

2025 Back to School Community Safety Toolkit

For DC families and school
parent organizations

August 2025

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Introduction

In August 2025, DC is experiencing new safety challenges including increased law enforcement presence and changes to how youth cases are handled. In the midst of it, DC kids are getting ready to go back to school, and we know the current conditions are creating worry and fear among many families.

Families and parent organizations have an important role to play in ensuring schools remain safe, structured, and supportive places for children to learn. This toolkit compiles ideas from education advocacy organizations in DC that your school community can try now or any time.

This toolkit is intended for use by families of DC students. If you are not the family member of a student but want to support schools right now, connect with someone in your life who is part of a school community and ask them how you might help.

This toolkit was compiled by Free DC and includes materials from the American Federation of Teachers, Anti-Racist DC, Black Swan Academy, CARE Anacostia, Critical Exposure, DC Action, DC Girls Coalition, EmpowerEd, Police Free Schools, United Leaders for Freedom, and DC school staff. Thank you to everyone who contributed to this guide.

Before getting started

Our current moment is one of new uncertainty and threat. However, overpolicing has been a danger to DC communities, particularly communities of color, for decades. What we are experiencing now is not new for many families.

Community efforts like the ones included here are most effective when we know one another and take the time required to foster mutual trust. As leaders in Los Angeles have said, it's a lot easier to help someone if you know their name.

This moment is also a chance for us to think about how we support students, teachers, and our school communities *all* the time — not only during crisis.

This toolkit includes a number of ideas. Choose the ones that make sense for you and/or your school. Consider prioritizing one thing that you can do consistently over time, rather than lots of things fast but only for a short period.

Finally, **before beginning any family-led safety effort, discuss your ideas with a staff member from your school's leadership** to ensure coordination and alignment. This step is crucial to making sure community-led efforts keep students safe and avoid creating confusion.

I. Support Safe Routes to School

1. Organize a Walking Bus

One safe, joyful way to support safe commutes to school is to organize a Walking Bus. This is when one or more adults walks student(s) to school and picks up friends along the way. A Walking Bus can be informal or structured, often makes the commute more fun, and helps make sure there are supportive community members around during arrival and dismissal.

If you are a school parent, you can start a Walking Bus on your own. Find another parent in your area to partner with you, and work together to connect with fellow students along your route.

MORE INFORMATION:

- [How to Start a Walking Bus](#) from the National Center for Safe Routes to Schools
- [Walking Bus Best Practices](#) from CARE DC

2. Join a Walking Bus

As of August 2025, **CARE DC** is organizing Walking Buses from the Anacostia and Congress Heights Metro stations to nearby schools. [Complete this form to learn more.](#)

3. Organize a carpool

Driving is a particular concern for many families right now, as federal checkpoints are asking for personal information, including information about immigration status.

If you are a U.S. citizen, consider organizing a carpool with fellow families to help all students get to school and home safely each day.

4. Create arrival and dismissal support teams

Having caring adults be present outside school at drop-off and pick up times can support overall safety in multiple ways.

In partnership with your school staff, consider organizing community members to be outside school at arrival and dismissal. Work with your school staff to identify where community presence might be useful, and the appropriate steps to take if safety issues arise. Families who participate should wear visible identifiers (such as school-branded apparel or badges) so they are clearly identifiable.

In addition to supporting safety, this is also a great way to build school spirit! Cheer on students as they arrive in the morning, and give them some shine for a job well done as they leave for the day.

5. Make sure all students have Kids Ride Free cards

Students at DC schools ride Metro for free thanks to DC's groundbreaking Kids Ride Free program. In spite of the fact that kids ride for free, law enforcement officers are at many Metro stations to ticket or detain young people who evade fares.

Make sure all students at your school have a Kids Ride Free Card and understand the importance of using it. Ask your school staff to prioritize issuing these cards, or even hold a card application workshop. Consider urging WMATA, the Mayor, and DC Council to make these cards more easily available right now.

MORE INFORMATION:

- [Kids Ride Free DC SY25-26 Guide](#) from WMATA

Additional questions to ask

Check in with your school to see how they can support parent efforts for safe routes to school. For example:

- Has your school already marked safe routes to dropoff/pickup locations?
- Is your school administration able to dedicate staff or personnel (such as members of your school's wellness team) to help walk students to and from the Metro, bus stops, or other key routes?
- Does your school currently offer rideshare credits for students? How can the parent organization leverage or share that resource?

II. How to Form a Rapid Response Network

Developing a team of community members who can share information quickly and respond quickly is another important way our communities can support safety right now.

Collect a group of trusted community members. Establish a clear and secure way to communicate with each other (e.g., a phone tree, or a group chat on WhatsApp or Signal). Use those communication channels to share updates with one another, and respond quickly when needed.

Some examples of what community response can look like:

- If there are unverified reports of ICE or law enforcement near school, a parent might go and visually confirm whether that report is accurate.

- If there is a report and it is verified, school staff might consider issuing an alert for families that it may be hazardous at school arrival/dismissal. School staff might also issue an alert when a threat is no longer active.
- If there is a report and it is verified, community members with privilege might go to watch the officers, film their actions, or make noise to alert anyone in the area of their presence.
- If there is a report and it is verified, parents might use a phone tree to share that information with other parents so they can make alternative arrangements for students to get home safely.

Rapid response networks can also offer follow-up support, such as a meal train and other resources to impacted families. Read more about follow-up support ideas on page 9.

II. Share Resources

1. Encourage your PTO to state clear, standard guidance

As legal cases against the current occupation move through court, DCPS and charter schools alike are being cautious about what formal guidance they issue for families. However, this lack of direction opens the risk of confusion or misinformation among school communities.

Parent-teacher organizations (PTOs) can help fill this gap by sharing clear, standard guidance and resources. Work with your PTO to identify age-appropriate, multi-lingual flyers to share consistently. Use information from trusted sources like the ones below. When distributing information, be sure to share it with *all* families to avoid unintentionally singling out community members.

MORE INFORMATION:

- [DC, MD, VA Immigrant Resource Guide](#) from Migrant Solidarity Mutual Aid

- [Immigration Emergency Family Planning Toolkit](#) from Ayuda and the Amica Center for Immigrant Rights
- [Know Your Rights Guides](#) from ACLU of DC
- [Immigrants' Rights in Interactions with Law Enforcement](#) from ACLU of DC
- [Know Your Rights: Stop and Frisk](#) from ACLU of DC
- [Conoce tus derechos para tus derechos](#) from Mijente
- [Printable Know Your Rights Cards](#) from the Immigrant Legal Resources Center

2. Make sure students understand Youth Curfew Zones

As of August 21, 2025, DC has announced four Youth Curfew Zones that will have targeted enforcement against young people. If you know middle and high-school aged students, make sure they understand what these zones are and where they are.

MORE INFORMATION

- [List of Youth Curfew Zones](#) from the Metropolitan Police Department
- [What to know about DC's Youth Curfew Zones](#) from Harriet's Wildest Dreams

3. Help your community understand these resources

Sharing one flier one time is typically not enough for any large community to understand new information. Consider hosting trainings, in-person workshops, school community dinners, or other events that give families an opportunity to discuss this information and ask questions. Just like with kids, we learn in part by reading but also by hearing new ideas from people we trust, talking about it ourselves, and socializing it among friends.

IV. Support Safety Outside of School

1. Reminders for youth wellness

For families of middle and high school students in particular, remind young people about behaviors that support their overall wellness, including:

- Following all citywide transportation rules and curfew laws.
- Refraining from carrying prohibited items.
- Avoiding large gatherings and unsafe behavior.

2. Organize and promote out-of-school-time events

Parent organizations can also offer support for students by hosting supported youth gatherings, organizing after school activities, and sharing information about wellness events happening in your community.

V. Support Each Other

This period of heightened enforcement is scary and stressful, and many families in our communities will experience direct harm during this period. As school communities it's important for us to take time to care for one another if or when that happens.

Some ideas for community care:

- Organize a meal train for families who are impacted by immigration enforcement.
- Organize a community fundraiser for people facing legal fees.

Conclusion

By working together and in partnership with school leaders and teachers, families can help ensure students feel safe, cared for, and ready to thrive this school year.

Have resources that should be added to this toolkit? Send them to team@freedcproject.org. We will keep this guide updated as new resources and information are available.

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