

# City of Palo Alto

Police Department

August 2012

Dear Parents of Elementary School Students,

The Palo Alto Police Department is a strong supporter of the local Safe Routes to School Partnership formed by the City of Palo Alto, the Palo Alto Unified School District (PAUSD) and Palo Alto Council of PTAs. We invite you to join us in our ongoing efforts to provide a safer school commute for all students using all 5 E's of traffic safety: engineering, enforcement, education, encouraging reduced vehicle trips and evaluation.

During peak times when about half of all PAUSD students are on their way to or from school by foot, on bikes or in buses and carpools, the Police Department prioritizes traffic enforcement on school commute routes. Officers will ticket speeding, U-turns, driving in the bike lane, failure to yield properly at stop signs and crosswalks and other safety violations around schools throughout the year. The department also funds 29 Adult Crossing Guards to facilitate safe crossing of busy intersections. In addition, we participate in periodic county-wide "Operation Safe Passage" campaigns to crack down on school zone traffic violations.

Educating young children in how to walk and bike safely is also important, and I'd like to ask for your help. The Police Department assists our Safe Routes to School partners in providing in-school traffic safety education to your child, but your role in reinforcing these skills is vital. See the reverse side of this letter for key safety tips for cyclists, pedestrians and drivers. Please review this information with your children. If you make these safe practices part of your daily school commute, your children will learn safe street skills that will last a lifetime.

Parents can also help us reduce congestion and improve safety along school commute routes by choosing an alternative to driving solo to school whenever possible. Look for information on local "Walk & Roll" events in early October. If walking, biking or taking the bus is not feasible for your student, please consider carpooling, especially on rainy days.

For times when you must drive, be sure you share the road safely by putting away your cell phone, using extra caution and arriving before the last minute rush. Always make sure that your young passengers use their seatbelts and booster seats properly and that they get out of the car near the curb where it is safe and legal to do so.

Let's all work together for a safe school commute in Palo Alto in 2012-13. Please contact your PTA to find out more about local Safe Routes to School efforts. If you have any traffic enforcement questions or concerns, please contact Officer Derek Souza at 650-329-2413.

Sincerely,



Dennis Burns  
Police Chief

275 Forest Avenue  
Palo Alto, CA 94301  
650.329.2406  
650.329.2565 fax  
650.617.3120 Administration fax



## ***Bike Safely***

**Be visible – ride on the right, moving in the same direction as traffic.** Drivers will not see you if you are riding the wrong way, weaving in and out of parked cars, or riding on the sidewalk.

**Be predictable.** Avoid crashes as well as traffic tickets by obeying all stop signs and traffic signals – drivers may not see you if you don't. When you ride your bike, you are expected to yield to pedestrians and follow the rules of the road that apply to car drivers.

**Be alert.** Watch out for drivers turning left or right, or cars coming out of driveways. Avoid doors being opened in front of you by riding out of the door zone.

**Make eye contact with drivers at intersections and driveways.** Watch for right-turning cars by checking over your left shoulder. Don't assume that drivers see you!

**You always have the option of getting off your bike and becoming a pedestrian.** This is a good choice at crowded intersections. Move out of the stream of traffic, get off your bike and walk it across in the pedestrian crosswalk.

**Obey adult crossing guards or the safety patrol.** They are there to help you cross congested intersections safely.

**Do NOT carry things in your hands while biking.** Secure anything you need to carry in your bike rack or basket. Keep your backpack snug, not dangling low on your back.

**Wear your helmet and buckle it every time.** It's the law. To best protect your brain, your helmet must fit properly: snug and level on your head, just above your eyebrows.

## ***Walk or Skate Safely***

**Be alert.** Look for cars coming from all directions before entering the street – including from behind you.

**Don't assume drivers see you!** Make eye contact – especially at intersections and driveways.

**Be predictable.** Do not make sudden moves which place you in the path of oncoming vehicle traffic.

- **Cross at corners.** This is where drivers expect to see you. Crossing mid-block is hazardous as well as being illegal near traffic signals.
- **At intersections with traffic signals, start crossing with the white WALK symbol only.** Do not begin to cross once the red flashing hand appears -- wait for the next light cycle.
- Wait for a safe gap in traffic if there's no stop sign or traffic signal.

**Obey adult crossing guards or the safety patrol.** They are there to help you cross congested intersections safely.

### **PARENTS: Help your student learn how to share the road safely.**

Help your child choose the best walking or cycling route -- it may not be the same way you would drive in a car!

Children who regularly practice safe walking and biking skills when young are more likely to make safer choices as teenagers.

## ***Drive Safely***

**Always observe the 25 mph maximum speed in school zones.**

**Be aware of school commute routes.** Children walking or biking to school help reduce traffic congestion – give them a brake and use extra caution. Young children think drivers can stop instantly, and may not be able to judge speed or distance of vehicles moving toward them.

**Obey "No Right Turn on Red" signs where posted at school intersections.** This allows students to cross safely without cars turning through the crosswalk.

**Set a good safety example by following instructions of crossing guards. Also:**

- Yield to pedestrians in crosswalks.
- Avoid making U-turns and other unsafe maneuvers.
- Never double park. Avoid blocking red curbs or disabled access ramps.
- Make sure your child gets out of your car on the curb side, not near traffic.
- Use booster seats to make adult seat belts safer for children younger than 8 years old or under 4'9" tall.

**Try to carpool whenever possible to help reduce traffic congestion near schools.**

**Don't take risks if you are running late.** Leaving home a little earlier is a safer choice.

***Report ALL crashes involving students to the PAPD at 329-2413, even if there are no injuries. Also contact your school office to fill out the PAUSD incident report form.***

For more safe routes to school information, see [www.cityofpaloalto.org/saferoutes](http://www.cityofpaloalto.org/saferoutes)  
[www.saferoutes.paloaltopta.org](http://www.saferoutes.paloaltopta.org)