

# Child-Friendly Cities MKE



## REPORT

*SAFE AND HEALTHY STREETS FOR KIDS BY KIDS*



**WISCONSIN  
BIKE FED**

**SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, SPRING 2019 - FALL 2023  
PUBLISHED BY THE WISCONSIN BIKE FED**

# Thank you CFCMKE Partners

### PREPARED FOR

The City of Milwaukee & Milwaukee Public Schools



**MILWAUKEE**  
PUBLIC SCHOOLS



**WISCONSIN**  
**BIKE FED**



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A Special Thanks to the talented and dedicated civil servants and educators who contributed to the development of Child Friendly Cities curriculum in Milwaukee. Especially Senior Transportation Planner, Marissa Meyer at the Department of Public Works. Additionally, this work is possible because of partnership with the MPS Physical Education Department.

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# About Child-Friendly Cities MKE

From the winter of 2019 through the fall of 2022, the Wisconsin Bike Fed (Bike Fed) worked with 400 children, Milwaukee Public Schools faculty and staff, and families to co-create the City of Milwaukee's first, Child-Friendly Cities Youth Urbanist program.

Child-Friendly Cities MKE (CFC MKE) is growing due to a shared value and determination to honor and dignify the life experiences of our city's youth daily, whether in school or at leisure.

The CFC MKE program aims to provide young scholars with a platform for in-class civic participation—having a chance to become the spatial planners for safe street design directly surrounding their school campus.'

By conducting extensive outreach with children and families, 100% of whom were from marginalized communities, the Bike Fed reached a broad cross-section of MPS students ages 9–13.

Catering to both families and students, CFC MKE is an art, design, and civic-based educational program which supports the movement toward Milwaukee becoming a Child-Friendly City at large.

To celebrate a three-year milestone of program development, we are sharing our experiences through this report. The report has a series of case studies and recommendations on how to build a Child-Friendly program in your community.



"If all of these changes happen our school community will be safer for all pedestrians. These are some of the few traffic controls that I think will help the community around the school. I hope all streets that are close to our school become safer for all pedestrians." – Milzy De La Cruz, 5th Grade, Escuela Lincoln



## A Message from The City of Milwaukee Department of Public Works

The City of Milwaukee's SRTS infrastructure program started with a federal grant to build street safety improvements near eight schools around the city. The construction funding worked out to about \$75,000 per school. The street project design process normally includes getting community input about traffic safety issues and community priorities, plus getting feedback on specific design alternatives later in the project. City staff wanted to go further than just listening to the school community to find a way to have community members actively design street improvements near their school.

The highlight of the SRTS community input process was the interactive design workshops. Students, parents, teachers, staff, and nearby residents worked together in teams to place paper icons representing street infrastructure like traffic circles, speed humps, crosswalk, etc on an aerial map of the school. One key aspect of the workshop was that each infrastructure item had an associated cost, and the teams were limited to a \$75,000 budget. Including a budget helped both make sure participants were prioritizing the locations they thought were the most important and set relatively reasonable expectations for how far the project budget would go.

While the pandemic forced an early shut down of the design workshops, their success prompted the City to allocate \$75,000 of local funding per year to do a similar project at one school. Thanks to the Bike Fed's efforts at Lincoln Avenue Elementary to incorporate the design workshop into a larger CFC curriculum, going forward the City was able to combine input from the community-wide meeting with input from the classroom activities when developing and selecting a design for each school. In both cases, City staff reviewed the maps created by each team and recorded the location and type of improvements the participants had placed in a spreadsheet. By analyzing which locations received the most attention and which improvements were used most often, City staff created 2-3 alternatives for each school.

Overall, students were engaged and excited to participate in the design workshop activity. A few students City staff spoke with were dismissive of their own ability to contribute to the street design process. One student asked, 'Why are you asking a nine-year-old? You're the expert.' Staff responded in those specific conversations how students are experts on their own experience walking and biking around the school and that their opinions on what should be built are invaluable. By addressing student comments we are able to increase students' confidence and ownership in their own role in shaping their community.

In the future, the City may be able to increase funding to its local Safe Routes to School infrastructure program to build improvements near two or three schools each year. However, with so much of the community input process needing to happen right at the beginning of the school year, either the programs will need to be scheduled quite precisely, the summer construction goal will need to be relaxed, or the number of available staff will need to be increased.

# SERVING WHERE THE NEED IS GREAT

## Safe Routes to School Strategic Plan

In 2019, the City of Milwaukee adopted resolution no. 1900984 “to take actions on achieving racial equity and transforming systems of racism that impact the health and well-being of the community.” The resolution acknowledged that racial inequity results in health outcome disparities among communities of color in Milwaukee. The resolution outlined several strategies to address health equity issues, including policy changes and initiatives such as Safe Routes to School.

In 2020 the Bike Fed, Milwaukee Department of Public Works (DPW), Milwaukee Public Schools, and community stakeholders published a Safe Routes to School Strategic Plan (SRTSSP). The plan aims to revise and align youth education and MPS infrastructure projects with the city’s commitment to the social and racial justice movement. A significant component of the SRTSSP is a set of criteria to allocate infrastructure investments where they are most needed.

The following set of criteria from the SRTSSP is the highest priority for school infrastructure projects

- Pedestrian crash risk at intersections near the school
- % of students attending the school that live within the walk zone of the school
- % of students at the school that are eligible for Free and Reduced Lunch
- Neighborhood demographic index, based on % low income and percent Hispanic or non-White racial minority

The prioritization plan gathered data from nearly 250 schools in Milwaukee with enrollments of over 100 students. The table below lists the top ten schools in MPS with priority rank for infrastructure improvements. The smaller the rank number, the higher the priority.



# SERVING WHERE THE NEED IS GREAT

With over 200 elementary schools in MPS Safe Routes Infrastructure Projects have focused on the highest need schools based upon the criteria below. Expanding our efforts will be essential to build a truly Child Friendly built environment in Milwaukee.

Category	Measure
Pedestrian Crash Risk	Pedestrian crash risk of intersections within 1,000 feet of the school, using data from the Milwaukee Pedestrian Plan.
Students in Walk Zone	Percent of students attending the school that live within the walk zone of the school. Non-MPS schools were assigned the average percent of students that live within the walk zone of MPS schools (25%).
*School Equity	Percent of students at the school that are eligible for Free and Reduced Lunch, according to Wisconsin Department of Instruction data.
*Neighborhood Equity	EPA Environmental Justice Screening and Mapping Tool's "Demographic Index" for the Census block group the school is located in. The Demographic Index is a combination of percent low-income households and percent of population that identifies as Hispanic or non-white racial minority.

## EXAMPLE OF RANKINGS

School	Pedestrian Crash Risk	No. Students in Walk Zone	School Equity*	Neighborhood Equity*	Total Score	Rank
Clarke Street School	400	240	150	150	940	1
Metcalfe School	332	300	150	150	932	2
Westside Academy	204	300	150	150	804	3





## Lincoln Ave School

**Introduction:** Community Schools such as Escuela Lincoln are centered around collaboration and shared leadership. The Bike Feds' work here helped establish a successful Walking School Bus program. In November of 2019, the Community School Coordinator at Escuela Lincoln and the Safe Routes team from the Bike Fed presented at the National Safe Routes to School Summit in Tampa, where the inspiration for a Milwaukee Child Friendly Cities program was laid.



### SCHOOL DATA

**SRTS-SP RANKING**  
42 OF 247

**PARTICIPANTS**  
120 4TH & 5TH GRADERS

**TIMELINE**  
1 WEEK WINTER  
OF 2019

**Geography:** Located in the historic, densely populated Lincoln Village, Escuela Lincoln is located at the corner of a major street, Lincoln Avenue, and South 18th Street. The school's close proximity, under a mile walk from both Pulaski Park and the Kinnickinnic River, supports outdoor environmental classroom experiences for young scholars.

### Fostering Relationships:

The Bike Fed's role on the Escuela Lincoln Community School Leadership Team established strong relationships with the school staff. At the time, the team's three main priorities were safety, health & wellness, and sustainability, all well-aligned with Safe Routes programming. When the City of Milwaukee announced in late 2019 that Lincoln was one of 8 schools selected for a Safe Routes infrastructure project, the team recognized that the investment would help meet many goals for this community-centered school. The engagement laid out by Planners at the DPW was strong, placing the decision-making in the hands of the school and neighborhood community. One central question during these workshops was how to get children more involved.



After Lincoln's community design workshop, the project team, which included the Bike Fed, Community School Coordinator, and School Support teachers, decided to replicate the workshop to get more students involved. The process became favorable by building solid relationships with the Community School Leadership Team. The Community School Leadership moved quickly to set up a series of Child-Friendly City lessons to enable more student participation in street infrastructure projects.

Drawing upon the resources provided by the DPW, lessons were developed by the Bike Fed and School Staff and predominantly led by homeroom teachers. This involvement of the teachers was exceptional, given their heavy workloads; however, the leadership team's broad support and priorities made this work more achievable.

Lessons included an introduction to Safe Routes, mapping, project budgeting, and reading/writing. Student workshops typically consisted of student break-out groups with two adult facilitators. Sixteenth Street Community Health Center (SSCHC), a federally qualified healthcare clinic, is responsible for the hiring and placement of the community school leader.

From the workshops, students produced persuasive essays addressed to the DPW and other city leaders, expressing the merits of their group's street design decisions. Their work was submitted to the Common Council and was instrumental in passing The City of Milwaukee Safe Routes to School Strategic Plan. The city also committed local funding from the city budget to annually support at least one Safe Routes infrastructure project.



## Zablocki Community School

**Introduction:** Zablocki Community School has a long history of Safe Routes to School efforts with the Wisconsin Bike Fed. However, programs such as the Walking School Bus were shuttered when the Covid-19 pandemic necessitated virtual learning. Nine months in isolation was causing declines in the mental health and attendance of students. The Bike Fed's lessons at Zablocki during this time aimed to increase student attendance, develop environmental knowledge, get outside, share experiences, and provide student feedback for a neighborhood plan.



### SCHOOL DATA

#### SRTS-SP RANKING

42 OF 247

#### PARTICIPANTS

120 4TH & 5TH GRADERS

#### TIMELINE

7 WEEKS WINTER 2021

**Geography:** Zablocki has six parks within walking distance including Pulaski County Park along the Kinnickinnic River. Yet, I-94 and Oklahoma Avenue are formidable barriers and contribute to high speeds throughout the area. This largely Latino community has a vibrant culture and welcomes many newcomers, most recently Rohingya displaced from Myanmar.

### Working in a Pandemic:

During the first year of the covid-19 pandemic classes at Zablocki Community School, were virtual. In order to get students engaged with their environments and promote activity the Bike Fed was invited as guest instructors to the Green Team. The ultimate goal was to include student perspectives in the Department of City Development's neighborhood Plan, "Envision 13th St." The task for the Bike Fed was to develop environmental knowledge without the collective ability to be in those physical environments.





To keep students engaged virtually and encourage them to login weekly the team had to get creative. To capture the students attention Bike Fed program manager, Michael Anderson dressed as a Chicken during lessons. At the end of each lesson students participated in a poll for a weekly “Mike the Chicken” video; highlights included Mike the Chicken eats Ice Cream with Hot Sauce and Mike the Chicken goes to the Grocery Store by Bike. This quick content was relevant to youth culture and led to increased classroom participation.

Six lessons were led to enable students to articulate their experiences and needs in their neighborhood. These lessons included Walking Wisdom, Neighborhood Streets & Home Addresses, a Family Photo Safari, and Mobility Memories. The first few lessons were facilitated using interactive software that the students were accustomed to and incorporated breaks for movement. Lesson materials were dropped off at each student's home. These kits included instructions for the Family Photo Safari and craft supplies to build and express a mobility memory. Students also voted on a slogan for yard signs designed to drive residents to contribute to the neighborhood plan online. The Green Team’s message, “Students Walk Here, Students Live Here.”

The work continues with seasonal Zablocki Walks events facilitated by Mike the Chicken, concentrating on child friendly spaces within walking distance from school. These events help acclimate Zablocki’s many newcomers to the community. In November 2022 the DPW announced a major project along Oklahoma Avenue, and began engaging the Zablocki community regarding possible options including a road diet, bike lanes, and curb extensions.



## Westside Academy

**Introduction:** Westside Academy was chosen as the first school to receive a Safe Routes Infrastructure project using local funds. The DPW and Bike Fed determined that these local funds should alternate between a northside and southside school every year. In America's most segregated city it is imperative that leaders are meeting the needs of Milwaukee's predominately African American neighborhoods, which for a variety of structural reasons are disproportionately affected by traffic fatalities.



### SCHOOL DATA

**SRTS-SP RANKING**  
3 OF 247

**PARTICIPANTS**  
30 4TH & 5TH GRADERS

**TIMELINE**  
2 WEEKS OCTOBER 2021

**Geography:** Westside Academy has numerous Child Friendly amenities nearby, including a Public Library and Washington Park, a historic park designed by Frederick Law Olmstead. A pandemic era Active Street on nearby Galena forms an important link between Washington Park and two other parks. Its location along Lisbon Avenue, a state owned road which links to a highway spur, encourages high speeds and reckless driving. A future rails to trails project next to the school has potential to transform access to safe and accessible cycling.

### Working in a Pandemic:

Westside Academy is another one of Milwaukee's Community Schools, with the Medical College of Wisconsin serving as its lead partner agency. The Bike Fed viewed the structure of Community Schools as one of the essential components of success at Escuela Lincoln. Additionally, Westside Academy is home to a Summer Bike Camp run by the Wisconsin Bike Fed. These relationships helped ensure school buy-in for visiting instructors to come and work with their scholars.





Very few students at Westside Academy walk to school; many inequities and concerns of safety add to this dilemma. Returning to in-person instruction the school was struggling with low-enrollment; having merged their fourth and fifth grades the week before this program began. A major obstacle was developing students' sense of local geography when most of them are unfamiliar with walking near school. This was addressed by creating a hybrid of the Bike Fed's Bicycle Driver's Ed curriculum and Child Friendly City lessons developed at Escuela Lincoln. This combination created a fun hands-on learning environment with real world connections culminating in the DPW design workshop and a bike ride to a local park.

With students reentering the classroom Westside staff had a heavy workload getting students caught up and reacclimated. In order to meet these pandemic related challenges; the Bike Fed created a mobile outdoor classroom with all workshop materials created with magnetic pieces and boards rather than paper so that students could design outdoors. Lessons from Lincoln were replicated here, with many insights learned about modifying lessons to make them more accessible. Working with the School Support Teacher & Community School Coordinator, students learned about infrastructure, using a map, budgeting, and many learned to ride a bike for the first time!

Additionally, a community design workshop and walk audit were hosted in order to get resident feedback. Building safer streets is broadly an important goal of the Washington Park neighborhood, one step in undoing the historic injustices of redlining and blockbusting that devastated the community through the 1960s.

The Wisconsin Bike Fed is a member of the Westside Community School Leadership team and works on many elements of community safety, helping to link the school to nearby child-friendly resources. Construction on infrastructure began in November 2022.

Westside Academy





## US Grant School

**Introduction:** US Grant School was chosen as the second school to receive Safe Routes infrastructure improvements with local funds. The goal was to get as many students as possible to participate in Child Friendly City lessons to help the DPW & Bike Fed refine their youth engagement. This was a huge expansion in the number of students participating in Child Friendly City lessons allowing the Bike Fed's Safe Routes Instructors to refine and develop a stronger and more inclusive curriculum.



### SCHOOL DATA

**SRTS-SP RANKING**  
25 OF 247

**PARTICIPANTS**  
150 4TH-8TH GRADERS

**TIMELINE**  
OCTOBER 2022

**Geography:** The Layton Boulevard Neighborhood is composed of classic bungalows and historic homes whose residents represent a truly global mixture of Milwaukee cultures. Streets are lined with trees and a large city playfield nearby serves as a community hub. However, many commercial streets in the area are on the Pedestrian High Injury Network. Flat land and poorly designed intersections amplify speed creating a very unfriendly and all-to often deadly environment for people walking.

**Building a Curriculum:** US Grant has many staff champions and deep connections with Safe Routes programs. However, the post-pandemic era posed numerous challenges for school staff. In response the Bike Fed dedicated its staff to lead instruction for the entire month of October. When building a curriculum, it's essential to be able to test out the lessons and refine them with each group. Working with 11 classrooms provided that opportunity to operationalize Child Friendly Cities and hopefully help other communities replicate the effort.



Engagement for this project began in Spring of 2022 when the Bike Fed came to teach its two week Bicycle Driver's Ed program; ensuring that students had both a familiarity with their neighborhood streets and developed relationships with the visiting instructors. In September 2022 the Bike Feds' Safe Routes Instructors worked to revise lessons built in previous projects into a more official curriculum. Depending on the grade level students either participated in 2 or 4 lessons.

Firstly, the Junior Urbanist lesson introduces students to Urban Planning and with the infrastructure options that would be available to them within their budget. In the 2022 school year there were over 200 English Language Learners at US Grant so this lesson utilized three different methods to ensure that all students understood the names and impact of infrastructure options. Secondly, the Mapping & Community Walk Audit lesson taught students how to read and analyze a map as well as record their observations of traffic outside of school. The toughest lesson overall was budgeting and math, an essential lesson for the younger students who may not be able to quickly do math during a design workshop. Multiple approaches were taken, including small groups and whole classroom instruction. Using a scaled budget bar was very helpful for the English Language Learners, whereas some students benefited from other strategies tied to state learning standards. Ultimately, these lessons led to 40 small teams each developing their own plans for infrastructure improvements all on budget! Two weeks after lessons the students voted on their preferred option. The experience at US Grant was a huge leap in building an official Child Friendly Cities curriculum for Safe Routes Infrastructure projects.

Working on a timeline that brings an infrastructure project to construction as soon as possible requires quick work across multiple agencies. From the Urban Planner working with the Bike Fed to the Engineers analyzing the feasibility of the plan, the process moved quickly at US Grant to ensure construction in 2023. The Bike Fed will return to teach Bicycle Driver's Ed after the construction has taken place, so that students may experience the impact of their own decision making.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to sustain and grow the CFCMKE Initiative new funding sources and commitments will be essential, both for the continued involvement of The Bike Fed and to support the work of the Department of Public Works. Additionally, the scope of projects has room to grow by building and refining lessons as well as developing stronger partnerships so that the vision of students has a wider impact on their ability to explore and enjoy their neighborhoods safely. 2023 NHTSA recommendations to WISDOT praised CFCMKE and suggest that it be expanded to schools across Wisconsin.

## Potential Funding Sources

- Road to Zero Community Traffic Safety Grant
  - Focused on the Safe Systems Approach
- Healthier Wisconsin Partnership program with the Medical College of Wisconsin.
  - Three year systems change grants which The Bike Fed has previously been awarded to establish the city's Complete Streets Policy.
- Foundations looking to support civic engagement and or STEAM based learning.
- Expanded Transportation Alternatives Programs Funding
- City funding increases the number of schools receiving SRTS infrastructure improvements.
- Systems Change at School District Level in allocation of transportation funds from Bussing to Walk & Bike Infrastructure at schools with high % of students in Walk Zone.

## Curriculum Development

- Incorporate formal writing lessons & develop reading library
- Incorporate the city of Milwaukee's Paint the Pavement program into an Arts based lesson for student designed decorative crosswalk.
- Adapted lessons by grade level standards and development of games that can be played after lessons are over.

## Partnerships

- Expand the scope of CFCMKE to create an accessible network of child friendly spaces within walking distance of schools.
- Milwaukee Public Libraries, County Parks, and MKEPlays could be key partners.
- Work with the MPS Transportation Department formally.



# RESOURCES

Check out the Bike Fed materials used in Child Friendly City Lessons. They are accessible in a [Google Drive folder](#) to which files will be added as developed. Click each section to take you directly to materials.

These materials are specific to the City of Milwaukee and MPS but may serve as a guide for other communities looking to center infrastructure improvements around children.

For questions about Child Friendly City efforts email the Bike Fed's Milwaukee Youth Program Manager at [michael.anderson@wisconsinbikefed.org](mailto:michael.anderson@wisconsinbikefed.org)

## **JUNIOR URBANIST**

**Goal: Get students to understand the concept of Urban Planning & impact of specific infrastructure.**

**Activity: After Presentation students place labels by photos of infrastructure around the classroom.**

## **BUDGETING**

**Goal: Get students to be comfortable discussing costs.**

**Activity: Variable based on age group. Worksheet & discussing of math strategies**

## **CONCERN GATHERING**

**Goal: Students identify their concerns at specific locations around school**

**Activity: Mapping Worksheet & Walk Audit.**

## **DPW DESIGN WORKSHOP**

**Goal: Provide DPW with meaningful student input**

**Activity: Teams of students create unique plans for traffic calming**

# NEW INFRASTRUCTURE

**In Fall 2023 the majority of Safe Routes Infrastructure Improvements were finished at 10 different Schools**

**Right: Traffic Circle & Crossing Signs a few blocks from Lincoln Avenue School. Students felt it was important location as many students walk this route to school**

**Bottom: Curb Extensions & High Visibility Crosswalk at Longfellow School.**







## Auer Avenue School

In 2023 Auer Avenue Community School was chosen for Safe Routes Infrastructure Improvements. Lessons learned from the above case studies helped make this a very successful week of lessons. In Spring of 2023 these MPS scholars will also participate in the Bicycle Driver's Ed Program and complete a Paint the Pavement Project, expanding the scope of Child Friendly City lessons with Art.



### SCHOOL DATA

**SRTS-SP RANKING**  
**38 OF 247**

**PARTICIPANTS**  
**60 4TH & 5TH GRADERS**

**TIMELINE**  
**2 WEEKS OCTOBER 2023**



Milwaukee wants to make it safer and easier for kids to walk and bike to school. To help accomplish that, they're focusing on traffic-calming street improvements near Auer Avenue School.