



Safe Routes to School Local Stories: Addressing Community Needs

You probably rode your bicycle or walked to school, because approximately half of kids used to do this in 1969. Unfortunately, today, only 13% of schoolchildren walk or bicycle to school. As a result, kids today are less active and healthy. Federal funding is provided for Safe Routes to School projects such as sidewalks, bike lanes, pathways and educational programs. To keep this program growing, the Safe Routes to School National Partnership leads national efforts to promote safe walking and bicycling to and from schools, and in everyday life, to improve the health and well-being of America's children and to foster the creation of livable, sustainable communities.

Reducing crime

- In Martinsburg, WV, federal Safe Routes to School funding of less than \$150,000 provided students with a safe place to walk away from a site of regular drug and crime activity. Students using this pathway are now better protected from drug traffic, criminal activity and vandalism in the area, making it safer for them as they walk and bicycle to and from school. As an added bonus, more students are walking and bicycling to school now that the path has been installed.
- Flagstaff, AZ cleaned up a local park where children were being exposed to drug deals, gang activity and public drunkenness on their walks and rides to and from school. The health department received more than \$100,000 in SRTS funding for encouragement and education projects in the classroom. The department also formed a walking school bus and set up a local police substation to help students feel safer when walking and bicycling to school. Parents and students report that they are now more comfortable on the walk and ride to and from school.
- Students at an Alameda County, CA school located near busy streets with gang violence felt unsafe walking and bicycling to school. A community partnership of local merchants that were located along these streets made signs letting students know that the establishment was a safe place, where they could duck into quickly if they felt like they were in trouble. This was an effective approach in removing a safety barrier that kept students from walking and bicycling to school.

Reducing carbon emissions and air pollutants

- Ten walking school bus routes in Columbia, MO, organized by the PedNet Coalition, have significantly reduced carbon emissions and air pollutants as 350 registered students who used to be driven to school are now walking or bicycling. The result is a reduction of 40,000 miles driven to school each year, producing 19 fewer tons of the greenhouse gas carbon dioxide and 1 less ton of other air pollutants. Approximately 20 to 30 percent of participants also walk or bicycle home from school, further increasing the environmental impact.
- Hillrise Elementary in Las Cruces, NM conducted a pilot to document the environmental impact of reducing car trips to school as more children walk and bicycle to school. A survey showed a 7.3 percentage point reduction in trips to school made by parents, equivalent to 38 fewer cars arriving at school each morning to drop children off. Assuming an average trip length of three-quarters of a mile one-way, that is a reduction of 5,130 miles driven on trips to school throughout the school year—which equates to a reduction of 2 tons of carbon dioxide and 283 pounds of other harmful pollutants. Starting off with just a few students walking and bicycling can still make a huge difference in a community. The city was so impressed with the initial pilot results that they are expanding Safe Routes to School efforts throughout the entire school district.
- Three elementary schools in Longmont, CO average a total of 414 children walking or bicycling both to and from school each day—one-third of the student population. This saves parents close to 150,000 miles of driving, which equates to a savings of 68 tons of carbon dioxide and 4 tons of other pollutants.

Improving traffic safety

- Highland Park, MI prioritized a number of infrastructure improvements, including sidewalk repair, replacement and installation, demolition of abandoned buildings and cleanup of vacant lots. Federal funding was awarded in late 2008 in the amount of \$900,000 to construct the infrastructure improvements and close to \$54,000 for traffic safety education, volunteer recruitment and encouragement activities. Safety has improved with uniformed parent crossing guards help students safely cross streets, and adults are more visible on the street during arrival and dismissal times. Older students are regularly walking together with younger students, and the police have increased their presence around the schools and in the neighborhoods.
- Burlington is a small rural Wyoming town with one-third of students living within one and a half miles of school. Even for students who live relatively close to school, the roads are unpaved gravel, there are just a few street lights scattered through town and the only sidewalks in town run for just five blocks along the high-speed state highway that bisects the town. With a little more than \$365,000 in SRTS funding, sidewalks have been built and students no longer have to walk along the high-speed state highway or in the middle of gravel roads. A 2009 survey showed that about 44 percent of kids now walk to school and that 14 percent of children have switched from walking to bicycling now that sidewalks are available.
- The Miami-Dade County school board in Florida mandates that all students in the school system receive pedestrian education through the WalkSafe program. As part of the program, the WalkSafe organization also collects incident reports from elementary schools to identify traffic and built environment dangers. Through teaching children pedestrian safety and making needed infrastructure improvements around schools, there has been a 43 percent decrease in the total number of children ages 0-14 hit by cars in Miami-Dade County since 2001.

Increasing physical activity

- A Seattle, WA study evaluated the impact of a walking school bus on students walking to school in a low-income, urban neighborhood. At the participating school, three walking school buses were developed and maintained. Distances ranged from 0.3 to 1.5 miles long and took 15-40 minutes from start to finish. After 12 months of the intervention, the number of students who walked to the school increased from 20% to 25%.
- \$270,000 in SRTS funding helped fund encouragement and education programs at several elementary schools in Longmont and Boulder, CO areas. Before the program began at one of the elementary schools, only about a dozen children were bicycling to school regularly. By the end of the school year, the program averaged 60 participants per day, a five-fold increase.
- The school wellness policy for Christina School District in Delaware states that all schools will work toward 150 minutes of physical activity per week. Safe Routes to School is a program they use to help meet this goal. The physical education teacher at one of the local elementary schools reports that all the infrastructure improvements and encouragement activities have really paid off, revealed in a noticeable decrease in the number of students being driven to school.

Building community and local government partnerships

- Alameda County, CA passed a transportation sales tax measure that funds SRTS programs –both for engineering improvements that make it safer to walk and bicycle to and from school and for encouragement and education activities that promote walking and bicycling. This is a great example of a local county group leveraging additional money for SRTS. Alameda County has also been successful developing partnerships between schools and law enforcement, health departments, public works, neighborhood associations, community organizations and advocacy groups. These partnerships can help engage organizations and businesses in removing the barriers that keep students from safely walking and bicycling to school.

- Sponsored by the Cascade Bicycle Club in Seattle, WA, the Major Taylor Project is a collaborative grassroots partnership of youth agencies, schools and bicycle educators. They have created a multicultural bicycling community where teenagers have the opportunity to spend time outdoors on a bicycle. With the support of a two-year grant of \$20,000 provided by the Group Health Cooperative, a Seattle-based nonprofit health care system, the Cascade Bicycle Club opened Major Taylor clubs at a high school and several community organizations. In the year since the clubs began, 90 percent of active club participants have each completed more than 1,400 miles of riding.
- Last year, Brockton, MA had more than 6,100 students from 5 elementary schools walk to school during twenty sessions in the fall and spring. The success of the SRTS program in Brockton is largely due to their involved group of community partners, from the school staff; the superintendent, to the principals, to the teachers to the crossing guards to the parents, to officials in the city of Brockton. They have the support of the Mayor, Brockton Police Department, Old Colony Planning Council, Chartwells Food Service, Harvard Pilgrim Health Care Foundation, the Brockton Enterprise and Walk Boston just to name a few. The schools have also noticed less traffic congestion and parking issues as they implement SRTS with their community partners.
- Decatur, GA kept their SRTS program going after a pilot project grant ran out by integrating the program within the City's active living division. They also incorporated SRTS engineering improvement requests into their capital projects lists. City staff have really taken ownership of the SRTS program. When they first started out 10 years ago, advocates had to explain the basics of Safe Routes to School. But now SRTS is becoming ingrained in city programs, and many infrastructure needs are being looked at from the Safe Routes to School perspective. Local level partnerships such as these really help create sustainable SRTS programs.

Reducing bus transportation costs

- The city of Auburn, WA's transportation department saves \$240,000 each year in personnel and fuel costs by reducing hazard bus service. It uses some of its municipal funds to make improvements around schools, such as signage, traffic calming, sidewalks and paths, and writes grant applications for programs like Safe Routes to School to secure additional funding to make larger-scale upgrades and improvements. Overall, the improvements made now mean that 20 percent of students (2,800 children) live within safe walking areas and no longer need to be bused to school.
- An Alexandria, VA neighborhood school was adjacent to an active construction site as the community continued to expand, and out of safety concerns, provided hazard busing to all students living within a one-mile radius of the school. In 2008, construction was winding down so parents asked school administrators to rescind the busing policy and allow walking and bicycling to that the school. The parents' request was aided by the fact that tight school budgets would be aided by reductions in busing costs. As a result, the school principal and the assistant school superintendent rescinded the hazard busing policy so that children could start walking and bicycling to school--a win-win situation for students and the school budget.

Overcoming barrier of distance to school

- In 2009, the rural community of Crete, NE implemented a "No Child Left Inside" project to encourage kids and parents to get outdoors and move more, since long distances to school can make it hard for children to walk or bicycle to school. Crete Elementary School hosted two walk and bicycle to school days where college athletes and high school students safely walked kids to school from two locations. Students who rode the bus and had a parent's permission were dropped off at one of the two walking school bus sites so they could join the walk to school. More than 200 students participated in the fall and spring events.
- To overcome the challenge of distance to school in a rural area, Round Valley Primary School in Springerville, AZ identified a "park and walk" route from Springerville Park to the school, using developed park trails, sidewalks and crosswalks. This route is available to families and students at all times, not just

for designated walk events. A First Wednesday Walk program was developed and continued through 2009 school year. In 2010, they have doubled the number of walk events, holding two per month, with the support of local businesses, community groups and high school organizations.

- Many urban school districts struggle with distance to school issues because kids don't go to school near their homes. Because of this, in New York City many students take public transportation, and walk or bicycle to the nearest transit stop. The New York City Department of Transportation has developed six "Safety City" facilities throughout the five city boroughs to deal with this barrier of distance to school as students maneuver through several modes of transportation on their trips to and from school. These facilities provide more than 50,000 children a year with hands-on experience and practical lessons in how to make safe choices when walking to and from school, taking public transportation, riding in a car or riding a bicycle.