



# School Zone / Speed Zone:

A Study of Speed Limit Compliance Near NYC  
Schools That Lack Speed Safety Camera Protection

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Schools That Lack Speed Safety Camera Protection*

## Executive Summary

In a study of driver compliance with the speed limit, Transportation Alternatives found that a majority of drivers participated in dangerous, illegal driving behavior outside public school buildings in New York City while school was in session. Using a speed radar gun during school hours at six locations in five boroughs, Transportation Alternatives found that a majority of drivers traveled at dangerous speeds, illegally exceeding the speed limit.

New York City's current program of 140 speed safety cameras has successfully reduced speeding in certain school zones, but the cap imposed by state law leaves over a million children unprotected. In school zones without speed safety cameras, drivers continue to endanger children's lives.

Transportation Alternatives found:

- 92% of drivers speeding outside PS/IS 30 in Bay Ridge, Brooklyn.
- 75% of drivers speeding outside PS 97 in Gravesend, Brooklyn.
- 74% of drivers speeding outside Susan E. Wagner High School on Staten Island, just a few days after a fifteen-year-old boy was struck and injured.
- Half of drivers speeding on Boston Road in Allerton, the Bronx, near three schools.
- Approximately one-third of drivers speeding on arterial roads near schools in Flushing, Queens, and Harlem.

None of the observed school zones has a speed safety camera. If the New York State Senate does not pass S6046-B, none will be able to get them.

# Introduction

Speeding is the leading cause of traffic deaths in New York City, and children are in particular danger, as it is more difficult for them to accurately judge how fast a vehicle is moving. A New York City Department of Transportation study in 2013 identified 100 schools where 75%-100% of vehicles were speeding within a quarter mile. The installation of speed safety cameras, which photograph the license plate of vehicles operating at 11 or more miles per hour above the speed limit and impose a \$50 fine, has been phenomenally successful in protecting children walking to and from school in 140 school zones.

Unfortunately, the limitations of the current state law prevent speed safety cameras from operating during the hours, or at the locations, where 85% of crashes happen. Cameras may only be placed within a quarter-mile of a school entrance, on the same street. This often leaves adjacent, more dangerous arterial roads without cameras. Furthermore, these cameras do not operate at all on weekends or during school holidays, even though children still use these streets outside of school hours. Many New York City public schools are adjacent to parks or playgrounds that are used every day, year round, yet speeding is only penalized part-time.

What makes these current limitations nonsensical is that speed safety cameras *work*. The New York City Department of Transportation has reported that speeding has dropped up to 63% in locations where speed cameras are allowed to operate, making them phenomenally effective. And the majority of drivers who get their first ticket from a speed safety camera won't get another within the next year, which is proof of a deterrence effect. Speeding is a violation at all times of day, all times of year. Pedestrians are always vulnerable to speeding traffic. There is no good reason why the program should not be expanded and enhanced.

## Methodology

Transportation Alternatives uses LIDAR devices, or “speed guns,” to measure traffic near schools in all five boroughs of New York City, following the procedures described in the *Transportation Alternatives Speeding Survey Toolkit*, designed to help any concerned New Yorker gauge the problem of speeding in their own neighborhoods. It is available online at:

[https://www.transalt.org/sites/default/files/news/reports/2013/Speeding\\_Toolkit.pdf](https://www.transalt.org/sites/default/files/news/reports/2013/Speeding_Toolkit.pdf)

Speed gunning took place at schools where there are currently no speed safety cameras in operation. Some readings were taken at times when, if a camera had been present, it would have been operational. Others were taken at times that a camera would not be allowed to operate, but children were still present in the area. Certain locations in close proximity to parks could be expected to have children present on weekends and outside school hours.

We also made observations at a variety of locations: some on the streets in front of a school entrance, where a camera, if present, would be located; others were taken on adjacent arterial roads where, under recommended changes in the law, cameras would be allowed to operate in the future, and where children have to cross in order to reach their school.

## Results

Our findings show that speeding is a five-borough problem. What we observed outside a handful of New York City schools is not unusual or exceptional – it is the rule. In a truly equitable city, school children would not be subject to what is essentially a lottery to determine whether they get protection from speeding drivers on their way to and from school. Only the New York State Legislature has the power to ameliorate this unfair situation – and save lives.

### BAY RIDGE, BROOKLYN

On a weekday afternoon in early June, 92% of drivers were speeding in front of PS/IS 30 on Fourth Avenue. This took place during hours when children would have been walking home from school or attending the after-school program. The entrance to the school is clearly marked, and its presence is obvious – yet drivers continued to speed with impunity.

A speed camera outside PS/IS 30 would not only protect children, but other vulnerable pedestrians as well. Within two blocks of PS/IS 30 are a senior center, three houses of worship, multiple doctors' offices, and a subway station.

**74%** of drivers were speeding on **Manor Road** in Staten Island, outside Susan E. Wagner High School, **the same week that a student was hit and injured.**



In early June, **92%** of drivers were observed speeding on a weekday afternoon outside PS/IS 30 in Bay Ridge, Brooklyn.



### GRAVESEND, BROOKLYN

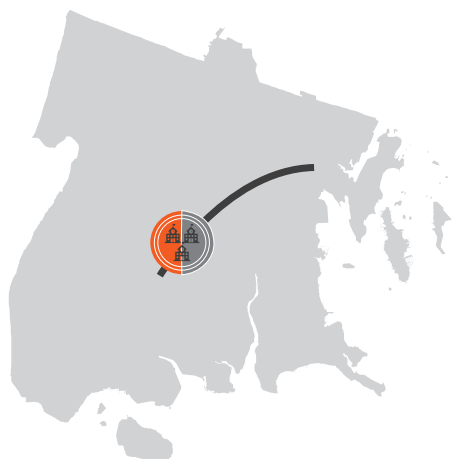
PS 97, on Stillwell Avenue between Highlawn Avenue and Avenue S, was one of the 100 schools the DOT identified in 2013 as having a high proportion of speeding drivers nearby. Four years later, students at PS 97 are still in danger. TransAlt found 75% of drivers were speeding on Stillwell, in front of the school's entrance, on an afternoon in early June.

## MID-ISLAND, STATEN ISLAND

On June 6th, a fifteen-year-old boy was hit and injured by a driver on Manor Road outside Susan E. Wagner High School. Two days later, TransAlt observed 74% of drivers speeding at the same location.

The design of Manor Road encourages speeding, as it passes for long distances through parkland without traffic signals before abruptly becoming a residential neighborhood just north of Wagner High School. While these design flaws need to be addressed, a speed camera would quickly provide a deterrent to drivers who think they can disregard the speed limit.

**Half** of all drivers were speeding on the notoriously dangerous **Boston Road** in the Bronx, **near three schools**, on a June afternoon.



creating danger for children walking to school. TransAlt found 30% of cars speeding on 149th Street near Willets Point Boulevard, just outside PS 21, JHS 185, and Memorial Field Playground.

## HARLEM, MANHATTAN

Harlem's wide, straight boulevards create north-south speedways through the neighborhood. On one of them – Lenox Avenue / Malcolm X. Boulevard – TransAlt observed 33% of drivers speeding on a June morning, just around the corner from the entrances to PS/MS 149 on West 117th Street and Success Academy Harlem 1 on West 118th.

## ALLERTON, THE BRONX

Boston Road, a busy arterial route that runs from Morrissania in the South Bronx, through Bronx Park, and out past the Westchester County line, is a notoriously dangerous Vision Zero Priority Corridor. Its only speed cameras are in the far northeast of the borough. In Allerton, TransAlt observed 50% of drivers speeding on Boston Road between Waring and Mace Avenues, around the corner from three schools.

## FLUSHING, QUEENS

In parts of the outer boroughs, long blocks and wide streets abound in more suburbanized landscapes,

# Conclusion

Speeding is a problem throughout New York City – even within clearly-marked school zones. Drivers will not police themselves, as our evidence shows. Automated enforcement is the fairest and most effective way to deter speeding. Speed safety cameras have been phenomenally helpful in reducing speeding in places where they have been installed, but the limitations of existing law tie the City’s hands and deny protection to 93% of students. This is an unjust situation. There is no good reason to ration a proven-effective intervention.



111 John Street, Suite 260  
New York, NY 10038  
[transalt.org/schoolzonespeedzone](http://transalt.org/schoolzonespeedzone)

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