



Thanks for having me here today. I'm Ellen Coulter, Media Communications Manager for ARDOT.

Today I'm going to be discussing a new educational program for 6th through 8th graders called Street Smart.

This program was carried out by ARDOT, but was made possible through help and support from the Arkansas Department of Education.



Before I dive into the background of this program and how it was developed, I want to start with a brief overview of what Street Smart is in case this is the first time you're hearing of it.

Street smart is a free, ready-made, road safety curriculum to be used in 6th-8th grade health classes – with cross-curricular topics that can transition to different subject areas as well. The goal is to build it out to a full, K-12 program eventually.

We actually just had a meeting this month to discuss the next phase of the program, which will extend to 9-12 graders.

We launched this campaign at a news conference on August 15, just in time for the 2024-2025 school year. It's still too soon to know exactly how many classrooms are teaching the curriculum, but we've heard a lot of positive feedback so far.

This is the first program of its kind in Arkansas. When you think about it, many kids don't learn about road safety until they are preparing for their driver's license test. This program teaches road safety to kids BEFORE they are ever behind the wheel of a vehicle. The goal is to get kids comfortable and familiar with the rules of the road before they begin driving.

Topics include pedestrian, passenger, bicyclist, bus, and driver safety – addressing things such as seatbelts, distracted brains, bicycle hand signals, stopping distance and blind spots.

The program was created with students in mind – how to best reach this age group. We got a panel together to help us brainstorm the best way to teach this material. But it was also developed with teachers in mind, designed to be easy to integrate into existing curriculum.

This program is funded through the Highway Safety Improvement Program and was developed in partnership with the Arkansas Department of Education.



So, now that you know what Street Smart is, let's back up a bit and talk about the backstory behind this.

It's no secret that younger drivers are more prone to wrecks. They are less experienced and typically have an "invincible" mindset. They also tend to be consumed with their phones, friends, and other distractions that don't mix well with operating a vehicle.

ARDOT's Planning & Research Division develops a Strategic Highway Safety Plan – the current one is roughly 200 pages – that uses a data-driven approach to identify focus areas and strategies for improving roadway safety.

It should come as no surprise that one of the focus areas of our strategic highway safety plan is younger drivers. Recommended strategies for younger drivers outlined in the plan include increased awareness of risks. In other words, we need to be teaching our youth about what types of behaviors lead to crashes.

Ok, so we know the data shows that we need to be placing a special emphasis on younger drivers. Now what?



The solution came to us while attending a national conference in which the Georgia Department of Transportation presented on their children’s campaign called “Keep Georgia Safe.” It’s a free, K-12 car and road safety program that has been hugely successful throughout the state of Georgia.

Former ARDOT Director Lorie Tudor saw what GDOT was doing and decided we needed to make that happen here. She really got the ball rolling.

When you look at GDOT’s content, it’s catchy, engaging, and age-appropriate..

We decided we wanted to implement something similar here in Arkansas.

We got on the phone with GDOT to figure out how they created their program. To their knowledge, no other state had done anything like it yet. We figured this was a unique opportunity to be ahead of the curve, not only by creating the first program of its kind here in Arkansas but also being one of the only states in the country with a program like this.

Using their roadmap, we started working on an Arkansas-centric program. Unlike GDOT who chose to go it alone, we knew we wanted early involvement from our Department of Education and luckily they were on board right away. We wanted to be sure all of our materials lined up with educational standards and had credibility.

This program has been in development since last year, and we’re thrilled to be where we are today, seeing it in action for the 2025-2026 school year and already planning an expansion of the program.



**PHOTO (LEFT TO RIGHT): ARDOT Director Jared Wiley, ADE Secretary Jacob Oliva and the five Street Smart talent: Lawson, Lila, Keegan, Austin, and Jenna
NOT PICTURED: FORMER DIRECTOR LORIE TUDOR who spearheaded this initiative**

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We launched the campaign with a press conference in August. There on the left by the American flag is ARDOT Director Jared Wiley, at the podium is Arkansas Education Secretary Oliva, and then off to the right are the five Arkansas teens we hired to be the faces of the campaign. They are featured in all of our educational videos.

The 5 teens were critical to this program – the 6th through 8th grade demographic are impressionable, they look up to older kids. It felt important to have these messages coming from role models/peers rather than adults.



Okay, so that's the backstory. Now let's look at the end product.

We developed two interactive games, nine educational videos, and a variety of lesson plans, quizzes and group activities for each grade level.

We utilized an agency to develop this content so ensure it was of consistent, professional-level quality.

All content is accessed through the website StreetSmartAR.org. Some of the content is displayed publicly, such as the games and videos. But the full slate of lesson plan and answer keys can be requested by teachers and sent to your email.

This program was developed over the past year with input from real teachers, and we're really proud of the product.

I want to show you a couple of the videos now to give you an idea.

STREET SMART LOOKING AHEAD	
2025-2026 SCHOOL YEAR	2026 AND BEYOND
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introducing program to 6-8th graders • ARDOT visiting schools statewide • Educator engagement and feedback 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Content revisions • 9-12th grade program • K-5 program • Fully built out program in every school statewide

As I said, we put a lot of effort into developing this program. We want it to be easy to use and helpful to teachers. Most importantly, we want it to be effective in teaching kids about road safety.

Our main focus currently is continuing to encourage teachers to use the program throughout this school year and then soliciting their feedback at the end of the year for ways to improve the program.

And then in the coming years, we can revise and adapt the content as necessary, eventually adding a K-5 program and a 9-12 program.

One day, we hope it can be a household name like the “D.A.R.E.” program was for me growing up.

Now.... Before we wrap up, we have one more thing ... This session was called “Are you smarter than an 8th grader?” and you all have gotten off too easy thus far. SO...



Let's play.

These are facts taken directly from the street smart materials. I'm going to ask 5 questions.

QUESTION #1

There are TWO hand signals that can signify a right turn for a bicyclist. What are they?

Hand Signals 101



LEFT TURN

Left arm out
to the side



RIGHT TURN

Right arm straight out
OR left arm bent up



STOP

Left arm bent down
with hand flat

QUESTION #1

There are TWO hand signals that can signify a right turn for a bicyclist.
What are they?

ANSWER

Right arm straight out OR left arm bent up



QUESTION #2

Most school buses don't have seatbelts. What is the safety structure called on a school bus that allows it to get away with no seatbelts?



Stay Seated, Stay Safe

Most school buses don't have seatbelts — but they're still designed to protect you.

The seats form a safety structure called compartmentalization, similar to how an egg carton protects eggs.

Seatbelts should always be worn when available!

QUESTION #2

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ANSWER

The seats form a safety structure called compartmentalization, similar to how an egg carton protects eggs.

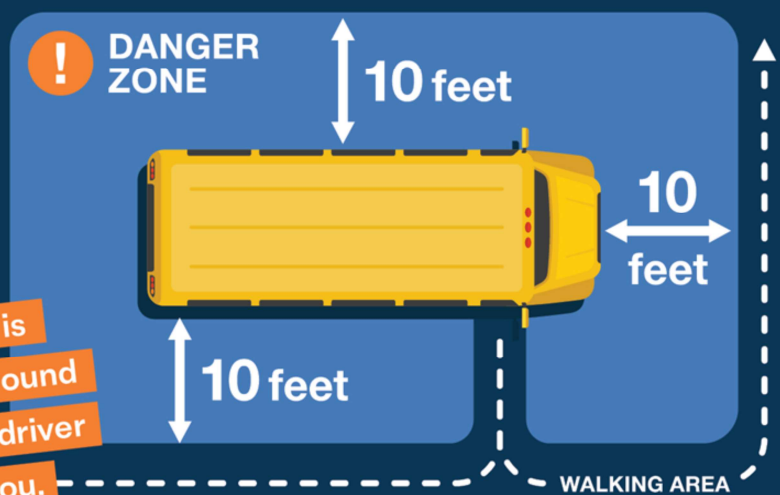


QUESTION #3

Most school-bus related injuries happen when children are getting on or off the school bus. How many feet are you supposed to stand AWAY from the school bus while you wait?

The DANGER ZONE

The "Danger Zone" is
the 10-foot area around
the bus where the driver
can't always see you.



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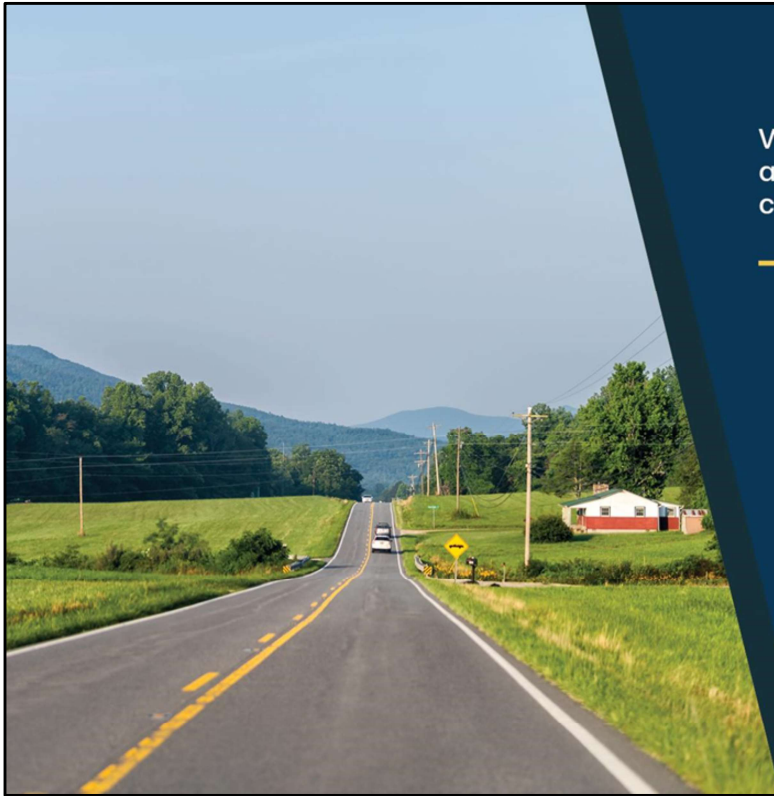
ANSWER

The "danger zone" is 10 feet around the bus in every direction.



QUESTION #4

As a pedestrian walking along a road, which side are you supposed to walk on?



Walk on the **LEFT SIDE** of the road, against the flow of traffic so you can see cars coming.

Wear **BRIGHT OR REFLECTIVE** gear.

Be **EXTRA** careful near curves, hills and driveways.

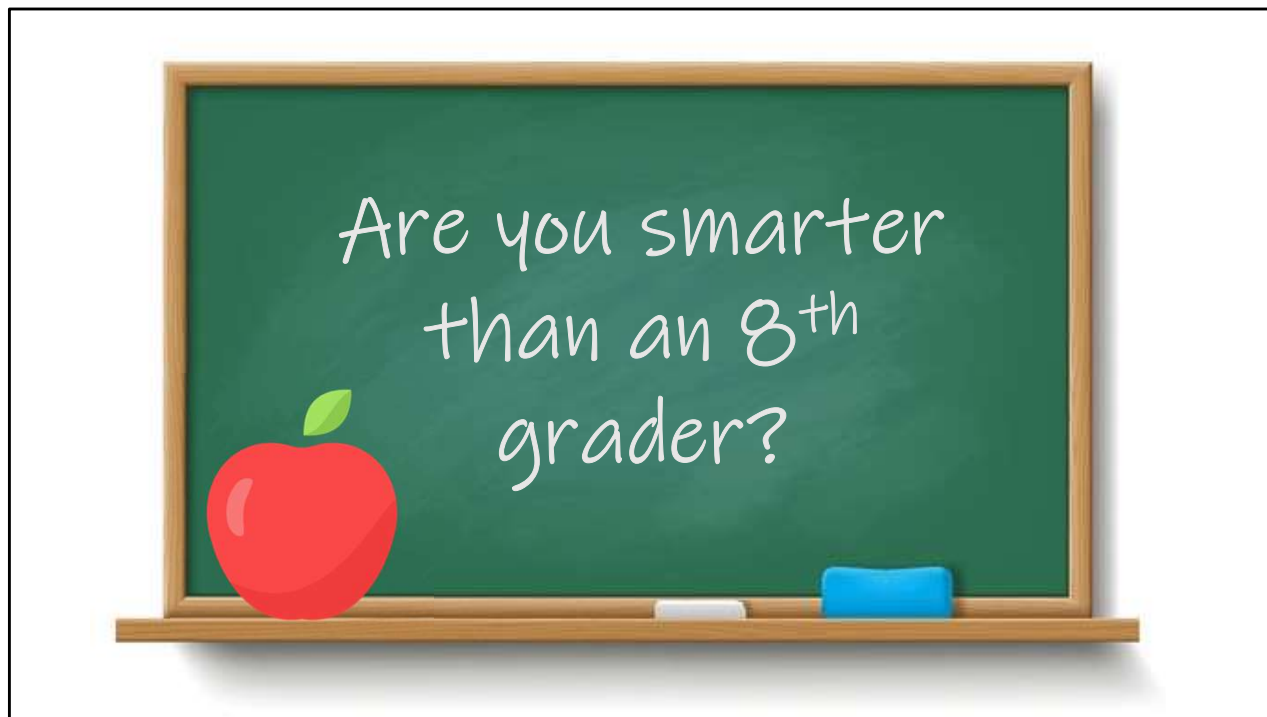
Step **OFF THE ROAD** when needed to give space.

QUESTION #4

As a pedestrian walking along a road, which side are you supposed to walk on?

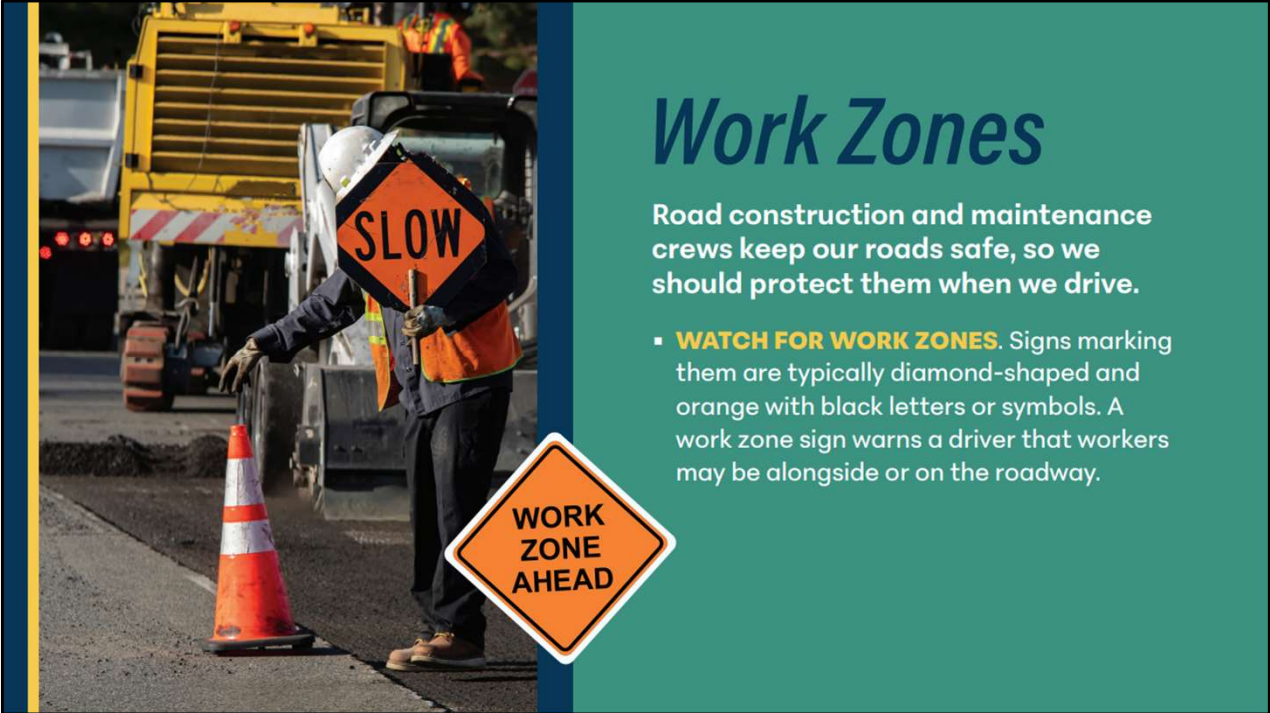
ANSWER

Walk on the **LEFT SIDE** of the road, against the flow of traffic so you can see cars coming.



QUESTION #5 – FINAL QUESTION

What shape and color are work zone signs typically? Like the ones that say “work zone ahead”



Work Zones

Road construction and maintenance crews keep our roads safe, so we should protect them when we drive.

- **WATCH FOR WORK ZONES.** Signs marking them are typically diamond-shaped and orange with black letters or symbols. A work zone sign warns a driver that workers may be alongside or on the roadway.

QUESTION #5

What shape and color are work zone signs typically? Like the ones that say “work zone ahead”

ANSWER

Diamond-shaped, orange with black writing



Here is the QR code to the materials once again if anyone is interested in checking them out.

Thank you again for having me today! Questions?