

# Creative Placemaking for Safer and More Engaging School Routes: A Case Study of Thomas Edison Elementary

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## INTRODUCTION

Every day, children walk to school on streets that lack engaging or interactive elements. While safe, active travel is vital for their well-being, most routes are not designed with children in mind. Creative placemaking—the integration of arts and culture into public space—offers a way to make these routes safer, more playful, and community-driven.

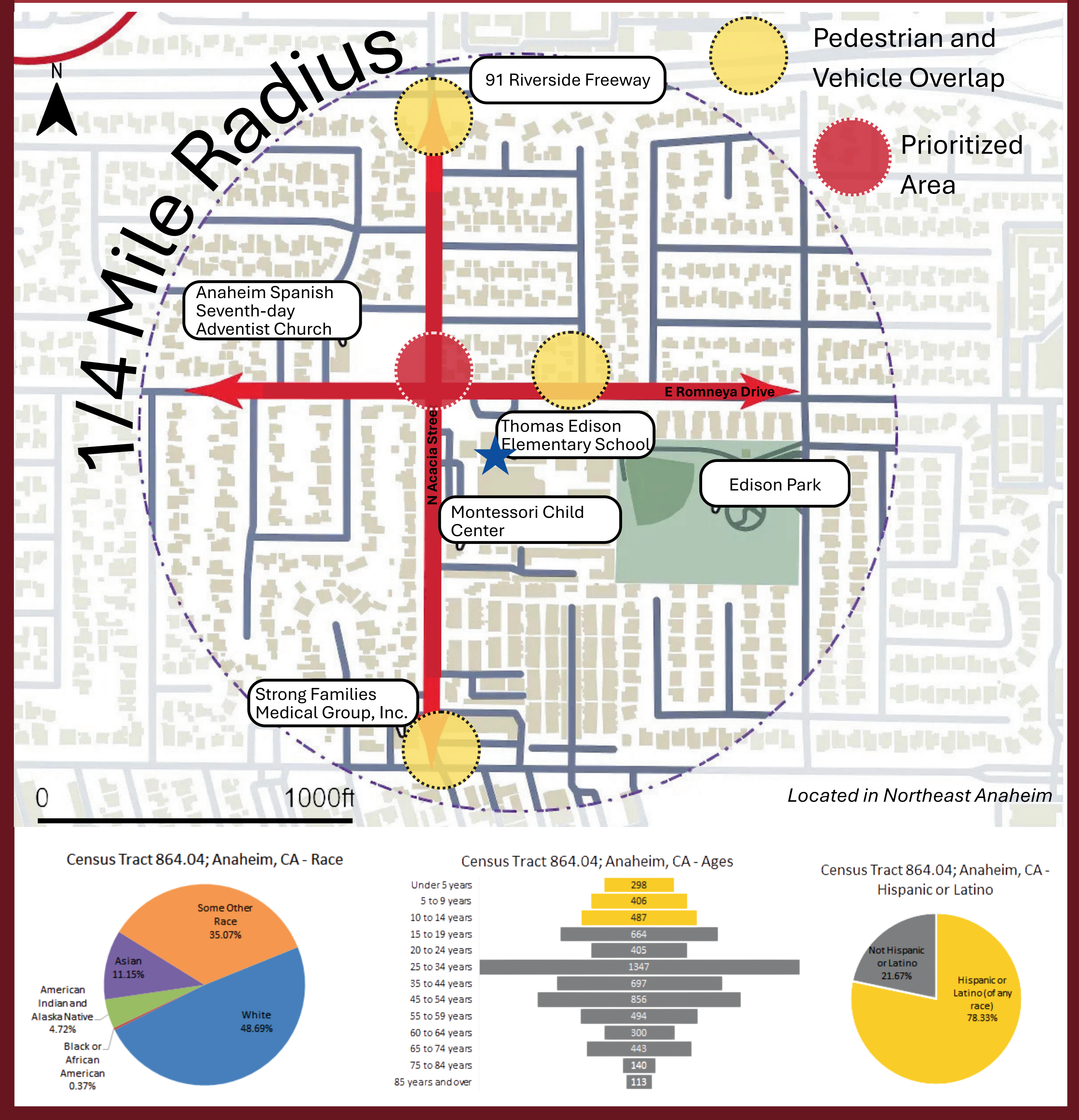
This project focuses on Thomas Edison Elementary in Anaheim, where safety concerns intensified after the tragic death of a 17-year-old near the campus in 2022. As reported by the Voice of OC, the incident spurred local calls for safer, youth-focused streets.

This case study explores how creative placemaking can transform school routes by centering children’s needs, fostering a sense of belonging, and creating opportunities for play.

## RESEARCH QUESTION

Using creative placemaking methods, what artistic elements could enhance safety, promote a sense of belonging, and foster playful, engaging school routes near Thomas Edison Elementary?

## STUDY AREA



## LITERATURE REVIEW HIGHLIGHTS

- **Safety** (*Bloomberg Philanthropies, 2022*).
  - Art on crosswalks led to 27% more drivers yielding to pedestrians, 50% fewer pedestrian-related crashes, and 37% drop in injury-causing collisions.
- **Sense of Ownership & Belonging** (*Water et al., 2020*) & (*NPR, 2024; University of California, 2024*).
  - When kids can share their ideas through art (like drawing), they feel valued and more connected to their environment.

## METHODOLOGY

- **Walk Audit** - Spotted areas where kids and cars mix, key spots for safety and design improvements.
- **SWOT Analysis** - Looked at what's working and what's not to guide smart design choices.
- **Drawings** - Used kids’ and parents’ drawings to shape creative ideas for the street.
- **Survey** - Gathered insights on how residents walk, what they see, and what they like and don’t like.
- **News Articles** - Used to understand local safety concerns and community narratives (Voice of OC).
- **Case Studies** - Looked at global examples of creative streets to inspire playful, safe spaces for kids.

## KEY FINDINGS

**Children and Traffic Overlap** - Child activity was observed at the E Romneya Drive and N Acacia intersection, east of the intersection at the school’s exit, and the 91 Riverside Freeway underpass.

**Prioritized Conflict Area** - The intersection at E Romneya Drive and N Acacia was reiterated within the drawings, survey, and articles as a major concern. Participants described the area as visually dull and uninviting emphasizing the need for more color and vibrancy to make it safer and more engaging for children.

## DRAWINGS



## CASE STUDIES



## RECOMMENDATIONS

### ART INSTALLATIONS

Install tactical urban design features and replicate along La Palma & Acacia and the 91 Freeway underpass to improve safety and visibility. Recommended interventions includes:

- Colorful Crosswalks
- Multilingual Wayfinding Signs
- Playful Pavement Art
- Artistic Seating
- Colorful Lighting Art
- Creative Shading

## STRENGTHEN COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

- Build rapport by continuously hosting co-creation workshops with children, parents, and local artists using art-based activities, like draw-and-tell and Place-It!
- Seek support from City of Anaheim and Anaheim Elementary School District.

## EVALUATING IMPACT

- Gauge emotional and social outcomes through “draw and tell” or photo diaries from students to capture evolving perceptions of safety, play, and belonging.
- Record vehicle speed tracking and driver yield rates before and after installations like colorful crosswalks.

## CONCLUSION

This project demonstrates the value of creative placemaking as a powerful tool to enhance safety, promote a sense of belonging, and foster playful, engaging along school routes. By including children’s voices and cultural identity in the design process, we can transform ordinary streets into vibrant, welcoming spaces that support active and joyful travel to school. With sustained community collaboration, tactical design strategies, and thoughtful evaluation, these efforts can strengthen both physical safety and emotional connection along the streets to Thomas Edison Elementary.

