



CASE STUDY: GREATER WASHINGTON DC REGION

Implementing bicycle education Prince William County, VA

Prince William County Public Schools physical education program focuses on functional fitness. In 2011, they began to more fully implement the Bike Smart Virginia curriculum which focuses on safe bicycle riding and rules of the road. The goal is for students to use bicycling as a lifelong means of physical activity. The school district has successfully worked with the Office of Risk Management and the Office of Transportation to make this program a success as well as utilizing already established training opportunities to certify teachers.

Background

Prince William County Schools (PWCS) physical education program focuses on functional fitness versus athletic fitness. The goal is to promote lifetime skills for physical activity. The Bike Smart Virginia curriculum provides on-bike instruction in bicycle safety and maintenance. The curriculum was implemented district-wide in 2011. Prior to 2011, physical education teachers at Potomac High School and Mary Williams Elementary school were trained through a State of Virginia grant program. When two teachers from each school attended, the grant paid for the training and a fleet of bicycles to implement the curriculum. In 2011, the program expanded with 4 pilot schools joining the existing schools to implement Bike Smart.

Program Implementation

Recognizing that bicycling is a lifelong skill, PWCS wanted to provide bicycle education in physical education class. Bike Smart Virginia is an 8 week curriculum that teaches students helmet safety, crash avoidance, bicycle handling and the rules of the road. It is an approved curriculum by the Virginia Department of Education.

Bicycling to school is an opportunity to immediately use students' new bicycling skills. Exploring opportunities to walk and bicycle to school is supported by the PWCS Wellness Plan which encourages community and county collaboration for Safe Routes to School.

There were several pieces to implementing bicycle education district-wide including addressing safety and liability, training teachers and purchasing bicycles and helmets. The district tackled one hurdle at a time, addressing each issue as presented.

Physical education teachers must complete the 12 hour Bike Smart training before implementing the program in physical education classes. The Office of Risk Management approved the Bike Education Program because teachers would be certified in Bike Smart Virginia prior to implementation, students would wear helmets and parents would sign waivers before a student could participate. One school has chosen to implement Bike Smart on the grass instead of pavement or a gym floor.

A committee was formed of current teachers implementing Bike Smart and the teachers participating in the new pilot schools. The committee is a support system for teachers and facilitates the sharing of best practices. Experienced teachers and those with their first Bike Smart class under their belt have developed approved protocol and guides to prepare newly trained teachers for what to expect as they implement bicycle education.

Bicycle education does require a lot of equipment. PWCS received two fleets of bicycles with the State of Virginia grant. Teachers continued to get their Bike Smart certification but did not have the bicycles to implement the curriculum. Those teachers pieced together bicycle fleets by purchasing a few bicycles at a time, raising money at their schools or accepting donated bicycles. When PWCS decided the program should be district wide, they purchased a third fleet of bicycles and one trailer. The Mary Williams fleet at stays at the elementary school and the Potomac High School bicycle fleet is able to be used at different schools. One trailer was shared by two bicycle fleets requiring bicycles to be stored on site at schools with limited space.

The Health and Physical Education office dedicated funds toward the purchase of a second bicycle trailer, making it easier to transport the second fleet of bicycles. Trailers also ensure safe, protected storage for the bicycles. A Virginia Department of Transportation Safe Routes to School Mini Grant will be used to purchase bicycle trainers, allowing the bicycles to be used indoors during the winter as stationary bicycles or for students who are still unsure of riding on their own. The trainers allow students to get the feel of the bicycle and learn how to work the breaks and gears before riding solo.

Sustainability

Utilizing internal resources, PWCS is able to sustain and expand the Bike Smart curriculum. PWCS encourages teachers to regularly attend the Health and Physical Activity Institute sponsored each summer by the Virginia Department of Education at James Madison University. One course offered is the Bike Smart Virginia certification. PWCS has also brought the Bike Smart Virginia certification course to the county.

The Office of Transportation Services is able to move the bicycle trailers from school to school as needed. Maintenance of the bicycles is contracted out and is currently accounted for in the budget.

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