Trunk-or-treat planning kit

A head start for your PTO or PTA board. Take what's useful and change the rest.

Timeline

10 to 8 weeks out

- [ ] Pick a date and check it against the school calendar
- [ ] Get approval to use the parking lot
  Ask about closing it to traffic, lighting, and who will open and lock up.
- [ ] Choose an event lead

6 weeks out

- [ ] Decide whether it's free or a fundraiser
- [ ] Ask the school about insurance and food rules
- [ ] Share the trunk host and volunteer signup link
  Families decorate their car and bring treats. A count of trunks helps you plan the layout.
- [ ] Add a save the date to the school newsletter

4 to 5 weeks out

- [ ] Plan the parking lot layout
  Leave a clear walking lane, and keep trunk cars parked with engines off once it starts.
- [ ] Plan a table of non-food treats
  Stickers and small toys help kids with food allergies join in.
- [ ] Send the flyer home and post it online
- [ ] Choose extras like a costume parade or photo spot

2 to 3 weeks out

- [ ] Pick a decorating theme or contest
- [ ] Ask families to donate candy
- [ ] Follow up on empty trunks and volunteer spots
- [ ] Plan lighting and traffic control
  Ask the school about lights, cones, and someone at each entrance.
- [ ] Decide on a rain plan
  Some schools move inside to the gym. Decide who makes the call, and how families will hear.

The final week

- [ ] Send trunk hosts their arrival time and spot
- [ ] Send a reminder to families
- [ ] Buy everything on the shopping list
- [ ] Print signs and the lot map
- [ ] Check the forecast and make the rain call

The night

- [ ] Cone off the lot before cars arrive

After the trunk-or-treat

- [ ] Thank trunk hosts and volunteers
- [ ] Record receipts and reimburse anyone who paid
- [ ] Write down what to change next year
  A few quick notes while it's fresh can save next year's board a lot of time.

Volunteer spots

A sample to adapt. Add, cut, or rename spots to suit your school.

Spot	When	People
Lot Setup Cone off the lot, and set up signs and lights.	3:30 PM to 5:00 PM	4
Trunk Hosts Decorate your car and hand out treats.	4:45 PM to 7:30 PM	20
Traffic and Entrances Direct cars and keep the walking lane clear.	4:30 PM to 7:45 PM	4
Welcome Table Greet families and hand out lot maps.	5:15 PM to 7:30 PM	2
Non-Food Treat Table Hand out stickers and small toys.	5:30 PM to 7:30 PM	2
Costume Parade Helper Line up the parade and cheer everyone on.	6:00 PM to 6:45 PM	2
Cleanup Crew Pick up cones, signs, and trash, and leave the lot clean.	7:30 PM to 8:30 PM	5

Sample budget

Placeholder amounts to help you get started, not real prices. Swap in your own numbers.

Item	Example	Our budget
Candy and treats beyond donations	$150	
Decorations and lighting	$80	
Stickers and small toys	$60	
Cones and safety vests	$60	
Trunk contest prizes	$50	
Flyers and signs	$25	
Total	**$425**	

Shopping list

Warehouse club

- [ ] Candy
- [ ] Bottled water
- [ ] Trash bags

Party or dollar store

- [ ] Glow sticks
- [ ] Stickers and small toys
- [ ] Decorations
- [ ] Prizes for the trunk contest

Hardware store

- [ ] Extension cords
- [ ] Battery lanterns
- [ ] Safety vests
- [ ] Flashlights

Office supply store

- [ ] Poster board and markers
- [ ] Tape and zip ties
- [ ] Name tags for volunteers

Easy things to overlook

Engines off
Asking trunk hosts to park early and stay put keeps the lot safe once families arrive.

Lighting
It gets dark early in October. Lanterns and a few bright lights make the walking lane easier to see.

Treats for every child
A non-food treat table lets kids with food allergies join in, and families notice.

A count of trunks
Knowing how many cars are coming lets you plan the layout and send each host a spot.

A rain plan
Some schools move inside to the gym. Deciding early saves a lot of messages on the day.

Want it all in one place?
PineBoard can hold your tasks, volunteers, shopping, and budget together, and copies the plan to next year. Try it free for 60 days at pineboard.app.