



CASE STUDY: GREATER WASHINGTON DC REGION

Collaborating internally and utilizing partners for Safe Routes to School Montgomery County, MD

The Montgomery County Safe Routes to School program works closely with the internal roadway and pedestrian safety program to comprehensively address safety around schools. The coordinator partners with law enforcement, the local bicycle organization and Safe Kids to create sustainability and broaden the program reach. For the first time in 2012, the program addressed the needs at a local high school with a safety campaign “Hey you, I’m looking at you!”

Background

The Montgomery County Safe Routes to School program has been in existence since 2007 and is staffed by a full time coordinator. While the program receives state Safe Routes to School funding, the coordinator position is supported locally through the county general fund at 60 percent. Montgomery County has prioritized pedestrian safety, including Safe Routes to School with significant results.

Safe Routes to School activities are consistent with Montgomery County Public Schools Wellness: Physical and Nutritional Health Regulation. The Regulation states “The Department of Transportation assesses and makes information available regarding safe routes for walking or biking to school. MCPS Regulation EEA-RA: Student Transportation encourages students and families to model wellness by walking for exercise.”

Program Implementation

Starting in 2005, Montgomery County School Access and Safety Engineering program has evaluated schools for infrastructure needs. To date, over 50 schools have been evaluated with the goal to evaluate all schools. Infrastructure improvements are completed with county funds. From the School Access and Safety Engineering program, schools are chosen to work with the Safe Routes to School Coordinator on education and encouragement activities.

Schools working on education and encouragement complete a School Plan and implement Safe Routes to School non-infrastructure activities. Starting with the schools with the lowest score from the assessment, approximately 10 schools annually receive program resources for a total of 34 schools currently.

The coordinator holds a series of meetings with schools that focus on assessment through observation of how students get to school, feasibility of education and encouragement

activities and finally, implementation of appropriate activities. Montgomery County Police enforce traffic laws around the school.

Montgomery County schools participating in Safe Routes to School address all Five E's. Examples include:

- Education –Walking and bicycling maps can be developed for participating schools; develop Walking School Buses; addressing drop off/pick up issues; starting walking clubs.
- Encouragement – Organize an annual county-wide Walk to School Day (host school receives direct assistance from the coordinator), bike rodeos and other activities and events to promote health, safety, and physical activity.
- Enforcement – The Montgomery County Police enforce traffic laws at and around identified schools; also address seatbelt and car seat safety.
- Engineering – Identify walking and bicycling barriers and may help with sign and crosswalk markings, installing traffic signs, curb extensions, etc. Infrastructure needs will be completed by the county.
- Evaluation – Analyze student travel mode choice to/from school via tally forms; parents' knowledge and attitude towards walking and bicycling via parent survey; and MCPS DOT transportation survey.

For schools receiving infrastructure improvements under the Safe Routes to School program, there was a 72 percent decline in collisions around those schools. Regularly collected collision data was used for the evaluation. While collecting school travel survey and parent survey data remains a challenge, four schools with consistent travel survey data have shown an increase in walking and bicycling since participating in the Safe Routes to School program.

Sustainability

Realizing the constraints of having only one person, the coordinator went through “train the trainer” bicycle rodeo training through the Washington Area Bicyclist Association (WABA). This training allows the coordinator to work alongside Montgomery County physical education teachers to incorporate a bike rodeo in their classroom. The Coordinator also partners with the Takoma Park SRTS Coordinator to have WABA conduct a train the trainer bicycle rodeo training for Montgomery County physical education teachers and parent volunteers. Once the physical education teacher or other volunteers/school staff receives the WABA training, they have access to a trailer of bicycles to be used during their physical education classes.

The Safe Routes to School coordinator involves Montgomery County Fire and Rescue Service, SafeKids and Montgomery County Police Department all which have educational programs or enforcement which can be utilized on the ongoing basis. Once the relationship is established, it is easy for the schools to call for an educational program or police officer to enforce a school zone without the involvement of the coordinator.

Next Steps

Safe Routes to School programs have typically targeted K-8th grades. Recognizing that high school students walk and bicycle to school too, the coordinator, working with the County's Pedestrian Safety Coordinator, started a "Hey you, I'm looking at you!" campaign at a Blair High School. The goal of the campaign was to urge high school students to establish eye contact with drivers before crossing the street and to look both ways. Collision statistics around the high school show that those under age 20 and over age 50 have been involved in all collisions, mostly during daylight hours. The students also answered pedestrian safety questions via text messaging for prizes. The campaign was done in conjunction with the Pedestrian Safety program. In Spring 2013 the Coordinator will begin training high school students on core pedestrian safety lessons. These high school students will then teach local elementary school students the knowledge and skills required of safe pedestrians.

Contact

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