



December 2, 2012

Katrina Butner, PhD, RD, ACSM, CES
Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion
Department of Health and Human Services
1101 Wootton Parkway, Suite LL100
Rockville, MD 20852
By email to PhysicalActivityGuidelines@hhs.gov

Re: Comments on Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans Mid-Course Report

Dear Dr. Butner:

The Safe Routes to School National Partnership appreciates the opportunity to comment on the draft *Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans Mid-Course Report: Strategies to Increase Physical Activity Among Youth*.

The Safe Routes to School National Partnership is a network of more than 600 nonprofit organizations, government agencies, schools and professionals working together to advance the Safe Routes to School movement in the United States. Given our focus on getting children more active on their trip to and from school and in daily life, we commend the subcommittee members for focusing their mid-course report on ways to increase physical activity among young people.

We are very pleased that the mid-course report identifies active transportation to school and built environment improvements in three strategies that were found to have either sufficient or suggestive evidence. This mirrors our experience in working on behalf of a safe built environment and an active trip to school in communities across the country. We also appreciate the report's suggestion on p. 40 that active transportation to school may convey "triple benefits" (increasing children's health while also improving air quality and environmental sustainability). One of the reasons Safe Routes to School has been so popular locally is that it does have many benefits—including those you mentioned plus other benefits like safety, cost-effectiveness and building a sense of community.

We also have comments and recommendations for the subcommittee to consider as it finalizes the mid-course report:

1. We appreciate the inclusion of the section on active transportation to school and the mention of Safe Routes to School programs within it in the school setting. However, the discussion and evidence review focuses nearly exclusively on the education and encouragement aspects of active transportation to school. We recommend adding to this section a discussion about the infrastructure improvements that are also often a necessary part of Safe Routes to School programs – i.e. constructing sidewalks, bike paths and other

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bike/ped infrastructure. Without infrastructure improvements, many schools lack a safe way for children to walk or bicycle to and from school.

2. We support the recognition in the community section of the importance of a built environment that promotes physical activity for all youth. However, we recommend that language be included to emphasize the important need for targeted built environment improvements focused on improving safety and ensuring equity for all young Americans. Further, we would appreciate a mention in this section of Safe Routes to School programs, which are an opportunity to take a comprehensive approach through infrastructure, education, encouragement, enforcement and evaluation to get young people physically active and to create a built environment conducive to active transportation. Safe Routes to School programs do not take place solely within the school environment and have a direct impact on the community setting and the built environment in neighborhoods, and so should be mentioned in this section as well.
3. We recommend including more language explaining the differences in the strength of evidence categories and the importance of focusing intervention and implementation resources on those evidence-based strategies. It would be extremely helpful to better clarify that strategies with “suggestive” and “emerging” evidence are sufficient to pursue implementation, along with continued evaluation. While there is “suggestive” evidence around Safe Routes to School, continued research is critical to ensure that initiatives are based on the latest and strongest scientific evidence.
4. While we appreciate the important information conveyed by the mid-course report, it does not replace the need to fully revise the physical activity guidelines on a regular basis, to ensure that they are based in the latest scientific findings.

Thank you again to the subcommittee members for their work in producing this fine draft report. We believe it demonstrates that Safe Routes to School initiatives are an important part of getting young people more active, and look forward to working with the US Department of Health and Human Services and other agencies on implementing its recommendations, once the report is final.

Sincerely,



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