



## Safe Routes to School in Action

*Kent County, Maryland*

### Background

With a population of approximately 20,000, Kent County Maryland has 8 schools: 4 elementary, 3 middle and 1 high school. School locations vary throughout the county, with a few schools sited within walking distance for some of the students. Yet, students living within close proximity to school still took the bus or were driven to school. The Kent County Department of Health's chronic disease prevention program saw Safe Routes to School as an opportunity to get children more physically active during their trip to and from school. They identified the key reasons students were not walking to school as: a lack of awareness, safety concerns, and no bike racks. To overcome these barriers, they applied for SRTS funding.

### Details

Kent County put their 2007 Maryland DOT grant of \$67,400 to work immediately by installing bike racks at schools. In addition, the county used the funding to support a variety of noninfrastructure programs including *Walking Wednesdays*, bike and pedestrian safety clinics, and perhaps the most popular, a SRTS poster contest to build awareness and enthusiasm about the program.

In the fall of 2008 *Walking Wednesdays* occurred on 4 consecutive Wednesdays in October, leading up to International Bike and Walk to School Day. School principals met students at locations between a half-mile to a mile from school, where the groups gathered and walked and biked to school. Volunteers were waiting at school to punch frequent biker/walker cards. Once the card was complete, the kids could enter a raffle to win a free bicycle. A Galena Middle School parent shared her enthusiasm for *Walking Wednesdays* when she responded to a program evaluation, "Before I heard about the Safe Routes to School Program, I never thought about sending my daughter to school on her bike. Thank you for starting the *Walking Wednesdays*. I feel better knowing that she is with a chaperone who can keep an eye on her safety." *Walking*



*Wednesdays* were so popular at the three middle schools last year that they will be added at all Kent County elementary schools this year and officials hope to add *Walking Wednesdays* in the spring as well. A program is currently being designed to train parents to chaperone *Walking Wednesdays*.

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"The students have really taken to the Safe Routes to School Program you started. They look forward to the safety clinics you provide, and are eager to participate in your contests including the poster calendar contest and the frequent walker rewards program. All of the kids talk about winning the bikes, step counters, and other great prizes you have offered. Thank you, and please keep up the good work!"

- Kent County Public School teacher

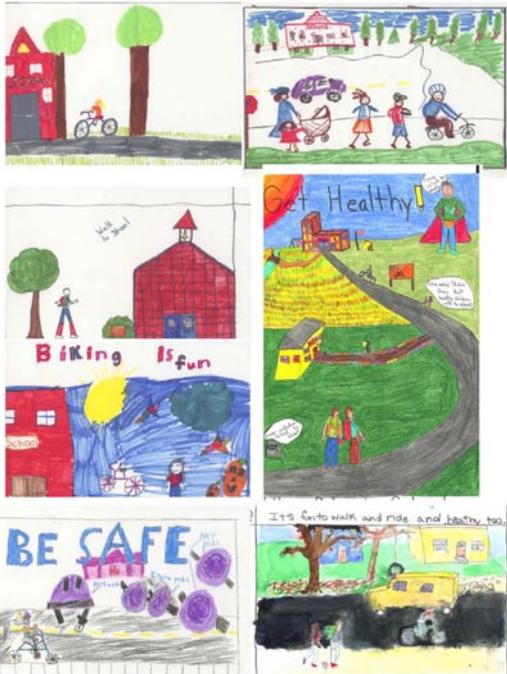
School personnel noticed that many more children were riding bikes to school after the installation of bike racks, but not all students were wearing helmets. A local community traffic safety officer hosted safety clinics at the schools to highlight safe pedestrian practices and focus on the importance of wearing bicycle helmets. A portion of the SRTS grant was used to purchase helmets to give away for any child within biking distance of the school who completed the safety clinic. School administrators, teachers, and parents see more children wearing helmets and that the bike racks are full. So full in fact, that current grant funding is being used to provide schools with additional bike racks.

Lastly, all elementary and middle school students were encouraged to enter a Safe Routes to School poster contest highlighting the benefits of biking and walking to school. The poster contest winners had their poster inserted into the county school

calendar, which had a profound impact on awareness and enthusiasm about the Safe Routes to School program, among children and parents.



Congratulations to last year's winners of the Safe Routes to School Poster Contest



From Top Left to Right, Mary Cate Parent, Wornton Elementary School, Grade 1, Kelin Ruiz, Galena Middle School, Grade 7, Darrian Jones, Wornton Elementary School, Grade 4, Emma Harvey, Chestertown Middle School, Grade 7, Barbara Kilby, HH Garnett Elementary School, Grade 2, Alysa Kendall, Millington Elementary School, Grade 4, Samantha Collier, Rock Hall Middle School, Grade 5



### Continued Success

Kent County is currently using a second round of funding, \$72,800, from MD DOT to expand the already successful noninfrastructure projects as well as to install sidewalks, crosswalks, and “no parking” signage in front of one middle school.

Future funding will help Kent County address a lack of sidewalks around one elementary school. Due to safety concerns about the lack of sidewalks, the elementary currently bans children from walking to school, even though most children live within one mile to school. School and county officials hope to be able to lift the ban after addressing the safety concerns and to continue promoting healthy behaviors among all school children in Kent, Maryland.

### Contact Information

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