

# AB 2583 (Berman)

## Safer School Zones

### SUMMARY

AB 2583 would increase safety in school zones through lower speed limits, clearer timeframes when the lower speed limits are in effect, and improved planning practices.

### BACKGROUND

School zones are areas that have a reduced speed along a section of roadway where children are going to and from school. Unfortunately, California's current school zone laws fail to keep kids walking and biking to school safe, and fall behind other states that have enacted more rigorous safety policies.

Of the 39 states that set a maximum school zone speed by statute, California is one of just eight states with a school zone speed limit greater than 20mph. Thirteen states have a school zone speed limit of 15mph, including Arizona and Nevada. While California allows cities to lower school zones speed limits, many cities do not take advantage of this safety mechanism.

Research shows that reducing speed limits in school zones can bring significant safety benefits by reducing vehicular speeds and fatal and injury crashes.<sup>1</sup>

According to the UC Berkeley Transportation Injury Mapping System, in 2022 there were 71,406 crashes within 1/2 mile of schools in California between 7am and 6pm. 377 people were killed, and 58,770 were injured.

The average risk of severe injury for a pedestrian struck by a vehicle reaches 10% at an impact speed of 16 mph and 25% at 23 mph, an increase of 250%. Risk of death at 15mph is 4%, while the risk at 25mph is 12% (a 300% increase). One out of 10 pedestrians struck by a vehicle traveling at 40mph

will survive, but 9 out of 10 pedestrians will survive when a vehicle is traveling at 20mph.<sup>2</sup> Additionally, at lower speeds, drivers can see more of their surroundings and have more time to see and react to potential hazards.

While lowering the speed limit is important, ensuring that drivers comply with the speed limit is equally necessary. Currently, California utilizes the vague metric of, "When Children are Present." Other states have found this metric to be less effective than set timeframes.<sup>3</sup> Only six other states mandate the use of "When Children are Present." The majority of other states including New York, Texas, Oregon, and Nevada, utilize set timeframes.

"When Children are Present" requires motorists to make snap judgments that may not be accurate. What if a child is present, but they are not visible from behind a sign? What if there is a group of teenagers present who look like adults? On top of the demands of safely operating a vehicle, the metric requires motorists to survey the area around a school for the presence of children as well as determine if the school has a fence, leading many drivers to not comply and posing enforcement challenges. Importantly, "When Children are Present" offers no protection to teachers, parents, school employees, or any other adults who travel to and from schools.

A time-based standard is easier for drivers to comply with because it provides a statewide, consistent, and easy-to-understand parameter to follow. With a time-based metric, motorists will no longer have to guess the conditions of individual school zones as they approach.

Additionally, dangerous walking conditions for students have led to serious unintended consequences. Two-thirds of school-aged children in California live within 2 miles of their school, yet over half of those children arrive to school in a private vehicle. Parents cite concerns about the speed and the amount of traffic along the route as the primary reasons for not walking their kids to

<sup>1</sup> <https://cdnsiencepub.com/doi/abs/10.1139/cjce-2018-0060>

<sup>2</sup> [SRTSAActionPlan.pdf \(seattle.gov\)](#)

<sup>3</sup> <https://static.tti.tamu.edu/tti.tamu.edu/documents/0-5470-1.pdf>

school. Increased car trips result in more traffic congestion. Congestion around schools leads to increased pollution not just for the nearby neighborhood but also inside the classroom.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, walking and biking can boost students' health, physical activity, and even their concentration in school.<sup>5</sup> Research has also found that if children are taught early to walk or bike to school, they are far more likely to keep doing so later in their lives.<sup>6</sup>

While short-term solutions are urgently needed, improved planning for safer streets near schools will create significant long-term safety progress. A city's Circulation Element provides overall guidance for the city's responsibility to satisfy the transportation and movement needs of the community, including multimodal transportation networks, airports and ports, military facilities and operations, and utilities. The Circulation Element provides an opportunity for cities to elevate school zone planning into their current responsibility of designing a multimodal transportation network.

California must act to implement policies that create safe, healthy, and equitable school zones so that all kids feel safe walking or biking to school, and are protected from speeding cars on roads designed for drivers, rather than people.

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## THIS BILL

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AB 2583 would make a series of safety improvements to lower speed limits and protect pedestrians in school zones.

Specifically, the bill would:

- Reduce the school zone speed limit to 20mph within 500ft of a school.
- Improve clarity and standardization by changing "When Children are Present" to set hours for the school zone speed limit from 7AM-10AM and 2PM-5PM.
- Allow local jurisdictions the flexibility to meet the needs of a local school community by permitting alternate hours when the reduced speed limit is in place.

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<sup>4</sup><https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0048969720318738>

- Ease the ability of local jurisdictions to establish extended safe school zones between 500-1000ft of a school with 25mph speed limits to more effectively slow traffic.
- Require local jurisdictions to consider and better plan for school zones and broader school walk zones in the next update of their Circulation Elements. Circulation Element updates are permissive, meaning there is no set timeframe in which cities must update their Circulation Elements.

These changes would protect kids and extend the benefits of safe walking and biking to school to children throughout California.

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## SUPPORT

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Streets for All (Sponsors)  
California School Employees Association (CSEA)

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## OPPOSITION

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None on File

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## FOR MORE INFORMATION

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<sup>5</sup> [Why, and How, Kids Should Walk or Bike to School \(nextcity.org\)](#)

<sup>6</sup> [Young Children Who Walk or Bike to School Are More Likely to Continue the Habit as They Age | Rutgers University](#)