



Traffic Guidelines Manual

ORIGINATOR State Traffic Engineer	13-5-5
CHAPTER 13	Traffic Regulations
SECTION 5	Speed Limits
SUBJECT 5	School Zones

BACKGROUND

Wisconsin Statutes require that School Advance warning signs (S1-1) be installed and maintained on every highway where a school grounds is contiguous to the highway. There is no requirement that a school speed limit be posted except where it differs from the 15 mph provision in s. [346-57 \(4\)\(a\)](#) and [\(b\)](#). These two provisions place the requirement on the motorist to reduce speed to 15 mph when children are present, even in the absence of speed limit signs.

MOTORIST OBSERVANCE

It is commonly known that motorists in Wisconsin, as well as in many, if not most other states, do not respond consistently or dependably to school speed limit signs, unless there is active enforcement. Where enforcement is exercised, it is often sporadic or symbolic, such as on the opening day of school. It takes intensive, continuous enforcement to cause a reduction of speed toward 15 mph or thereabouts. As a result, this effort is rarely undertaken. In regard to public safety, it would be better to address the issue as to what actual hazards exist and make efforts to correct them.

THE NEED FOR SIGNS

There are of course many variations on the physical arrangements at school locations on the State Trunk Highway System. The following two very typical situations, however, are offered to illustrate guidelines for handling most of the rest:

1. In a built-up section of a city or village, where the arterial speed limit is low, probably 25 mph or 30 mph and sidewalk are present. Many or most of the children walk to school. Many are transported by personal auto, thereby causing some congestion, etc. The posting of the school speed limit is virtually inevitable and would be in agreement with general statewide practice. A motorist's unexpected or sudden reaction to the combination of the speed limit and/or presence of children or crossing guard would likely not cause an accident potential. Sudden stoppages and slow downs are common in developed areas. It would be desirable to study the location to see if an increase to 20 mph would be appropriate and acceptable; as per authority is s. 349.11(7). School speed limits can be posted (S4-51 sign). **If used, it *should* be posted at 10 MPH less than**

the speed limit of the highway. Reason: If speed limits more than a 10 MPH drop are used, the compliance will be marginal and differential speeds will occur.

2. On a rural section of highway, where the school is the only feature, and the speed limit is 55 mph or approaching it. Virtually, all students are transported. There *may* be a few nearby who walk or cycle. It is the Department's policy to refrain from posting school speed limits under these conditions and to resist requests to have them posted. Whereas motorists are skilled at anticipating slowing traffic where there are recognizable features, such as intersections or driveways, there would be a very serious situation generated if occasional motorists respond to extremely low posted speed limits in an unpredictable manner. Since children are unlikely to be present, speed limit signs would also be basically a purposeless use of signing. School speed limits can be posted (S4-51 sign). **If used, it *should* be posted at 10 MPH less than the speed limit.** If there are no children present, do not post a school speed limit sign; rather place an advisory speed plaque under the S1-1 advance sign or the school entrance warning sign school.

On the other hand, School Advance signs, which are required, *should* be useful in warning of motorists frequenting the school driveway.

The two examples given *may* represent the two extremes of situations. Other locations *may* have semi-urban characteristics and will have to be studied carefully to see what problems *may* exist.

Do not post signs unless asked by local unit of government. Evaluate appropriateness prior to posting. Appropriateness includes such items as:

- Are there children present near the roadway?
- Will there be proper and consistent enforcement?
- Are children bused to school rather than crossing the roadway or near the roadway?

ARTERIAL SPEED LIMIT

There has been occasional local sentiment to have an arterial speed limit lowered because of the existence of a school, often times on the outskirts of the municipality. If the school is isolated and detached, the request *should* be resisted. The school hours, particularly those where children are present at street side, are such a low percentage of the day that this *should* be unjustifiable. Enhanced warning signs or flashers on time clock would be better solutions.

CONFLICT OF SIGNS

Where school speed limits are posted, it is considered good practice to omit the full time arterial speed limit signs in the school zone, in order to prevent confusion or avoid giving motorists grounds for disobeying the school speed limit.

MUTCD

See [Figure 7B-3](#) in the MUTCD for proper sign locations.

Wisconsin MUTCD Section 7B.11 provides standards, options and support for School Speed Limit assemblies.

SPEED LIMITS WITH FLASHERS

It *should* be emphasized the Wisconsin Statutes provide for school zone speed limits to be in effect "When Children Are Present". Therefore, it is improper for local municipalities to use the S4-4 "When Flashing" panel with the school speed limit sign that is supplemented with a flashing beacon.

FLASHING BEACON

A permit can be issued to the local jurisdiction to place a beacon above the S4-51 sign in accordance with TGM 4-5-1 permit application.

PERMANENT MOUNTED SPEED BOARDS

See TGM 2-1-7 regarding policy for speed boards.