

# School's Out in the Streets!

## A Path Towards School Streets for All in New York City



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Cover image taken by Ghuncha Shaheed

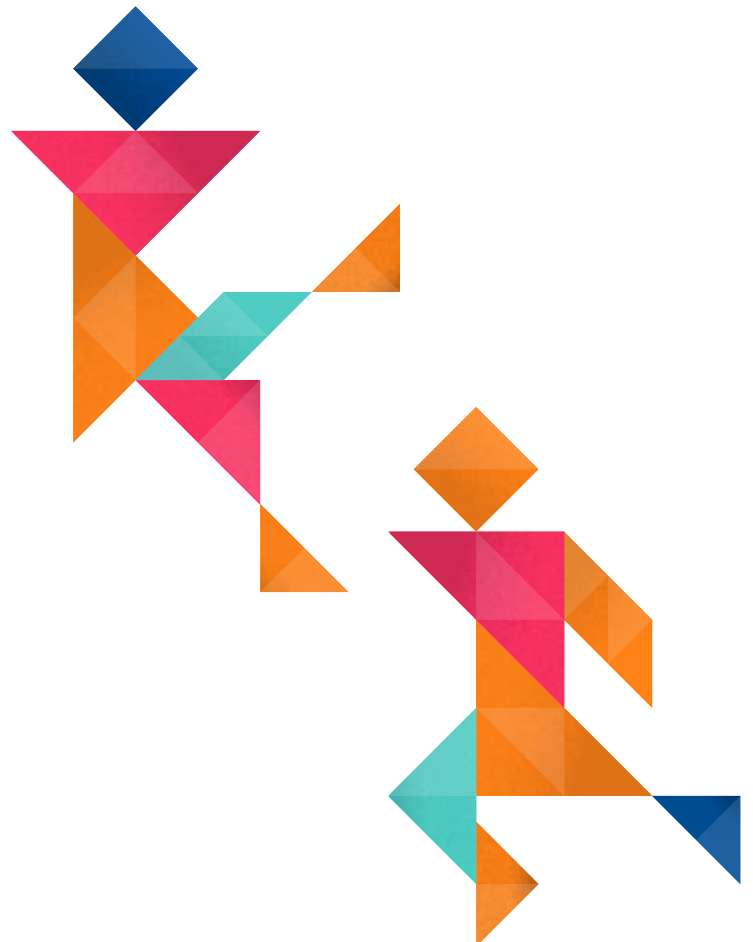
## ABOUT OPEN PLANS

Open Plans' mission is to promote a people-first street culture that prioritizes community, active mobility, and connection.

We use grassroots advocacy and policy changes to help transform how people experience New York City's public spaces.

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### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Across the world, cities are keeping kids safe and expanding public space by permanently pedestrianizing streets in front of schools. Paris, for example, has pedestrianized roughly 100 of their 300 School Streets — often complete with greenery, seating, and other permanent infrastructure. School Streets help students understand that New York City's streets are public spaces where they have a right to play, learn, and grow.

In order to create a truly robust and equitable School Streets program, we recommend the following:

- Create **School Plaza Blocks** and **Limited Entry School Streets**. Pedestrian streets and plazas will reduce staffing burdens for schools, keep students safe, and create community space.
- Create a **clear structure** for the Department of Transportation (DOT) and the Department of Education (DOE) to collaborate in overseeing the School Streets program.
- **Improve administrative capacity** at DOT and DOE, including extra staffing, to reduce over-reliance on non-profit partners.
- **Reform the School Streets application process** to reduce the burden on schools.
- **Implement strategies to resolve parking concerns**, including moving teacher parking to different blocks and creating placard buyouts.
- Create a dedicated **“School Streets” line item in the Mayor’s 2026 budget**.



*Photo by Ghuncha Shaheed for Open Plans.*







# Introduction

School Streets are a category of Department of Transportation (DOT) street closure and activation that can serve communities in various ways. Some schools close off their street to vehicle traffic during pick-up and drop-off times to reduce congestion and increase safety, and others use the street during the school day for recess, recreation, or PE class. Often, these schools are co-located, or have insufficient or no access to recreation spaces. Sometimes School Streets are active for community programming, hosting fairs and other community and neighborhood events.

Other cities are continuing to build on this concept, perhaps most notably Paris. Their program, “rues aux écoles,” began in 2019 and now has 300 participating schools.<sup>1</sup> Many Parisian School Streets are completely pedestrianized plazas where motor vehicles can never enter. Others in Paris are closed off temporarily with barriers, and others allow traffic, but only for certain vehicles and at lower speeds. In addition to the safety element of the program, Paris emphasizes the environmental impact of restricted car access: cleaner air for students.

New York City’s School Streets program began in 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic as a way to increase school safety during pick-up and drop-off, and allow for social distancing.<sup>a</sup> The program is used by public, private, and charter schools ranging from 3K through college. Presently, there is no public-facing process in New York City to transition a School Street to a pedestrianized plaza block.

The School Streets program must be improved. Schools shouldn’t need assistance from non-profits to participate,<sup>b</sup> and the City should be more proactive in outreach to potential School Streets candidates. We can learn from cities further along in this process like Paris that provide an inspiring model for quickly and effectively building a robust School Streets program.

We believe that every student deserves a safe route to school, clean air to breathe, and a safe and stimulating space to play. We propose a School Streets program that makes applying, enrolling, and operating a School Street child’s play. We also recommend a new approach: School Plaza Blocks and Limited Entry School Streets — more permanent models of School Streets oriented by learnings from other cities and our own. These improvements are necessary for a robust and equitable program—to ensure that students in every neighborhood and borough can enjoy the benefits of School Streets.

We offer the following benefits, case studies, and recommendations based on our experiences working directly with schools so that the new administration can hit the ground running. Our students deserve to know that the streets belong to them. The School Streets program is a powerful way to accomplish this.

*Photo on facing page by Ghuncha Shaheed for Open Plans.*

<sup>a</sup> The Department of Transportation runs this through the Open Streets program with the full name Open Streets for Schools: Full Closure, but the program is commonly referred to as School Streets. School Streets implement principles from existing programs like Safe Routes to Schools and Play Streets.

<sup>b</sup> Yes, we are trying to organize ourselves out of a job!





# ✧ The Benefits of School Streets

## Improved Safety

Streets near schools are dangerous, and the data proves it:

***“During the 8 a.m. hour, when hundreds of thousands of children stream into 1,600 city-run public schools, there are 57% more crashes and 25% more injuries per mile on streets near schools than on the city’s other streets.”<sup>2</sup>***

School Streets are a proven way to both improve traffic safety and the perception of safety around schools. A report by the New York City Comptroller’s Office found that, when speaking with schools that had School Streets, school administrators reported that there were fewer crashes and conflicts on School Streets.<sup>3</sup> We see this effect mirrored in other pedestrianized spaces. After two seasons of Open Streets on 34th Avenue in Queens, crashes dropped by 77% and injuries by 89%.<sup>4</sup>

In addition to creating safer conditions for pedestrians, these streets feel safer as well. On Somerville Road

(in Birmingham, United Kingdom), after a School Street was implemented, there was a 28% increase in the number of residents that felt the road was safe. The effects trickled over to surrounding streets; residents who said that the roads surrounding Somerville Primary School felt safe rose by 11%.<sup>5</sup>

## Increased Active Travel and Physical Activity

Active travel and physical activity are vital for childhood development, and are proven to lower the risk of chronic diseases and improve mental health.<sup>6</sup> School Streets increase the number of students walking, biking, and scooting to and from school, and allow for additional outdoor recreation. This is particularly relevant for schools without outdoor space.

On School Streets, many kids get to school on foot and by bike. In Montreal, on days that School Streets were active, “independent, active travel was more frequently observed” when compared to days the School Street was not active. Additionally, throughout the year, researchers saw a general and progressive increase in active transportation and mobility use throughout the school year.<sup>7</sup>





Artist's rendition of a School Street on Clarkson Street, serving City-As-School and M721. Illustration by Blake Larue, commissioned by Open Plans.

School Streets are an organic opportunity for children to learn about active mobility. A public school in Brooklyn that hosts a bike education program on their School Street reported the percentage of second graders who can ride a bike increased from 35% to over 90%.<sup>8</sup>

These increases in physical activity pay dividends in public health. A study of Open Streets programs in Latin America found that such programs could prevent hundreds of annual premature deaths due to increased physical activity *alone*.<sup>9</sup>

### Better Air Quality and Environment

City schools are often located in areas with high levels of traffic where noise pollution and air pollution surge during pick-up and drop-off hours. Air pollution poses a host of health risks, and children are especially vulnerable. Recent studies have shown that higher exposure to particulate matter was linked to hyperactivity, anxiety, and other behavioral problems resulting in poorer school performance.<sup>10</sup> Children in low-income families are disproportionately impacted by these effects, as asthma rates are higher in low-income neighborhoods.<sup>11</sup> Noise pollution also damages physical and psychological health.<sup>12</sup>

Closing off traffic in front of schools and encouraging active transportation are effective ways to reduce childhood pollution exposure.

In London, for example, the city found that School Streets reduced nitrogen dioxide pollution by up to 23% during morning drop-off.<sup>13</sup>

And pedestrian plazas — a real and logical next step for many School Streets — reduce pollution further, particularly in dense areas. When car space was converted into pedestrian space in Times Square, nitrogen oxide pollution decreased 63% and nitrogen dioxide pollution decreased by 41%.<sup>14</sup>

### Community Building and Wellbeing

School Streets are vital touchpoints for building community. In New York City, public space operators report that activating street space fills a “critical gap in a neighborhood lacking adequate recreational space.” Another describes the streets as a place for a “natural playdate,” letting parents congregate and

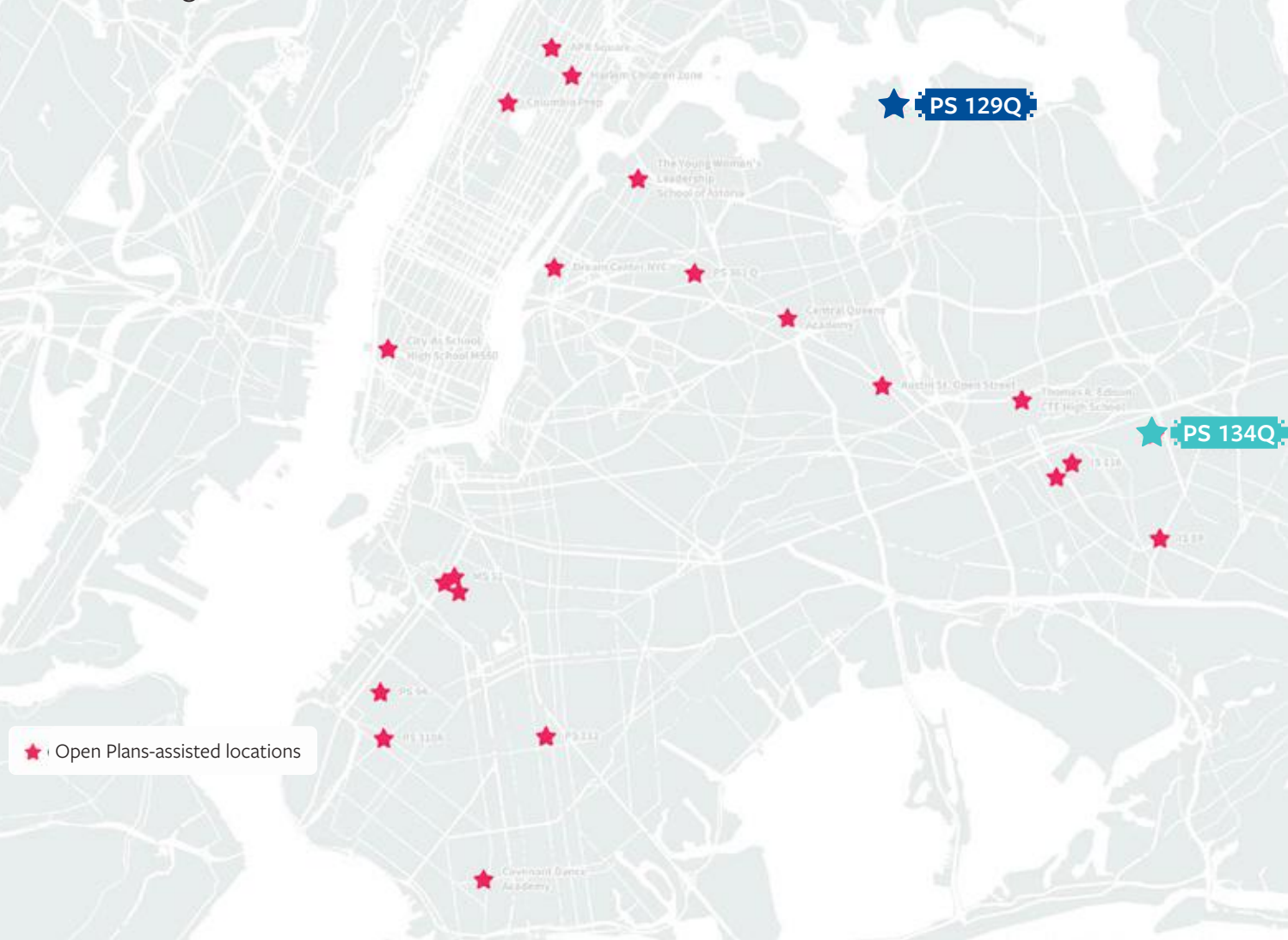
***“bridge language barriers and diverse cultural norms in their neighborhood.”***

By creating a public space and collaboratively managing it, other partners reported that bonds were deepened among “business owners, schools, families, nonprofits, and residents.”<sup>15</sup> Strong community bonds and relationships lead to safer neighborhoods where neighbors are looking out for each other.

# 🚶 Case Studies

Despite all of the program's immense benefits, New York City's School Streets program is not delivering on its potential. As of December 2025, there are just 78 schools participating in New York City's School Streets program.<sup>16</sup> The majority of schools receive help from external partners. Open Plans has helped 36 schools and community based organizations in various ways — helping them navigate the application process, doing community outreach, planning and hosting programming, and providing day-to-day support.<sup>17</sup>

Through this work, we've learned important lessons about the challenges and opportunities of New York City's program. Below, we lay out these lessons learned through three case studies.





## Case 1 PS 129Q: The Patricia Larkin School Open Street



Photo by Ghuncha Shaheed for Open Plans.

PS129Q is located in the semi-suburban neighborhood of College Point, Queens and has 1,000 enrolled students. The school has limited gym access, so students play in a multi-purpose room/cafeteria. Because College Point is a transit desert with no subway access (most residents drive, some take the Q25 on 7th Avenue, others use scooters and e-bikes), pick up and drop off outside the school building is chaotic and dangerous. This is especially difficult for their young students still learning street safety. Over the last decade, 7 crashes resulting in 12 injuries occurred outside PS 129Q.<sup>c</sup>

### Application Process

Nicole, a community advocate and literacy movement teacher at PS 129Q,<sup>d</sup> her administrative staff, and the Open Plans team worked together to apply for an Open Street. We received letters of support from three elected officials — some who have been consistent champions of street initiatives and others who have been historically wary. There are no other Open Streets in the neighborhood. After we submitted the application in December 2023, we were subsequently asked to provide a number of follow up documents like a “safety plan.” This is not normally part of the

application process; we’ve never been asked to do this before, and it caused a lot of extra confusion and headache for everyone involved. Eventually in April 2024, PS 129Q was accepted into the program, allowing them to use the School Street for pick up and drop off from 7:30 AM to 4:30 PM. They had three business days to send in a contract which was a pain point for this school as well as many other community partners because it uses legalese and hostile language which dissuades schools from signing up.

<sup>c</sup> On the stretches of 128th-129th Streets and 7th-8th Avenues bordering the school, according to NYC Crash Mapper.

<sup>d</sup> We call her the “mayor of College Point!”

## Community Outreach

Once accepted, Nicole and Open Plans used standard outreach approaches to get the word out about the new School Street, including passing out flyers to families at pick up and drop off, sending flyers on the parent portal, and presenting to PS 129Q staff.

We also took more unconventional approaches, like flyering at the Memorial Day Parade and posting in and meeting with hyperlocal groups like East Queens Facebook pages, Better College Point Alliance, and the Coastal Preservation Network. While Open Plans was able to design and print flyers, for most community partners, the cost of printing out materials and the technical know-how for designing signage feels insurmountable.

In addition, many of our community partners, parent volunteers, and staff members have shared the emotional toll of this process. They have been on the front-lines of receiving negative feedback, both from angry drivers trying to enter streets with barricades or community members who don't support open street initiatives.

To get families, caretakers, and neighbors on board, Nicole and Open Plans hosted a last-day-of-classes block party as an activation and outreach strategy. Community partners NYC H2o provided environmental education, and 34th Avenue Open Streets Coalition provided artistic education and cumbia colombiana classes.



Photos by Camila Santander, Open Plans. Lower left photo by Ghuncha Shaheed for Open Plans.



## Challenges

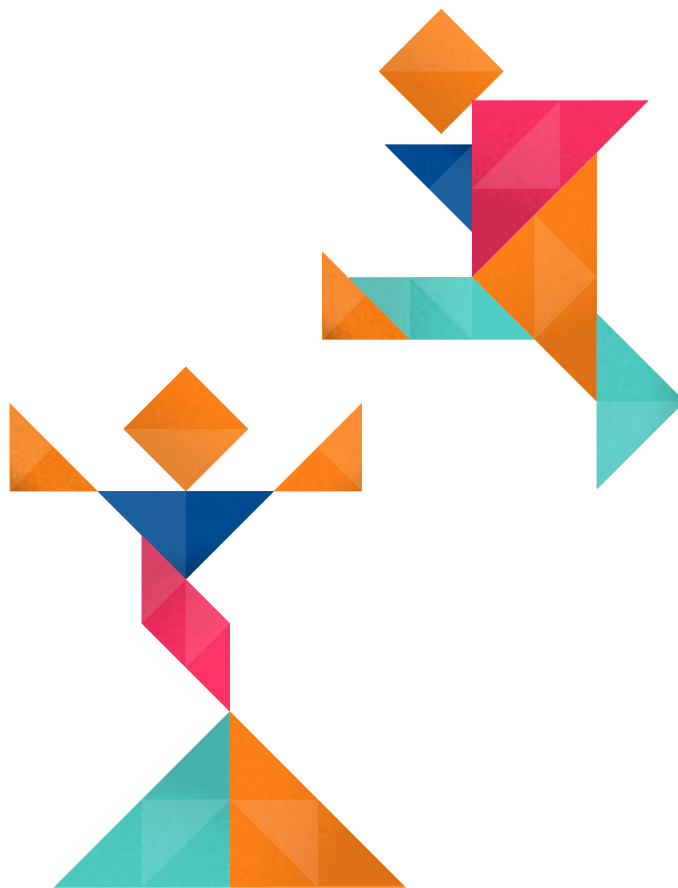
Despite hundreds of families attending the block party and buying into the process, a member of the school community left the block party worried about cars entering the closed street and glass or dirt on the street injuring a student. As a result, the school uses their School Street exclusively for pick up and drop off, and not for recess and gym like originally intended. Parked cars remain on the School Street despite no parking being allowed on the street during those hours. Even though many schools use their School Street for recess with a few cars still parked, the school administration is responsive to parent fears that cars could hit and injure students.

Nicole and Open Plans have posted flyers on parked cars, posted signage about parking, canvassed at pick-up, and reported the cars to the NYPD numerous times. During our Spring 2025 block party, Nicole worked closely with the local precinct, who arrived at the block party early and knocked on residents' doors, directing them to move cars and ticketing those who refused. This is not a sustainable strategy for the school or precinct.

Like many neighborhoods in Queens, PS 129Q is home to many immigrants, asylum seekers, and newer residents of NYC, with 64% Hispanic/Latinx students and 25% Asian/Asian-American students, so we intentionally curated community partners to match demographics of the school's families who could benefit from resources and enjoy culturally competent programming. While a block party every day is probably out of scope for this program (although regular programming support should be part of what Open Streets stewards are offered), PS 129Q could use their School Street for more than just pick up and drop off if the school were provided permanent, metal signage and support for removing parking.

## Key Takeaways

1. **Without school plaza blocks, parked cars reduce the likelihood of a school using their School Street.** Schools are unable to move all cars off the street without assistance from NYPD and some feel uncomfortable using their School Street for recess while cars are parked. **DOT neither provides permanent, metal signage for School Streets** nor printed materials, which causes lack of adherence with the Open Street and increased burden on school administrators.
2. Having an internal advocate doing outreach within the school was transformative. **But most schools don't have an internal advocate.** The burden of outreach has been so high that multiple school partners have pulled out of the process. **School streets are a big tent and provide a valuable opportunity for coalition building** — we've had partners across the ideological spectrum express fervent and material support. This program is fertile ground for building relationships, growing consensus and bridging the ideological divide.



## Case 2 IS 528: Bea Fuller Rogers School Open Street



Almost two years ago, Washington Heights resident Lei Marte reached out to Open Plans because he noticed a planning problem on his commute from his apartment to the 168th Street train stop. Wadsworth Avenue hosts two co-located public schools, but congestion, air pollution, and car crashes were putting hundreds of schoolchildren in danger each day. Over the last decade, 19 crashes resulting in 21 injuries occurred outside IS 528.<sup>e</sup>

### Application Process

After many phone calls, emails, in-person canvassing, and even a digital call to action from parents, we met with Principal Pichardo, Parent Teacher Coordinator Brito, and administrators at IS 528, a diverse public middle school that serves 244 students. 91% of students are Hispanic or Latinx and 39% are English Language Learners. Like most school administrators that we assist, the application process and receiving the DOT permit were overwhelming and challenging for IS 528 – primarily because school administrators are already overburdened with paperwork and other urgent school matters that often take priority.

Open Plans and IS 528 applied for a School Street for recess, gym, and outdoor play because the

middle school has no space for gym. While applying for the School Street, the Manhattan Borough President's office required us to receive written permission from one of IS 528's co-located schools before issuing a letter of support. The co-located school was hesitant to support, primarily because they were concerned about needles and litter on Wadsworth Avenue, and about noise during important standardized testing like Regents exams.

Six months later, after many administrative meetings in the school's multi-purpose room, they were accepted into the program. Shortly thereafter, IS 528's teachers and administrators realized that they'd like to use the School Street for after school volleyball practice. Unfortunately, because DOT's acceptance process is inflexible, they weren't able

<sup>e</sup> On the stretches of West 182nd and 183rd Streets, Broadway, and Wadsworth Avenue bordering the school, according to NYC Crash Mapper.





to adjust the hours to accommodate the volleyball team or host additional community programming.

On the first day of classes, Open Plans and IS 528 co-hosted a celebratory block party as an activation, but also to reduce any potential stress from neighbors about the program.

### A Win for the Community

Unlike other schools, whose School Streets waiver due to lack of staffing and resources, IS 528 reliably uses their School Street for recess and gym every day of the school week. School administrators have remarked that the use of the School Street has helped regulate student emotions after recess and within the classroom, and every time we stop by, the street is full of collective joy. Open Plans helped plan a block party for their second year of operation, and it was a tremendous gift seeing 7th and 8th graders who had been using the School Street for a year already have their favorite games and feel comfortable using the street.



### Key Takeaways

1. The Open Streets application process is both **technically difficult and onerous for school administrators**, particularly those that are strained with resources and time, often in low-income neighborhoods of color. **This further exacerbates the public space equity gap.** This includes both the application process and the contract, which uses hostile language and intimidates potential partners.
2. School streets are most effective when **schools use them regularly**, getting students and staff comfortable and allowing them to develop school-specific best practices.
3. There is a **lack of trust between school administrators and external partners**, which makes it challenging to propose new programs for the school, even when they are resoundingly beneficial.
4. DOT needs a clearer **legal liability framework** for School Streets.



*Photos on this spread by Angel Mendoza, Open Plans.*

## Case 3 PS 134Q: Langston Hughes School Open Street



Many school administrators that we work with lament that they can't remember when their school wasn't under construction. While school upgrades for accessibility and increasing space for co-located schools are urgent and vital, construction takes time. During this time, many schools lose out on public space for congregation.

PS 134Q is a public elementary school in Hollis/ St. Albans, Queens that serves over 300 students in South Queens. Students are 48% Black, 25% Hispanic, and 19% Asian, with a large and growing Bangladeshi population. The school often provides programming and support for parents and families, hosting programming on the Open Street such as an annual community health fair. The school also uses their School Street for culturally competent programming, like henna artists, to connect with the newer Bangladeshi families in the school with whom they are trying to build relationships and trust.

PS 134Q's gym is under construction for the indefinite future, so they applied for a School Street for recess and gym. Over the last decade, 20 crashes resulting in 27 injuries and one pedestrian death occurred outside PS 134Q.<sup>f</sup> The School Street is primarily staffed by the school's principal, who is the champion of the program, and like many other administrators, laments that the barricades are too heavy for her to lift each day.

### Application Process

The application process for PS 134Q was relatively smooth, particularly because Council Member Williams, who represents the area, was a key supporter. Not only did Council Member Williams' office write a glowing letter of support for the program, they also followed up with the Department of Transportation to ensure their acceptance. In addition, her office has been a champion of School Streets initiatives, pointing us in the direction of other schools that

<sup>f</sup> On the stretches of 203rd and 204th Streets and 109th and Hollis Avenues bordering the school, according to NYC Crash Mapper.





are looking to close their streets and bridging the gap with the Department of Transportation to push for and fund local safe street initiatives.

The ease of this process was a surprise because PS 134Q has driveways on their block. Numerous school streets applications have been denied, or have received overly onerous community outreach requirements that forced the school to withdraw from the application process, when multiple driveways or parking garages have been present. In PS 134Q's case, there have been minimal disruptions with neighbors, despite this being a heavily car-dependent area.



## Community Partners

Open Plans has helped PS 134Q apply for their Open Street three years in a row. Open Plans has also helped them host a community health fair with community partners like the local YMCA, Queens Public Library, Council Member Williams' Office, New York Road Runners, and Chhaya CDC. Additionally, the School Street was part of DOT's Trick-Or-Streets program.

## Key Takeaways

1. Having an **enthusiastic advocate at the Council Member's office** to suggest potential partner schools and help write letters of support is transformative and streamlines the application timeline. However, schools should not need an inside track to get important safety infrastructure.
2. School Streets are a **great strategy for schools that are under construction** (even if they already have gym and open space access).
3. School Streets work well in low-density, outer borough neighborhoods, and often find **unlikely champions across the ideological spectrum**.



*Photos on this spread by Camila Santander, Open Plans.*

# Challenges

These case studies, and our experience working with dozens of other schools around the city, highlight several key challenges with the current School Streets program:

- Schools are stymied by a lack of staff resources to apply for and manage School Streets. This discourages countless schools from participating and leads to an over-reliance on non-profit partners.
- The application process is burdensome for schools. It is buggy, difficult to navigate, cannot be saved while in progress, and requires a significant amount of unnecessary paperwork.<sup>8</sup> Lack of technological fluency and comfort can also be an issue for some administrators.
- The legal contract used to establish a School Street invokes terms and conditions that schools find overwhelming and threatening without a lawyer's perspective, something that is inaccessible for most schools.
- There is a lack of capital and operational funding to assist schools in running their School Street.
- Pervasive parking, including teacher parking, on already closed School Streets presents significant liability concerns and discourages the use of School Streets.
- Schools are given no official DOT signage for their School Street, which makes the street rules confusing for schools, residents, and drivers.
- There is no formal process for a School Street to become a plaza block or more permanent open space.

*Photo by Clarence Eckerson Jr., Streetfilms.*

<sup>8</sup> For example, typing in “5th Avenue” will give you an error message. The correct format is “5 Avenue,” but there is no way for applicants to know this.





# Recommendations

Through our experience helping schools navigate the School Streets program, and in researching what methods have proved effective in other cities, we present the following recommendations to improve New York City's School Streets program. The goal of these recommendations is to lead us towards a School Streets program with maximum participation and beautiful, pedestrianized, and safety-centered School Streets.

First, we present a suite of procedural improvements to make it easier for schools to participate in the current School Streets program. For a variety of reasons, participation is simply not what it could be. With these administrative improvements, we can make it significantly easier for schools to get involved with the program.

Second, we recommend that New York City roll out School Plaza Blocks, following Paris' lead in creating green, pedestrianized spaces. We recognize that this may mean different things for different streets, and so we recommend two types of blocks: a School Plaza Block that is fully free of traffic, and a Limited Entry School Street, which would feature infrastructure like swing arm gates to ensure that the space is pedestrian-centered but allows for local access.

# 1

## Make it Easier for Schools to Participate in School Streets

The current School Streets program presents too many barriers to entry. More often than not, schools need a non-profit partner to lead them through the process. Below, we propose administrative solutions for scaling up the program to its fullest potential and eliminating the need for external partners.

### 1.1

#### Make School Streets a collaborative, effective program between DOT and DOE

Presently, DOT has sole ownership over the School Streets program with virtually no involvement from DOE. The program must be significantly more collaborative. **DOT should continue to maintain ownership over the planning and implementation of School Streets while engaging DOE as an essential partner in identifying schools that may be a good fit and doing outreach.**

#### We propose the hiring of sufficient staff necessary to scale and build the program.

Additional DOT and DOE staff are required for successful implementation: planners, researchers, data scientists, and community liaisons.

**We propose setting clear, effective, and transparent metrics to ensure this program is robust and equitable.** This can include a map of active School Streets (along with details about when and how each school uses it), and the

criteria used to identify School Streets, School Plaza Blocks, and Limited Entry School Streets.

We propose naming the expansion of School Streets as a stated priority of both DOT and DOE. We also recommend changing the official program name from “Open Streets for Schools: Full Closure” to simply “School Streets,” with categories: School Streets,<sup>h</sup> Limited Entry School Streets, and School Plaza Blocks. It’s important to be clear that, while they are related, Open Streets and School Streets are different programs.

### 1.2

#### Reform the School Streets application process to maximize participation

The School Streets application is onerous, challenging, and requires a high level of technological literacy.<sup>i</sup> We recommend the following adjustments to make the School Streets application easier and more supportive of diverse applicants:

- **Create an online application that can be saved and is easy to use.**
- **Eliminate required letters of recommendation.**
- **Eliminate the required “site plan.”** This is a technical and intimidating term that turns school administrators off from applying, and doesn’t provide the DOT with any more

<sup>h</sup> This is the current colloquial title for what we know as School Streets.

<sup>i</sup> If you know or love a school administrator (like the aunt and grandma of one of this report’s authors), you know their time is both valuable and stretched thin!



detailed information than Google Maps.

- **Rewrite the School Streets contract using clear, direct language.** The current version uses technical and legal language that intimidates schools and makes administrators reluctant to sign.
- **Remove the burden of interagency outreach from schools.<sup>j</sup>**

### 1.3

## Improve administrative capacity at schools with School Streets

A significant barrier to school participation is administrative capacity, especially staff capacity to manage the School Street (moving and monitoring barricades, for example). School staff already have significant responsibilities and are generally underfunded, and so the idea of adding another responsibility is simply untenable. We recommend a number of opportunities for the City to ease this burden:

- **Pilot providing school crossing guards extra hours to manage barricades at School Streets.** Staffing is a significant barrier to a school operating a School Street. We propose a pilot allowing school crossing guards to take on extra hours to manage movable barricades on School Streets. The pilot does not require additional staffing, just allowing additional hours for some crossing guards, and could be scalable; in the future, it could lead to a position in the same unit dedicated to barricade management.
- **Make it easier for schools to use public space contractors.** Right now, it is difficult for schools to make use of contracted public space stewards. To tap into this resource, they often have to partner with another non-profit and fund it that way. We recommend making it easier for schools to take advantage of the services provided by

<sup>j</sup> Currently, schools have to liaise with agencies like FDNY, NYPD, and others.

contractors like the Horticultural Society of New York (the Hort) or the ACE program by allowing a mechanism for the school to procure contracted public space services on their own.

- **Provide schools assistance with community outreach.** Schools do not have the capacity to do community outreach about the potential for a School Street, which is sometimes a requirement for acceptance. We, and other non-profit groups, often assist schools with this community outreach; without this assistance, it would not happen. The City should provide outreach assistance to schools interested in School Streets, with City staff knocking doors, flyering, and performing other outreach in furtherance of the DOT's stated goals to expand public spaces.
- **Create a toolkit for schools to effectively participate in the program.** The City should provide the resources for schools to flourish. To assist in outreach to schools, DOT and DOE should work together on a toolkit that explains what is available to them as part of the School Streets program. This includes what the different types of School Street are, the types of street infrastructure that could be put in place with a Limited Entry School Street or School Plaza Block, and the programmatic possibilities of a School Street. Additionally, DOT should develop and provide off-the-shelf School Streets infrastructure (like barriers, boulders, planters, and benches), ensuring that this infrastructure can be built, installed, repaired, and maintained at a low-cost.



**City-run public space management is essential to the future of our public spaces, including for School Streets.**

This includes Public Space Teams in every neighborhood to help manage our public spaces. Read more about our vision for public space management in our report [\*\*Framework for the Future.\*\*](#)

## 1.4

### Implement strategies to manage and mitigate parking concerns

Parking is a concern for schools considering School Streets. We have heard from schools that cars remaining on the street is a reason for lower use of their School Street, for example, with the fear of student safety, property damage, and liability looming. Additionally, designated teacher parking and parking placards pose issues; while we understand some parking is needed for teachers commuting from transit deserts or far distances, it still provides a pervasive logistical challenge for School Streets operations.

**We recommend enforcing existing parking laws on School Streets.** It is currently illegal to park on a “full closure” Open Street, which includes School Streets. Anecdotally, we have found that these rules are not enforced on cars already parked on a School Street; we recommend that enforcement begin with the first violation resulting in a warning and the second violation resulting in a ticket.

We also recommend clear, permanent metal signage indicating that parking is illegal during the operating hours of the School Street.

**We recommend adopting solutions to mitigate teacher parking concerns.** One approach for teacher parking designated by signage is to move it to a different block face of the school rather than the one that would be designated as a School Street. For teacher parking placards, the City could incentivize teachers to give them up by providing them free Metrocards, a cash out, or another option.

## 1.5

### Create a dedicated budget line item for School Streets

Schools must have funding to effectively participate in the School Streets program. This includes capital funding to build out School Streets into Limited Entry School Streets and School Plaza Blocks, making them beautiful and green. It also includes operational funding to pay staff or contractors dedicated to the management of the School Street and programming to keep the street active. **We recommend a dedicated budget line item for School Streets.**



Photo by by Angel Mendoza, Open Plans.



# 2

## School Plaza Blocks & Limited Entry School Streets

Plaza blocks — when a street is fully pedestrianized and blocked off to vehicle traffic — are already within DOT’s toolbox. These streets are blocked off to traffic with raised permanent barriers like boulders or metal bollards, and the street is raised to sidewalk level to make the space more permanent. There is clear, permanent metal signage designating this space as pedestrianized and indicating that micromobility should be walked through the space, not ridden. They feature greenery, seating, space to play and socialize, and make our city more vibrant. One example is the Clivner=Field Plaza<sup>k</sup> at Baruch College, where a portion of East 25th Street is closed off to vehicle traffic, connecting two buildings on Baruch College’s campus and giving students an outdoor public space. Yeshiva University and LaGuardia Community College have similar plazas.



*The Clivner=Field Plaza at Baruch College provides public space for students to socialize, eat, study, and relax while connecting the campus. Photo by Baruch College.*

<sup>k</sup> Yes, this is the correct spelling!

However, there is no easy, formal way for a school to request or create a plaza block from their School Street, a logical next step for many blocks. **We propose a formalized, transparent process to create a School Plaza Block.**

We see this strategy work in Paris with great success — 100 of their 300 School Streets are pedestrianized in this way. By closing off traffic to a School Street permanently, all of the benefits of a School Street are amplified; fully pedestrianized streets mean no crashes, significantly less air pollution, less staffing requirements, and more public space for everyone in the neighborhood.

Another important lesson from Paris is that different street typologies have different solutions; some are closed off to cars completely, and some allow limited traffic. **In addition to fully closed off School Plaza Blocks, we also recommend Limited Entry School Streets.** On these streets, street parking is prohibited and infrastructure like swing gates allow for local vehicle access while making it clear the space is for pedestrians. Like School Plaza Blocks, we have examples of Limited Entry School Street strategies in New York City already; on West 27th Street between 7th and 8th Avenues, the block is closed off during the week using swing gates to connect the campus for students at the Fashion Institute of Technology.

Limited Entry School Streets can be an opportunity to build trust in a neighborhood that could then transition its School Street into a School Plaza Block. In other cases, in lower density neighborhoods with homes with driveways, Limited Entry School Streets can serve as the model for activating the streets as public space and increasing safety for children while retaining local access to driveways.

## 2.1

### Phase 1: Roll out School Plaza Blocks and Limited Entry School Streets with existing schools

We know that plaza blocks deliver results for communities, and it's time that we begin to roll them out comprehensively for schools. For Phase 1 of this expansion, the City should focus on targeting schools that are already participating in the School Streets program. They can do so by determining which schools are best positioned from a street safety perspective, are the most enthusiastic, need staffing support, and/or who use their School Street the most. In our case studies, we discuss PS 129Q and IS 528; we believe that these two schools are ideal candidates for the first round of School Plaza Blocks. PS 129Q is an ideal fit because a plaza block would eliminate parking on the street permanently,

allowing for more robust use of the street, and IS 528 is an ideal fit to make a well-used program simpler for already overburdened administrators.

A School Plaza Block is fully closed off to traffic with physical barriers and has the same criteria as standard plaza blocks mentioned above. It serves as a place where students can get to and from school and for student recreation, but also as a public space for the community outside of school hours.

Some schools, particularly those on blocks with homes that have driveways or due to other factors, may not be good candidates for permanent School Plaza Blocks. Or, the school or community may not yet be ready to commit to a full plaza block. For these cases, we propose Limited Entry School Streets. On Limited Entry School Streets, street parking is prohibited while the street is closed to traffic and there is permanent infrastructure like swing gates



*The shift from a street with vehicle access and parking to a pedestrianized plaza is transformative; the government of Paris highlights this in effective before and afters shown above. Rue Saint-Victor (5e), top; Rue Ferdinand Flocon (18e), bottom — before/after. Photos by Christophe Belin / Ville de Paris.*





Swing gates are effective measures to close off streets while still retaining local vehicle access. Photo by Clarence Eckerson Jr., Streetfilms.

that allow for the street to be open and closed without relying on temporary barricades. Clear, permanent metal signage designates these streets.

PS 134Q would be an ideal candidate for a Phase 1 Limited Entry School Street, as it would allow the school to continue using their Open Street (located on a residential street with driveways) for PE class without having to lug barricades down a flight of steps. DOT and DOE should work together to select other participating schools where the typology of their street wouldn't accommodate a School Plaza Block or where more community buy-in is needed — for a Phase 1 launch of Limited Entry School Streets.

## 2.2

### Phase 2: Identify additional School Plaza Blocks and Limited Entry School Streets based on select criteria

During Phase 1 implementation, DOT and DOE should work collaboratively and proactively to identify schools not yet enrolled in the School Streets program that would be good candidates for a Phase 2 rollout of School Plaza Blocks or Limited Entry School Streets. The criteria to determine a

good fit for a School Plaza Block or Limited Entry School Street could be based on access to public space, access to public and active transportation infrastructure, crash rates, asthma rates, and Priority Investment Areas outlined in the NYC Streets Plan.<sup>18</sup>

## 2.3

### Set a goal for 10 School Plaza Blocks, two in each borough, by 2028

Through the process of rolling out Phase 1 (proof of concept) and Phase 2 (expansion of concept) there should be at least 10 School Plaza Blocks by 2028 (two in each borough). Ideally, these School Plaza Blocks would be fully built out, but even if they are simply pedestrianized and build-out continues over the next several months and years, that would be a massive step forward for School Streets and street safety for students.





**Widespread adoption of School Streets will bring meaningful change to neighborhoods across the city.**

These relatively low-cost recommendations will enable the incoming administration to scale and grow this program. Safer and more joyful streets across the city are within reach.





*Photo by by Angel Mendoza, Open Plans*



# Endnotes

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