



# What to do About Pick-Up and Drop-Off Issues at School?

Now that school has started, one of the biggest issues for school administrators always tends to be pick-up and drop-off traffic in the school parking lot and surrounding streets.

As the School Safety Coordinator for the City of Phoenix Street Transportation Department for over 20 years, one of my primary job duties was to work with schools and school district to come up with solutions for these traffic nightmares.

There are steps I have learned over the years that can be used to improve these situations. Sometimes these steps are looked at like medicine. It doesn't taste good going down but ultimately cures the problem. I tend to look at the steps as building blocks that can be changed and moved around as needed. There isn't always a "one-size fits all" approach because every school and school design is different. Sometimes it is the design that puts a school "behind the 8-ball" when it comes to

solutions while other schools may just have a poor traffic management plan. I will discuss both issues in this article.

Here are my steps to improving pick-up/drop-off traffic conditions at school:

- **Create a traffic committee involving parents, school officials, city staff or traffic consultant** - That way, the plan is collaborative and many voices can express their opinions and be heard.
- **Have this committee review a morning arrival and an afternoon dismissal** - This will allow the group to see what is actually happening during arrival and dismissal and make notes for possible improvements.
- **Bring the committee together again to review notes** - The group can discuss what they saw and what they would like to see in a final plan.



- **The city staff or traffic consultant will take the notes and complete a proposed traffic plan for review by the committee** - A traffic plan could have the following items in it:
  - a. **Identifying one main area** for student pick-up/drop-off
  - b. **Loading or unloading should be in a single lane** along the curb on the passenger side of the vehicle.
  - c. Next to the loading lane should be a **“release value” lane to allow for vehicles to pass freely** as needed once they have completed the pick-up or drop-off.
  - d. **The loading or unloading lane can never be used as a parking lane.** If parents wish to park or leave their vehicle unattended, they need to find a parking space in the lot.
  - e. **The waiting area for students should be as close to the parking lot driveway exit as possible.** This will help to eliminate back-up in the parking lot.
  - f. **Up to three vehicles should be loaded at a time.** Spots can be painted near the curb with striped areas in the loading lane for cars to pull up to. Loading more than three can slow down the traffic flow as students try to get to their cars.
  - g. **“Stand-Back”** lines can be installed near the curb to identify how close students should get to the curb while they wait to be picked up.
  - h. **Parent and bus pick-up/drop-off areas must be separate** to meet Arizona Minimum Guidelines standards.
  - i. **Separating walkers and bike riders** is suggested and will improve congestion and student safety.
  - j. Areas with heavy crossing locations in the parking lot **should marked with crosswalk paint and signs.**
  - k. **Parent volunteers or school staff need to be available to cross families** at marked crossing areas inside the parking lot.

Some plans may call for signing or striping changes along the roadway or R-O-W. City jurisdictions would have the responsibility to complete this work. Other plans may point out a lack of training for crossing guards and other staff. City and school district staff can help provide the needed training.

Sometimes pick-up and drop-off issues at schools comes down to a lack of a plan or a poorly thought-out plan. This is when strong city or consultant involvement can help the most. I have heard administrators say “this is how we’ve always done it” or they blame parents or the city for their traffic issues. None of those comments change what is happening in the parking lot. A complete and well-thought-out plan is the only way to change conditions. Sometimes administrations get overwhelmed by other issues at school and don’t concentrate on traffic concerns. They might leave the traffic and pick-up/drop-off process to other staff members. It is important for city staff to check in with a school at the start of the school year to see where they are with traffic control. Sometimes the school administration doesn’t believe they have a traffic problem until they are visited by the local jurisdiction’s police or street transportation departments. That visit can lead to a great result and safer conditions.



For more information about Pick-Up and Drop-Off Issues at school contact:

**Donald Cross, (602) 377-3093**  
 email: [dcross@y2keng.com](mailto:dcross@y2keng.com)  
 website: [www.y2keng.com](http://www.y2keng.com)