



Safe Routes to School

Program and policy strategies

Policy Brief | August 2009

Increased physical activity is associated with better academic performance, concentration and classroom behavior.¹ Research shows that school-age children who have opportunities to engage in physical activity are more likely to focus on academic subjects in the classroom.² Thus, students who travel to school by walking, bicycling or using other physically active forms of transportation (including skates, skateboards and non-motorized scooters) may come to school more ready to learn. Supporting active and safe transportation to and from school through local school board policy provides an opportunity to increase daily physical activity and reinforce positive health and academic outcomes among youth (see CSBA's sample board policy and administrative regulation BP/AR 5142.2 – Safe Routes to School Program).

Over the past few decades, the number of students who walk and bicycle to and from school has been declining. A study conducted by the U.S. Department of Transportation's Federal Highway Administration found that the number of students ages 5 to 18 who walk and/or bicycle to and from school decreased almost 70 percent in 30 years, from 42 percent in 1969 to only 13 percent in 2001.³ A number of recent studies have associated the decline in active transportation to and from school with larger public health and safety concerns, such as physical inactivity, obesity, poor air quality, traffic congestion and collisions.⁴

The Safe Routes to School federal grant program (SRTS) and state grant program (SR2S) are designed to make it easy, safe and enjoyable for students to walk and bicycle to and from school on a daily basis.⁵ This policy brief provides information about these programs and ways that school districts/county offices of education (COEs) can become involved in increasing active transportation to and from school.

HOW TO GET STARTED

School districts/COEs can begin developing Safe Routes to School programs by establishing a multidisciplinary team with parent organizations, students, school administrators and staff, local law enforcement, city planners, health officials and other stakeholders. The group can assist with realizing a community vision, developing project proposals and implementing those projects if selected for funding.

There are a variety of resources, as well as examples of successful programs, available to assist districts/COEs and communities in designing and implementing Safe Routes to School programs.

The Federal Highway Administration, the federal agency that oversees the SRTS program, recommends that program implementation address the “5 E's”— education, encouragement, enforcement, engineering and evaluation as outlined below. Some of these strategies could be implemented by districts/COEs on their own, while others would more likely be implemented by city/county agencies or other program partners.

Education

Education projects may include teaching students and adults about the range of transportation choices; increasing awareness of the benefits of active transportation, including health and environmental benefits; instructing them in pedestrian, bicycle and personal safety skills; launching driver safety campaigns in the vicinity of schools; and involving parents and other partners in safety education programs. Students should receive pedestrian and bicycle safety education prior to implementing encouragement events and activities, as discussed below.

For a comprehensive online guide designed to support the development of Safe Routes to School programs, including key strategies for implementing the 5 E's, visit www.saferoutesinfo.org/guide.



Encouragement

Special events and activities help focus attention and build excitement around walking or bicycling to and from school. For example, districts/COEs can:

- *Join International Walk to School day/month.* This event, held annually in October, involves planning a schoolwide Walk To School day/month with students, parents, school administrators, local city/county officials, law enforcement, public works, community organizations and/or businesses.
- *Organize or support ongoing efforts to encourage active transportation to and from school.* This may involve small groups of students and parents walking, bicycling or using other forms of active transportation to and from school, arranging to meet other parents or students at a central location to walk or bicycle to school on (a) particular day(s) of the week (e.g., walk to school Wednesdays) or year-round competitions.

For more information on Walk to School activities, visit:

- California Walk to School Headquarters at www.cawalktoschool.com
- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Kids Walk-to-School Web site at www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/kidswalk
- The International Walk to School in the USA Web site at www.walktoschool.org
- The International Walk to School Web site at www.iwalktoschool.org

- *Start a "walking school bus" or a "bicycle train."* This involves one or more adults supervising a group of students to and/or from school by foot or bicycle. Parents often share the responsibility of escorting students.

For more information on walking school buses or bicycle trains, visit:

- The Pedestrian and Bicycle Information Center at www.walkingschoolbus.org
- The National Center for Safe Routes to School at www.saferoutesinfo.org/guide/encouragement/walking_school_bus_or_bicycle_train.cfm

- *Build support of parents and the community through publicity and information about the district's/COE's efforts.* For example, a district or school newsletter, Web site and/or parent notifications about transportation options can be used to distribute information about the district's/COE's Safe Routes to School program.

Enforcement

The goal of Safe Routes to School enforcement strategies is to ensure that all drivers, bicyclists and pedestrians are obeying traffic laws and sharing the road safely. This can be done by initiating or expanding crossing guard programs, student safety patrols or parent safety patrols; partnering with local law enforcement to ensure traffic laws are obeyed in the vicinity of schools (e.g., enforcement of speed limits, drivers yielding to pedestrians at crossings); and ensuring that students wear helmets when they bicycle or use skateboards, skates or non-motorized scooters in accordance with law.

Engineering

A growing body of evidence is emerging that links student physical activity behaviors to infrastructure around the school, such as the availability of bicycle lanes and sidewalks.^{6, 7, 8}

- *Organize or support infrastructure improvements in and around existing school sites.* A multidisciplinary, communitywide team (e.g., parents, students, school staff, neighbors, engineers, police, etc.) can help inventory and identify infrastructure needs around schools. This assessment can be done by conducting "walkability" and/or "bikeability" audits, which will identify barriers that make it difficult for students to travel to and from school safely. Also, there may be improvements that districts/COEs can make on school sites that facilitate students' active transport to and from school. For example, an assessment of school sites may indicate the need for more bicycle racks or for relocation of existing racks to be safer or more accessible. Once the team has obtained that information, they should address any barriers by seeking out resources and proposing alternative solutions. It is important to adopt the best alternative that proposes short-term and long-term safety solutions.
- *Consider "walkability" and "bikeability" when building new school sites.* When selecting a site for building a new school, there is an opportunity to consider how the infrastructure is built and the proximity of the school to the community to support active transportation to and from school.

For useful tools to assist with walkability or bikeability audits, download the following:

- Walkability Checklist:
www.walkableamerica.org/checklist-walkability.pdf
- Bikeability Checklist:
www.bicyclinginfo.org/pdf/bikabilitychecklist.pdf
- Also visit the Pedestrian and Bicycle Information Center for further information and training on health and safety engineering, access and mobility issues related to pedestrians and bicyclists at www.pedbikeinfo.org

Evaluation

In any Safe Routes to School program, evaluation is important in identifying problems and potential solutions to ensure resources are being used effectively and the program is achieving the desired impact. Moreover, data collected and shared can influence future funding of the program.

Some indicators that can be used to assess program implementation and progress toward program goals include levels of participation in promotional and educational events and activities; a survey of parent attitudes about allowing their child to walk or bicycle to and from school; tallies of the numbers of students using various modes of travel to and from school; records of student attendance and on-time arrival; and injury data within the school and/or district/COE attendance boundary.

To assist with program evaluation, the National Center for Safe Routes to School has developed a standardized parent survey and student tally forms for recording the modes of travel that students use before and after program implementation. NCSRTS also provides data analysis and report preparation of parent surveys and student tallies. Use of these instruments is required for programs that are funded by a SRTS grant and may be used by other districts/COEs as well.

The NCSRTS Parent Survey, Student Travel Tally forms and evaluation worksheets are available at www.saferoutesinfo.org/guide/evaluation/appendices.cfm.

GETTING THE PROJECT FUNDED

Safe Routes to School programs can benefit from a combination of local, state, federal and private funding.

State and federal grants

There are two separate grant programs administered by the California Department of Transportation (CalTRANS). For more information, visit the CalTRANS Safe Routes to School Web site at www.dot.ca.gov/hq/LocalPrograms/saferoutes/saferoutes.htm.

- **State program.** California's SR2S program is primarily an infrastructure program (e.g., engineering projects), with up to 10 percent of expenditures allowable for non-infrastructure activities (e.g., education, encouragement, and/or enforcement activities). Projects funded by the program are intended to improve the safety of students who walk or bicycle to and from school. Infrastructure improvements must be made on public property in the vicinity of K–12 schools. Improvements can be made on public school grounds providing the cost is incidental to the overall cost of the project. Only incorporated cities and counties are eligible to apply for the SR2S program; therefore, it is very important that school districts/COEs, local school site staff and parents work together with their city or county to maximize the benefit of the program funding. The SR2S grant guidelines recommend that city and county applicants partner with school districts/COEs in the development of a comprehensive and unified solution to bicycle/pedestrian infrastructure needs and submittal of an SR2S grant application. The state of California has provided approximately \$24 million per year for the SR2S program since 2000. Ongoing funding for this program is a part of annual state budget negotiations.
- **Federal program.** The federal SRTS program funding is available through CalTRANS and provides funding for both infrastructure projects (70 percent of the funding) and non-infrastructure projects (30 percent of the funding). Applications must be comprehensive by including all of the 5 E's described above. State, local and regional agencies experienced in meeting federal transportation requirements are eligible to apply. Other entities including non-profit organizations, school districts/COEs, public health departments and Native American tribes must partner with a city, county or metropolitan planning organization to serve as the responsible agency for their project. California spent \$68 million in federal SRTS funds through a 2005 federal transportation bill. Future funding is contingent upon a new transportation bill.

Other funding sources

There are many other transportation funding sources which can be used to support Safe Routes to School projects. District/COE representatives and parents should work closely with cities and counties to identify priority needs and develop a funding plan. Some potential sources include:

- **Local funds.** Each city and county has general funds which are often used for transportation purposes. In addition, many California cities and counties have transportation sales tax revenues which might be eligible for Safe Routes to School projects.
- **Safety funding.** The state administers Highway Safety Improvement Program funding which can be used for Safe Routes to School projects in areas where there have been high numbers of collisions.
- **Bicycle transportation account.** This CalTRANS-administered program provides funding for bicycle facilities which can be used for Safe Routes to School efforts that facilitate bicycling to school.
- **Regional transportation plan funds.** Each school is located within a region which is governed by a Metropolitan Planning Organization or a Regional Transportation Planning Agency. These entities develop long-range transportation plans which could include funding for Safe Routes to School. For example, the San Francisco Bay Area's organization—the Metropolitan Transportation Commission, adopted a plan with \$10 million per year for Safe Routes to School funding.
- **Community-based foundations:** Check with local community foundations, rotary clubs and other local funding sources about the possibility of applying for funding for Safe Routes to School programs. These entities might be able to fund education and encouragement activities.

For more ideas about funding Safe Routes to School programs, visit the Active Living Resource Center at www.activelivingresources.org/saferoutestoschool6.php

San Diego case study

The City of La Mesa collaborated with the La Mesa-Spring Valley School District, Grossmont Union High School District, Helix Charter High School, the County of San Diego, various community-based organizations and community members to change nutrition and physical activity environments. This multi-sector partnership included a Safe Routes to School and walkability project where local high school students mapped obstacles to safe travel in the west La Mesa area encompassing high-density, ethnically diverse and lower income neighborhoods.

The students created a Web site and photo essay boards that showed the need for improved pedestrian access around a local charter high school and made a presentation to the school district, city council and the city's Youth Advisory Commission. Their efforts resulted in a SRTS grant that allowed the partnership to add sidewalks, lighting and landscaping around Helix Charter High School. The continuing work of the city's Youth Advisory Commission led to two additional grants for sidewalks along a common route to an elementary school and for a multi-faceted walking incentive program at six elementary and two middle schools. This case study highlights how collaboration between multiple sectors results in community improvements that positively impact the health of the community's children and families.

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For Safe Routes to School Case Studies from Around the Country, visit http://drusilla.hsrb.unc.edu/cms/downloads/srts_case_studies.pdf

THE SCHOOL BOARD'S ROLE

School boards play an important role in encouraging and facilitating physical activity opportunities in schools, including Safe Routes to School, through each of their major areas of responsibility: setting direction, establishing structure for the district/COE, providing support to district/COE staff during program implementation, ensuring program accountability and providing community leadership.

Setting direction for the community's schools

In establishing a vision, the board has an opportunity to emphasize the importance of student safety and well-being. The board can:

- Develop an understanding among the governance team of the importance of before- and after-school physical activity opportunities, such as Safe Routes to School and the link to academic learning.
- Set specific district/COE goals related to student wellness and physical activity.
- Involve the district/COE, school staff, parents, students, local agencies and community members in establishing goals for the Safe Routes to School program.

Establishing an effective and efficient structure for the district or county office of education

The board must ensure that the district/COE has resources and a structure necessary to implement high-quality programs and policies. While the board does not implement programs and policies, the board can:

- Adopt policy that supports and encourages walking and bicycling to school (see CSBA sample BP/AR 5142.2 – Safe Routes to School Program) and ensure alignment of this policy with the district's/COE's vision and goals and related policies (e.g., BP/AR 3510 – Green School Operations, BP 3540 – Transportation, BP 5030 – Student Wellness and BP/AR 5142 – Safety).
- Establish age-appropriate curricular goals to educate students on the importance of physical activity and walking and bicycling safely.
- Ensure that the board's decisions regarding school schedules support adequate time for students to walk and bicycle to and from school.
- Ensure that the district/COE is looking into funding opportunities, such as working with the city or county governments on SRTS/SR2S grant applications or looking into other local funding opportunities.
- Consider walkability, bikeability and other forms of active transportation to school when making decisions about siting and design of new schools.

Providing support

After establishing the structure, boards can support the superintendent's and staff's implementation of the district's/COE's Safe Routes to School policies and programs in a variety of ways. The board can:

- Encourage district's/COE's governance team to serve as role models by engaging in regular physical activity and promoting and participating in walk and bicycle to school events.
- Appoint board representatives to sit on a Safe Routes to School committee to provide input on development, implementation and evaluation strategies.

Ensuring accountability to the public

As community representatives, boards are accountable to the public for the district's/COE's progress toward established goals. Boards establish systems and processes to monitor and evaluate results and communicate that progress to the local community. In evaluating and assessing progress toward Safe Routes to School program goals, the board can:

- Work with the superintendent or designee to identify evaluation data that can be useful to help evaluate program effectiveness and guide program planning.
- Schedule regular reports to the board, program partners and the public from the superintendent or designee.
- Recommend program modifications, if needed.
- Review and revise Safe Routes to School policies, as needed.

Acting as community leaders

Boards have a responsibility to act as community leaders and involve the community in meaningful ways in efforts to promote children's education and health. Regarding Safe Routes to School, the board can:

- Identify community stakeholders and initiate or participate in a multidisciplinary team of partners (e.g., local government agencies, health organizations, district and school staff, students, parents and parent organizations and/or businesses) committed to working together on providing Safe Routes to School.
- Collaborate with community partners on Safe Routes to School program planning, implementation and evaluation.
- Promote the district's/COE's Safe Routes to School activities in order to build support of parents, students and the community.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

California School Boards Association provides policy briefs, sample board policies and administrative regulations and other publications and resources on Safe Routes to School, student wellness, community collaboration on youth services, physical education and physical activity.

www.csba.org

California Project LEAN (Leaders Encouraging Activity and Nutrition) focuses on youth and parent empowerment, policy and environmental change strategies, and community-based solutions to increase healthy eating and physical activity. CPL provides technical assistance, training and tools on developing, implementing and monitoring school wellness policies.

www.CaliforniaProjectLEAN.org

National Center for Safe Routes to School assists communities in enabling and encouraging children to safely walk and bike to school. The center strives to equip Safe Routes to School programs with the knowledge and technical information to implement safe and successful strategies.

www.saferoutesinfo.org

Safe Routes to School National Partnership is a fast-growing network of hundreds of organizations, government agencies and professional groups working to set goals, share best practices, secure funding, and provide educational materials to agencies that implement Safe Routes to School programs.

www.saferoutespartnership.org

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CSBA and CPL would like to thank the Safe Routes to School National Partnership and WalkSanDiego for their assistance reviewing this document.

Support for this project was provided by a grant from The California Endowment and the Vitamin Cases Consumer Settlement Fund. The purpose of the Fund, created as a result of an antitrust class action, is to improve the health and nutrition of California consumers.