

## **Frequently Asked Questions regarding the 2021-2022 School Street Pilot Initiative at Winston Churchill Public School**

### **QUESTIONS ABOUT SCHOOL STREET BENEFITS, GOALS, AND PRECEDENTS**

#### **Why School Streets?**

School Streets are gaining popularity around the world in response to two common trends: declining levels of independent mobility and active transportation engagement among elementary school aged children; and unsafe conditions around school sites due to high vehicular traffic volumes, flow, and idling. By closing streets adjacent to schools to through traffic, School Streets offer a multitude of benefits for students, parents, teachers, and local residents. Specifically, School Streets:

- Provide a safer and calmer experience for children to come and go from school every day, thus reducing risk of injury, stress, and anxiety among students;
- Foster opportunities for children to develop skills in independent mobility and active transportation;
- Promote health and readiness to learn, by creating the conditions for children to engage in physical activity as part of their journey to/from school;
- Promotes social cohesion among students and among parents, by creating space for children and parents to informally interact outside the school; and
- Improve air quality and reduce noise pollution by eliminating traffic congestion around the school.

#### **How do School Streets lead to increased active transportation to school?**

While safe active transportation routes are also needed in our communities, School Streets guarantee that some active transportation happens for at least part of the journey to school. This is critical to building children's capacity for independent mobility, and eventually, for their engagement in active transportation for longer distances, and ultimately for the entire journey to school. School Streets also provide a calmer, quieter, and cleaner zone for children to arrive and depart from school, which may help parents feel more comfortable allowing their children to use AT to get to school.

#### **Where else is this being done in Canada?**

School Street initiatives were briefly tested in Victoria, British Columbia (for one day) and in Toronto, Ontario (for four days). Isaac Brock Public School in Winnipeg, Manitoba is currently running a School Street for the 2020-2021 school year. School Streets are also forthcoming in Vancouver (Spring 2021) and Markham (2021-2022). The goal is for the School Street initiative at WCPS to run for the 2021-2022 school year but it would start as a 90-day trial. As such, we have an opportunity to be a leader in Ontario, to be at the forefront of active transportation research, and to show our kids that we are willing to try new things as a community.

## QUESTIONS ABOUT PERCEIVED CONSEQUENCES OF A SCHOOL STREET AT WCPS

### **Is this initiative just punishing parents who drive their children to school?**

This initiative is not intended to be punitive; the goal is to create safer conditions for all students attending Winston Churchill Public School (WCPS) when they arrive and leave the school property every day, by not allowing through-traffic along MacDonnell Street. Vehicle congestion, blind spots, excessive speed, unsafe turns, and failure to yield all pose serious risks to the hundreds of children and adults who come and go from the school every day. We estimate that this initiative may add 2-5 minutes to the morning routine for families who typically drive and drop their child off immediately adjacent to the school's entrance.

We understand that change is hard, but we see this as a relatively minor change in the daily routine for some families, with big potential rewards for children and parents alike. Beyond the benefits described above, research has also shown that parents who park two or three blocks away from the school have reduced stress by virtue of not having to navigate congested traffic around the school site.

### **Does this not simply push congestion onto other streets?**

Yes and no. The implementation team will urge drivers to park on neighbouring streets, such as Napier, Hill, Earl, and MacDonnell (north of Earl). However, the redirected traffic will be much more dispersed compared to how it currently clusters around the WCPS entrance on MacDonnell. And, as mentioned above, the School Street team can work with the WCPS Parent Council to identify designated drop-off locations a few blocks away from the school, which will disperse the traffic even further. Of course, the goal over time is for students to shift to an active mode of travel to and from school for their entire journey, so the hope is that the overall number of vehicles making the journey to school will decrease over the course of the intervention period. Whether this actually happens is all part of the evaluation component of the initiative, and we are committed to making adjustments to the initiative as needed. Additionally, studies evaluating School Streets in other contexts have given us confidence that displayed traffic congestion will likely not be a major concern, as they have found that traffic on surrounding streets to the School Street did **not** see a significant increase in traffic volumes.

### **How will this initiative impact children's understanding of road safety?**

We feel confident that this type of initiative will not have a negative impact on children's understanding of road safety but we can understand why parents may be concerned that this will be confusing for children. A study from the University of Bristol, indicates that children as young as 6 are able to recognize the difference between when a street is closed to traffic and when there is normal vehicular traffic. They found that children can clearly describe the visual and auidial cues that signal the road is open to cars and not safe for play or walking in the street. They also found that these types of initiatives do not impair children's knowledge of road safety and parents were still teaching their children about road safety. Finally, the team plans to use this initiative to encourage more conversations and education on road safety.

## QUESTIONS ABOUT THE LOGISTICS FOR A SCHOOL STREET AT WCPS

### **Where and when would MacDonnell be closed?**

The northern boundary will be at the intersection of MacDonnell and Earl; the southern boundary will be at Union and the zone will also include a portion of Hill St to Napier, to prevent motorists from doing U-turns at the intersection of Hill and MacDonnell. At this time, the closure period for the morning is 8:40-9:10am, and 3:20-3:50pm in the afternoon.

### **What equipment be used to barricade the street, and how/where would it be stored?**

The street would be closed with lightweight sawhorses and signage, that can be easily moved by volunteers for local traffic. Most of the equipment would be secured on the school property, using combination locks that only volunteers and the school principal would know the code for. If the southern boundary for the initiative is Union, the implementation team will work on developing an agreement with a local resident for equipment storage on their property.

### **Will I be able to access my home during School Street hours?**

When the School Street is in operation, local residents living directly on the School Street will still be able to come and go from their homes as they please. Volunteers at the barriers by the entrance to MacDonnell will allow vehicles to enter but we ask that all vehicles drive at a walking pace once they have entered the School Street.

### **Would this initiative run in the winter? What about snow clearing and waste removal?**

A similar initiative has been happening in Winnipeg, which endures colder and snowier winters than Kingston. The implementation team will coordinate with the City's Public Works department to ensure these schedules do not conflict with the School Street closure times. In inclement weather days (i.e., early dismissal), the School Street will not run, and parents will be permitted to park on MacDonnell to pick up their child from the school.

### **How will the construction on Johnson St affect this initiative?**

Our team has been working with the City since the onset of this project and have been assured by city staff that the construction on Johnson will be completed in the area around MacDonnell by September 2021. Therefore, we do not anticipate that this construction will interfere with the initiative and parents will still be able to travel along Johnson to get to Winston.