



## **Safe Routes to School in Action**

*Spartanburg, South Carolina*

### **Background**

Based in the car-centric Southeast, Pine Street Elementary School in Spartanburg, South Carolina is making great strides getting their students out of cars and hitting the pavement. Pine Street Elementary School has a student population of 750, kindergarten to grade 6. Even though approximately 50% of the students live within a mile and half from school, survey results from 2007 report that only 13% of students walk to school, 1% ride a bike, 10% take the bus, while 67% are driven in a car and 15% of students travel to school in a van or other form of transportation.

Pine Street Elementary and the Partners for Active Living join forces to increase physical activity for students and decrease traffic congestion at drop-off and pick-up hours. After more than eight years of successful Walk to School day events and minor engineering improvements, Pine Street Elementary School implemented a comprehensive Safe Routes to School program and applied for federal funding. In 2008 the Pine Street Elementary SRTS program received a \$200,000 grant from the South Carolina Department of Transportation. \$180,000 of the grant supports infrastructure improvement while \$20,000 of the grant supports noninfrastructure program development.

### **Details**

During the 2008-2009 school year, Pine Street Elementary School implemented catchy school-based programs to get more children and their families active: W3, B2 and P3, also known as Walking & Wheeling Wednesdays, Breathe Better, and Pine's Pedometer Program.

W3, or Walking & Wheeling Wednesday, was a tremendous success in its first season with more than 150 students participating each week, despite an extremely rainy spring. Based on the national model, each Wednesday students were encouraged to walk or bicycle from home. Additionally, to cut down on vehicle congestion and encourage walking to school for children that live further away, a park-and-walk program was also implemented. Businesses near school allowed families to park their car and walk their children to school. All designated park-and-walk stops were located within a half mile of school. Every fourth week of participation in W3, students received an incentive. These awards, purchased with SRTS noninfrastructure funding, included W3 water bottles, back packs and umbrellas. There were also weekly drawings for coveted prizes like pedometers and iPods. At the end of the school year, students who walked each Wednesday of the program were entered in a drawing for one of six bicycles.



photo credit: Mary Black Foundation

W3 Logo (left) Pine Street students participate in Walking & Wheeling Wednesdays (right)

Pine Street Elementary joined forces with South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control on a program called Breathe Better, B2. B2 reinforced SRTS principles and encouraged ‘no idling’ as a means to reduce emissions in the school area. Pine Street Elementary PE teacher and SRTS coordinator Jane Abbott commented, “We believe that partnering ‘no idling’ with our reduction in traffic due to increases in students walking to or from school or the park and walk sites has really made a difference in the air quality of our area.”

Finally, P3, also known as Pine’s Pedometer Program introduced the students and their families to pedometers in mass. Purchasing over 900 pedometers with SRTS grant money, the program encouraged walking as part of the student’s and his or her family’s everyday life. Over one hundred students registered online with the “Log It” program sponsored by PE Central. These students amassed over 3 million steps in the final three months of school. Certificates were provided to everyone that participated.

In addition to encouraging more walking and bicycling, Pine Street SRTS organizers also focused on increasing students’ understanding of safe pedestrian and bicyclist habits. The school piloted Toole Design Group’s pedestrian safety curriculum, which was developed for the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. The piloted safety curriculum lessons were added into physical education classes and taught through implementation. According to Pine Street’s Jane Abbott, “We have seen tremendous success with this education program. The students are learning practical lessons that they can immediately implement on their walk to or from school.”

While the noninfrastructure pieces are garnering the most attention, the majority of the school’s federal funding was used to improve the pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure near the school. Smaller infrastructure projects include new bicycle racks, improved crosswalk markings and the addition of overhead warning flashers on the major thoroughfare near the school. But, this grant has also provided Spartanburg with the opportunity to make more substantial changes including the redesign of a five point intersection and a sidewalk connecting nearby neighborhoods to the front of the school. The five point intersection, located one block from the school campus, had been identified as a major barrier for parents to allow their children to walk or bike to school. Infrastructure improvements at the intersection have added stop signs, crosswalks and

flashing lights to slow traffic and provide safe crossings for children. Additionally, sidewalk improvements are being made on school campus to provide safe routes for children who live a stone's throw from school. Currently, these children have to walk on the vehicle driveway when approaching the front door of the school because there are no sidewalks.

### **What's Next**

Before the Safe Routes to School program in Spartanburg, few parents considered letting their child walk to school. A significant portion of Pine Street Elementary students and their families now enjoy walking and bicycling to school. This is a growing trend in Spartanburg. "While at a social gathering, I had an acquaintance tell me how she and her son walk to school regularly," said Laura Ringo, director of Partners for Active Living. "This is a signal that walking and bicycling are becoming more accepted and mainstream."

The school's successes are being touted throughout the Palmetto state. According to South Carolina Safe Routes to School coordinator Patti Sistrunk, "Pine Street Elementary has established a model program. As more South Carolina schools are funded over the next few years, I expect that they will mimic the initiatives that have worked so well at Pine Street."

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