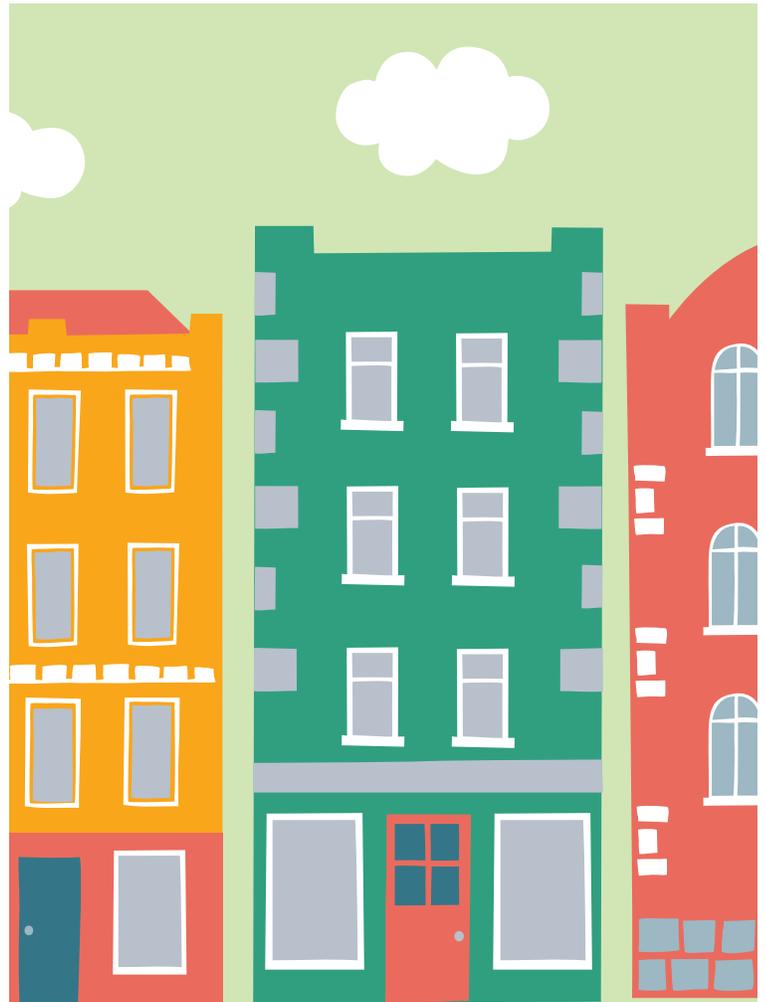


Parked cars can block sidewalks and crosswalks, but strategically placed racks can open up visibility, improving mobility and safety. SDOT has promised more of these in school vicinities.

altercations resulting from tempers flaring. That is to say, designated car drop-off zones are a time-sink for already over-extended staff and a source of discord in our school communities. There are also real air pollution and asthma problems created by concentrating cars in this manner.

Many schools do not have drop-off zones, and instead encourage parents to park in nearby neighborhoods and walk the last block to school. This solution decreases the traffic crunch around schools, which in turn makes walking and rolling to school safer for the entire community.

STSC recommends SPS design standards discourage private vehicle loading zones for able bodied students and families, and instead we recommend that SPS work closely with SDOT to make the blocks immediately adjacent to the school and the 2 block surrounding area as easy and pleasant for walking as possible.



## 9. Crossing guard vacancies: Fewer this year but more work is needed

Seattle Public Schools has a critical shortage of adult crossing guards. In September 2018 there were 71 crossing guard positions that were filled, and 46 open crossing guard positions, representing a vacancy rate of 39% in a critical safety position. In 2019 STSC worked with SPD and SDOT to spread the word about the open crossing guard positions, and that work has paid off. In fall of 2019 the crossing guard vacancy rate was 30%. This is still much too high, but it represents a substantial reduction in the number of open positions.

STSC is working with SDOT and the Mayor's office to push out coordinated crossing guard recruitment information prior to the start of the 2020-2021 school year. Additionally, SPS is working to improve crossing guard recruitment on a school-by-school basis and speed the on-boarding process.

Crossing guards are currently required to pay for their own background checks, approx. \$45. For a position that pays \$32 a day this upfront fee represents a hurdle. Many applicants have difficulty pulling together an extra \$45, needing to wait for the next month's social security check, etc. This often delays crossing guard on-ramping. SPS nutrition services pays the



STSC worked with SPS and SDOT to develop laminated crossing guard recruitment flyers and place them at every vacant crossing guard location. Yvonne Carpenter puts up a flyer near Queen Anne Elementary in June 2019.

background check fees for prospective lunchroom workers.

**STSC proposes using school bus stop paddle funds to pay for crossing guard background checks in order to speed the hiring process.**

## Conclusion

We appreciate the opportunity to serve on this Committee and to bring what we have learned to your attention. The School Traffic Safety Committee will continue working to improve safety for school age children throughout Seattle in 2020.