



**Safe
Routes**
PARTNERSHIP

Building

Blocks



**A Guide to Starting and Growing a
Strong Safe Routes to School Program**

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AUTHORS:

Hannah Williams
Michelle Lieberman
Sara Zimmerman

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Introduction

Safe Routes to School is a great way to help students be healthy and have fun on the way to school. This toolkit will help you kick off a new Safe Routes to School program or strengthen your existing one. We will take you step by step through how to start a program, how to get your school and city on board, and how to make your program stronger over time. We will introduce you to the background, lingo, and everything you need to know to develop your strongest possible Safe Routes to School program.





We've organized the toolkit to lead you through what you need to know to start or expand a Safe Routes to School program:

Section I introduces Safe Routes to School, providing background and highlighting the benefits for families, schools, and the community.

Section II covers the key activities of Safe Routes to School programs and gets you ready to run them—things like walking school buses, walk to school day, bike skills clinics, and more! These activities, and the Six E's of Safe Routes to School framework that they fall into, are the heart of how Safe Routes to School makes communities safer and kids healthier.

Section III turns to the stages involved in beginning, building, and sustaining your program.

Section IV examines central components of a Safe Routes to School program that you will want in place to effectively implement your program, including elements such as staffing, task forces, action plans, and funding opportunities.

The Appendix provides customizable templates and resources including a stakeholder assessment worksheet, task force invitation letter, Safe Routes to School coordinator position descriptions, sample Safe Routes to School city resolutions, a sample Safe Routes to School school board resolution, and a sample action plan matrix.

If you are just starting out and looking for activities to kick off your Safe Routes to School program, you might want to begin with Section II. If you already have some education and encouragement activities underway and want more clarity on the steps to create a more formal program structure or grow, you might want to go right to Section III.

Safe Routes to School programs vary greatly across the country. Although Safe Routes to School activities sometimes start at one school only, Safe Routes to School is most effective as a district or community-wide initiative. Programs range from volunteer-led annual events to intensive staff-run daily activities. Many times, young programs start small with one initiative such as Walk to School Day. Mature programs often build off the momentum of each year's accomplishments, creating an increasingly robust program that becomes institutionalized. Whatever level your program is currently at, this toolkit will provide resources and guidance to make it stronger and more successful.



What Is Safe Routes to School?

Safe Routes to School is a fun and proven way to get kids healthier and make communities safer and stronger. The Safe Routes to School movement works to make sure students can safely walk and bicycle to and from school, which is a great way to incorporate healthy physical activity into daily routines. Why do we need Safe Routes to School? In 1969, almost half of all students walked or bicycled to school, and 87 percent of kids who lived within a mile of school walked or bicycled. But now, fewer than one in six students walk or bicycle to school.¹ These changes have harmed the health and safety of students, and have contributed to traffic congestion and air pollution near schools.



The good news is that the Safe Routes to School movement includes families and students, as well as public health, active transportation, education, and environmental stakeholders, all working together to increase the number of students walking and bicycling to school and make conditions safer for walking and bicycling. To date, more than 17,400 schools and 6.8 million students nationally have benefited from Safe Routes to School projects and programs.²

At the local level—in individual schools, school districts, cities, and counties—Safe Routes to School practitioners run education and encouragement programs for students and families. School districts and schools set the stage for Safe Routes to School by adopting supportive policy and programs. Cities and counties support Safe Routes to School by prioritizing funding for bike lanes and sidewalks, and taking steps to make streets safer for students biking and walking. Safe Routes to School programs support healthier students in grades K-12.



A. How Does Safe Routes to School Work?

Safe Routes to School programs generally include educational efforts in schools to teach students about safe walking and biking, encouragement activities on the way to and from school to get more students on foot or bicycle, and additional actions at the city, town, or county level to make the streets safer for students as they travel to school. Because of these different areas of action, Safe Routes to School programs are most successful when schools, community members, and city or county government are involved.

Although Safe Routes to School will look different in each community based on local needs, resources, and challenges, programs also have many similarities. The Six E's of Safe Routes to School provide a framework for ensuring that a Safe Routes to School program is taking action in all of the areas necessary to be effective. The Six E's are education, encouragement, engineering, evaluation, enforcement, and equity. Section II will help you understand how to use the Six E's in your community.

Strong programs also require certain structural components in order to provide a strong organizational foundation for the activities. Programs often follow a similar progression in terms of their structural components: starting with school education and encouragement; growing with infrastructure efforts led by city or county partners; and maturing with policy change at school, district, and city or county level. Sections III and IV discuss the stages of development of a Safe Routes to School program and the structural components in more detail.



B. Why Does Safe Routes to School Matter?

Safe Routes to School increases safety and provides physical activity opportunities that improve students' health and general well-being. Children and adults in the United States are not getting enough physical activity, and the result is bad for our health—negative health effects such as increased diabetes, obesity, stroke, and other chronic diseases. Fortunately, Safe Routes to School allows students and their families to easily add more physical activity to their day, improving health. Safe Routes to School also builds students' independence and confidence, providing support and safety while students practice navigating their environment. The benefits of Safe Routes to School extend beyond just students to the whole community. Schools are often located near parks, libraries, local businesses, and other community amenities. Many schools are used by neighbors for extended learning or recreation. That means that when Safe Routes to School practitioners improve students' walks and bike rides to school, they are serving everyone within the community, and are investing in neighborhood health, sustainability, and quality of life.

Benefits from Safe Routes to School initiatives include:

Healthier students: More daily physical activity for students forms healthy habits that can last a lifetime, helping students build strong bones, muscles and joints, and decreasing the risk of chronic disease and obesity.³

Safer students: Safe Routes to School improves traffic safety and increases confidence for students through opportunities to learn about and practice road safety.⁴ Small and large infrastructure improvements near schools also reduce traffic injuries to students and community members.

Less danger from crime, bullying, and violence: Concerns around personal safety and crime are among top factors affecting whether families permit children to walk or bicycle to school.⁵ Five percent of high school students report not going to school at least one day per month because they feel they would be unsafe at or on their way to or from school.⁶ Safe Routes to School works to improve street safety for students experiencing harassment or violence.

Group walking and bicycling activities to school are one strategy to address safety concerns associated with student vulnerability and the absence of adult supervision.

Better focus: When students get physical activity on the way to school, they arrive ready to learn. Students who are healthy, awake, and alert have better focus and concentration, which can improve academic performance.⁷

School transportation fixes: Safe Routes to School provides solutions to school transportation issues such as reduced or no bus service, dangerous traffic congestion at pick-up/drop-off times, and student absences and tardiness due to transportation challenges.⁸

Community connections: Another benefit of Safe Routes to School programs comes from the increased family and community engagement, which reduces social isolation and provides positive social opportunities and connections for students, families, and community members.⁹

Cost savings: Walking and biking to school provides household savings from reduced gas and personal vehicle use, as well as savings on the cost of student busing.¹⁰

Cleaner air and fewer asthma attacks: Safe Routes to School contributes to a cleaner environment and fewer student asthma attacks by reducing air pollution from car emissions.¹¹

Refer to our webpage [The Benefits of Safe](#)

[Routes to School](#) for more information and statistics. To provide these benefits for both students and the larger community, Safe Routes to School efforts require actions not only within school walls, but also off campus, on the streets, and in neighborhoods where students are traveling to and from school. Participation by everyone in the community yields a stronger and more effective program.



Addressing Personal Safety, Crime, and Violence

Improving safety is a key priority for Safe Routes to School. This includes both traffic safety and safety from violence and crime on the way to and from school. Street harassment, bullying, and violence pose a frightening challenge for some students walking or biking to school and can undermine the goal of getting kids to make walking and biking a permanent, safe, and healthy habit.

Violence and crime affect children and youth in communities across the country. In many communities, the actual risk of harm to children is very low, and Safe Routes to School programs can play a crucial role in helping parents feel comfortable with children's walking and biking to school. In other communities, however, children face very real dangers of robbery, harassment, gang intimidation, and gang recruitment. Safe Routes to School programs can assist significantly in increasing the safety of children and teens in these communities. To learn more, see our more detailed resources: [Using Safe Routes to School to Combat the Threat of Violence](#) and [Taking Back the Streets and Sidewalks: How Safe Routes to School and Community Safety Initiatives Can Overcome Violence and Crime](#).



Key Activities for Your Safe Routes to School Program

Safe Routes to School reaches students through program activities that get more kids using active travel to school and making streets and neighborhoods safer for walking and biking. Research shows that comprehensive Safe Routes to School initiatives are more effective at increasing physical activity and reducing injuries for children.¹² A comprehensive approach requires embedding Safe Routes to School into many aspects of a community.



The Six E's of Safe Routes to School are a convenient way to summarize the key areas of activity that make up a comprehensive, integrated Safe Routes to School program. The Six E's of Safe Routes to School include education, encouragement, engineering, evaluation, enforcement, and equity. In this section, we introduce each E and its role, and discuss the range of activities that support that E, while providing resources and guidance for incorporating them into your Safe Routes to School program. You can look at the activities under each of the Six E's as a menu of options (although there are many more ideas out there too!) and choose which activities would be most appropriate for your school and community.

The Six E's provide a framework for ensuring that Safe Routes to School efforts take a comprehensive approach:



EDUCATION

Providing students and the community with the skills to walk and bicycle safely, educating them about benefits of walking and bicycling, and teaching them about the broad range of transportation choices.



ENGINEERING

Creating physical improvements to streets and neighborhoods that make walking and bicycling safer, more comfortable, and more convenient.



EVALUATION

Assessing which approaches are more or less successful, ensuring that programs and initiatives are leading to equitable outcomes, and identifying unintended consequences or opportunities to improve the effectiveness of each approach.



ENCOURAGEMENT

Generating enthusiasm and increased walking and bicycling for students through events, activities, and programs.



ENFORCEMENT

Deterring unsafe traffic behaviors and encouraging safe habits by people walking, bicycling, and driving in school neighborhoods and along school routes.



EQUITY

Ensuring that Safe Routes to School initiatives are benefiting all demographic groups, with particular attention to ensuring safe, healthy, and fair outcomes for low-income students, students of color, students of all genders, students with disabilities, and others.

EDUCATION



Providing students and the community with the skills to walk and bicycle safely, educating them about benefits of walking and bicycling, and teaching them about the broad range of transportation choices.

What Is It?

Education is an important element of Safe Routes to School. Students, teachers, families, and community members can all benefit from education about safe ways to walk and bike. Many Safe Routes to School programs incorporate bicycle and pedestrian safety training in the classroom and in the field to teach students the basics associated with walking and bicycling with traffic. Younger students may learn pedestrian safety skills in physical education (PE) class, such as how to cross the street, not to dart in front of cars, and how to look for vehicles when walking past driveways. Older students can be taught the basics of bicycling, including balancing, signaling, following traffic rules, and how to properly wear a helmet. Comprehensive mobility education for students may also cover how to use public transportation and how to drive safely and share the road.

Family and community member education is also an important component of a Safe Routes to School program. Through educational programs, families are asked to follow the rules of the road when they are driving, walking, and bicycling. They are encouraged to practice walking and bicycling with their children, as traffic safety is learned behavior that can only be acquired through hands-on experiences. Additionally, driver safety campaigns can extend to the entire community, so that everyone becomes aware of children walking and bicycling and understands how to share the road safely with kids and adults who are walking and biking.

Education Activities

Education activities provide fun opportunities for students, teachers, families, and the community to learn about Safe Routes to School. The activities below provide some ideas for ways to incorporate education in your Safe Routes to School program.

ACTIVITY: Integrating Bicycle and Pedestrian Education into PE

Integrating bicycle and pedestrian education into PE curriculum is a natural fit. Bicycle and pedestrian education helps achieve the goals set out by the National Standards for K-12 Physical Education—to develop physically literate individuals who have the knowledge, skills, and confidence to enjoy a lifetime of healthful physical activity—while providing larger benefits for students, schools, and communities.¹³ Through on-bike lessons, students practice and hone balance, develop control while starting and stopping a bike, learn to scan their surroundings, and acquire other skills necessary for safe bicycling as well as other types of physical activity. Bicycle education improves overall fitness and teaches students how to ride safely, which benefits their health both on and off the bicycle. Pedestrian safety education teaches students best practices for safely walking to school and other destinations. Skills include understanding four-way stops, making eye contact with motorists, avoiding distractions while crossing an intersection, and being visible. Pedestrian safety education is often used for grades K-3, while bicycle education often focuses on students in upper grades.

Target Audience(s):

- Elementary school
- Middle school

Materials/Resources Needed:

- Class time
- Visuals, worksheets, or instruction materials
- Bicycles, helmets, and cones or other equipment for on-bike skills practice

Potential Implementation Leader:

- School staff: principal and teachers

Potential Implementation Partners:

- PTA
- Police
- Biking or walking organization
- Bike shop
- Health department

Additional Resources:

- [Roll Bicycle Education into your Physical Education Program](#)
- [National Highway Traffic Safety Administration's Child Pedestrian Safety Curriculum](#)



All first grade students at Pagosa Springs Elementary School, Colorado, receive bicycle education as part of their physical education program. During a weeklong unit, students learn bicycle safety and skills, including helmet fitting, braking, hand signals, and other rules for riding safely on streets, sidewalks, or paths. This program uses 32 bicycles purchased by Retro Metro Kids, Archuleta School District's Safe Routes to School coalition, and is taught by a physical education teacher who was trained in bicycle education with the help of Bicycle Colorado.

Photo courtesy of Kendra Bridges

ACTIVITY: Incorporating Safe Routes to School into Other Subjects

There are many ways to incorporate activities that educate students about safe walking and biking into a variety of classroom subjects. Here are just a few ideas:

Transportation Tracking

Encourage students to begin thinking about transportation choices with charts. Begin the day by recording how students traveled to school. Have a classroom poster with columns for each type of travel (walk, bike, scooter, bus, car, carpool) and invite students to record their mode of transportation with a tally or sticker. Assign a weekly student leader to tally each column. See how the modes change or stay the same from month to month and season to season, and discuss changes and share stories.

Reading

Choose a story that features walking or biking to school and incorporate it into a classroom activity. Ask students to draw or write their reflections or experiences afterwards. This activity could be paired with Walk to School Day in October or Bike to School Day in May. [Reference Walk Bike Fun for ideas.](#)

Outside Learning

Utilize outside learning opportunities and field trips to practice safe walking and crossing. Prepare with lessons on crosswalks, speed, sidewalks, driveways, and distractions.

Science and Math

Walking and bicycling examples can be used for math and science learning. Have students record their walking or bicycling and sum their total mileage. Make comparisons between their mileage and the distance across the state and country! Turn the exercise into a science activity by discussing calories burned, levels of carcinogenic pollutants, and carbon emissions.

Target Audience(s):

- Elementary school
- Middle school
- High school

Materials/Resources Needed:

- Class time
- Visuals, worksheets, or instruction materials

Potential Implementation Leader:

- Teachers

Potential Implementation Partners:

- PTA
- Health department

Additional Resources:

- [Let's Go NC! \(North Carolina\)](#): A pedestrian and bicycle safety skills program for elementary schools, including lesson plans and videos.
- [California Pedestrian and Bicycle Safety Curriculum for Grades 4 and 5](#): A program aligned with California education standards specifically for upper elementary school students.
- [Walk! Bike! Fun! \(Minnesota\)](#): A comprehensive curriculum for students ages 5-13 that teaches safe traffic behavior through classroom activities and on-the-bike skills practice.
- [Active Transportation Alliance Teacher Resources](#): A resource kit that includes quick 10-minute lessons for use in PE classes, other sample lessons, and additional resources for elementary, middle, and high school teachers.
- [Bicycle and Pedestrian Curricula Guide](#): A guide to bicycle and pedestrian education for students.



ACTIVITY: Bicycle Skills Clinic/Bike Rodeo

A bicycle skills clinic, sometimes called a bike rodeo, offers a chance for students and their families to learn and practice bike handling skills in a fun, safe, and encouraging atmosphere. During a bicycle skills clinic, students visit volunteers, teachers, or bicycle organization staff at activity stations set up with chalk and traffic cones. At each station, students learn different skills for how to bicycle safely and confidently.

Bicycle skills clinics range in size and scale. Some clinics are large community events with skills courses, safety demonstrations, games, and other activities, while others are smaller, requiring fewer volunteers and resources. Clinics may be set up on school grounds, at a park, on a closed-off street, or at another community facility.

Target Audience(s):

- Elementary school
- Middle school

Materials/Resources Needed:

- Time during class, after school, or on a weekend
- Cones, tape/chalk, bikes, helmets, water, first aid kit, other event supplies

Potential Implementation Leader:

- Principal and teachers
- PTA
- Biking or walking organization

Potential Implementation Partners:

- Police
- City/county
- Health department

Led by a certified bicycle instructor and teacher at King Chavez Elementary School in California, the after-school bike club KClicletas is a model in the San Diego region. Photo by Francisco Contreras

ACTIVITY: Bicycle Maintenance Courses

Understanding how to fix and maintain a working bicycle are important skills for anyone using a bicycle for transportation or recreation. Bicycle maintenance education teaches students how to keep a bicycle in good condition, as well as key skills such as fixing a flat tire. Bicycle maintenance courses provide hands-on learning opportunities for older students and are often geared towards grades 6-12.

Target Audience(s):

- Middle school
- High school

Materials/Resources Needed:

- Time during class, after school, or on a weekend
- Tools and other equipment, demonstration bikes

Potential Implementation Leader:

- Teachers
- Biking organization
- Bike shop

Potential Implementation Partners:

- Community organization
- City/county
- Health department

Additional Resources:

- [Bikeology](#)

ACTIVITY: Community Education and Awareness Campaigns

Community education provides walking, biking and driving safety information and resources for individuals within and outside of the school community. Opportunities for community education include tabling at a community event or providing classes and workshops on safe walking and biking. Present at a PTA meeting to educate families. Partner with a city health or transportation department to create an educational campaign on safe driving in the community. This could include social media messaging, signs, or posters near schools, radio or TV ads, and information in community publications. Integrate messages on driver awareness and the role of community members for making walking and biking safe for everyone.

Target Audience(s):

- Families, school neighbors, other community members

Materials/Resources Needed:

- Flyers, handouts, posters, social media access

Potential Implementation Leader:

- School district or school
- City/county
- Community organization

Potential Implementation Partners:

- Health department
- Police department

Additional Resources:

- [Safe Routes to School Messaging for Pros:](#) Ideas and guidance on developing community education and awareness materials.

ACTIVITY: Crossing Guards

Crossing guards at a busy intersection or driveway can provide safe access for students walking or biking to school and help remind motorists to slow down near schools. Crossing guards help reinforce safe behaviors and can be an extra set of eyes and ears looking out for students. Crossing guards can be paid staff or volunteers, and are often organized or hired by the local city, county, or school district. The presence of crossing guards can greatly increase parental or family comfort with children walking to school.

Target Audiences:

- Elementary school
- Middle school
- High school

Materials/Resources Needed:

- Training materials
- Vests and other safety materials

Potential Implementation Leader:

- School or school district
- City/county
- Police department

Additional Resources:

- [Adult School Crossing Guard Guidelines](#)



ACTIVITY: Student Safety Patrol

Student safety patrol is a helpful tool for enforcing safe behavior at schools. Student safety patrol members are upper grade students who direct other students and teach traffic safety on a peer-to-peer basis. Student safety patrollers help in drop-off/pick-up areas, direct students to walking and biking routes on campus, and assist adult crossing guards.

Target Audience:

- Elementary (upper grades)

Materials/Resources Needed:

- Training materials
- Vests and other safety materials
- Adult leader/organizer

Potential Implementation Leader:

- School or school district
- PTA

Potential Implementation Partners:

- City/county
- Police department

Additional Resources:

- AAA's [School Safety Patrol](#)

Engaging Students with Disabilities



Students with disabilities are a key group to include when developing and implementing a Safe Routes to School program. Students with disabilities can benefit greatly from Safe Routes to School programs, which provide invaluable tools that support healthy lifestyles, bolster physical activity, and promote independence. Developing a program that is welcoming for students with disabilities broadens a program's reach, ensures all students can receive the benefits of the program, and enables students with and without disabilities to enjoy each other's company and learn safe and healthy habits together. Reference the infobrief [Engaging Students with Disabilities in Safe Routes to School](#) for more information.

ACTIVITY: Safety Reminders at Drop-off/Pick-up

Vehicle drop-off and pick-up zones are often areas where unsafe driver behavior occurs. School staff or volunteers can remind drivers of safe behaviors by handing out flyers with information about procedures and following the rules. These flyers can be designed to look like "notices" of safety violations and be handed to drivers or placed on cars not following proper procedures.

Target Audiences:

- Elementary school
- Middle school
- High school

Materials/Resources Needed:

- Flyer design and printing

Potential Implementation Leader:

- School administration

Potential Implementation Partners:

- PTA
- School volunteers

ENCOURAGEMENT



Generating enthusiasm and increased walking and bicycling for students through events, activities, and programs.

What Is It?

Encouragement activities get more kids excited about walking and biking. Encouragement strategies rally support for Safe Routes to School and use events and activities to promote walking, bicycling, public transportation, and being physically active. These activities are fun and engage multiple audiences, including students, families, and community members. Such activities focus on changing habits, modifying behavior, and getting students and families to travel to school actively instead of using a personal vehicle.



At Colorado's Schmitt Elementary, English Language Development teacher Drew Weisel decided to take a giant step towards ensuring all of the school's children get to school safely, healthy, and on time. In 2016, he started a walking school bus program. Weisel tracks the number of students who participate in the walking school bus each week and the numbers have been steadily growing. The program has built upon already-established events like International Walk to School Day and walk to school month. The program at Schmitt has been so successful that the school is considering adding a second walking school bus along another route.

Encouragement Activities

Encouragement activities can vary in scale and complexity, depending on your program's resources and capacity. Below are examples of activities to encourage walking and biking to and from school.

ACTIVITY: Competitions and Contests

Competitions and contests are fun and easy ways to incentivize participation in Safe Routes to School. These activities require minimal resources and can be used by schools to encourage more walking and bicycling right away. Ideas include tracking students walking or biking and creating a classroom or grade competition, raffling off prizes to kids who walk or bike, or encouraging students to earn incentives by walking and biking. A popular approach with many programs involves a Golden Shoe Award, in which classrooms compete for the honor of receiving the annual Golden Shoe Award (a sneaker spray-painted gold). Be creative!

Target Audience(s):

- Elementary school
- Middle school
- High school

Materials/Resources Needed:

- Flyers, posters, or other ways to promote
- Prizes or incentives

Potential Implementation Leader:

- School district or school
- PTA
- Community organization

Potential Implementation Partners:

- Bike shop or other local businesses
- Health department

ACTIVITY: Walking School Buses and Bike Trains

Walking school buses or bike trains are safe and fun ways for children to get physical activity as they travel to and from school with adult supervision. Each "bus" or "train" walks or bikes along a set route with one or more adults leading it, picking children up at the start or at designated stops, and using active travel to get them to school. The process is reversed in the afternoons on the way home from school. Walking school buses and bike trains address family fears about unsupervised travel while getting kids moving. They can operate once a month, once a week, or every day. While these approaches require some work and coordination, they are one of the most effective ways of getting more kids regularly walking and biking.

Target Audience(s):

- Elementary school

Materials/Resources Needed:

- Volunteers
- Flyers, announcements

Potential Implementation Leader:

- Teachers or principal
- PTA
- Family members

Potential Implementation Partners:

- Community organizations
- Community volunteers

Additional Resources:

- [Step In to a Walking School Bus Program](#)
- [Get Rolling with a Bike Train Program](#)

ACTIVITY: Remote Drop-Off

Many schools that want to involve students that live too far to walk or bicycle to school have created remote drop-off programs. Programs work with schools and school district transportation departments (including school buses) to designate student drop-off locations at a short distance from the school. After students are dropped off, they walk with their friends, family members, or school staff the rest of the way. This helps reduce traffic congestion around the school and enables students to get additional exercise.

Target Audience(s):

- Elementary school
- Middle school

Materials/Resources Needed:

- Flyers, announcements

Potential Implementation Leader:

- School or school district

Potential Implementation Partners:

- City/county

Additional Resources:

- [Get Out and Get Moving by Change Lab Solutions](#)



ACTIVITY: Walk & Bike to School Days

A Walk to School Day or Bike to School Day event is a simple way to introduce schools, families, and community groups to walking, biking, and Safe Routes to School. Walk to School Day is an international holiday celebrated in October each year and Bike to School Day occurs annually in May. Many schools continue the momentum with designated weekly or monthly walking and biking days.

Target Audience(s):

- Elementary school
- Middle school
- High school

Materials/Resources Needed:

- Flyers, announcements
- Incentives or small prizes for participation (pencils, stickers, and snacks are popular)
- Bike parking (for Bike to School Day)

Potential Implementation Leader:

- School
- PTA

Potential Implementation Partners:

- City/county
- Biking or walking organization
- Health department
- Police department

Additional Resources

- Walkbiketoschool.org: Register your school online and find additional event ideas.
- [Bike to School Day blog post](#)
- [Walk to School Day factsheet](#)



Working with Middle and High School Students

Activities for middle school and high school students are most effective when they are developed to be age-appropriate and encourage student ownership. Activities such as Walk to School Day and walking school buses can be modified to allow students to take leadership roles and mentor elementary school students. Tap into student talents and interests by asking a class or student organization to create educational posters, videos, and other safety campaign materials. Students can also be ambassadors for safety improvements near schools by participating in assessments and presenting their findings to local decision makers. [Refer to Safe Routes to School and Student Leaders: Facilitator's Guide to Engaging Middle School Youth](#) for more ideas.

ENGINEERING



Creating physical improvements to streets and neighborhoods that make walking and bicycling safer, more comfortable, and more convenient.

What Is It?

The streets and neighborhoods around schools vary in each city. While some communities have sidewalks and bicycle lanes or well-maintained paths to school, others do not have street infrastructure that supports students safely walking and biking to school. Engineering is a key way to mitigate this obstacle. Engineering treatments create physical improvements to the streets and neighborhoods that make walking and bicycling more comfortable and convenient, while decreasing the risk of injury and increasing street safety. Changes to the physical environment through engineering improvements are a critical component of Safe Routes to School. As a result, most successful programs coordinate with local transportation and planning agencies and include a thorough community assessment of the barriers for children walking and bicycling to school and a plan to address those barriers.



Blosser Elementary School in Willits, California, hosts a Walk Bike Fun Club. This club leads walk audits around the school and surrounding neighborhood. Third and fourth graders create reports from their observations and present to the local city council.

Engineering Activities

Many improvements to the streets, sidewalks, and physical environment around schools fall under the purview of the city or county transportation or engineering department. Schools and school districts can make changes at school sites to improve safety and comfort for students walking and biking when they arrive at campus. Students, families, school staff, and Safe Routes to School practitioners can assist with identifying barriers and necessary improvements to enable people to safely use the streets and sidewalks. The following are ideas for Safe Routes to School engineering-related activities.

ACTIVITY: Walk Audits

A walk audit can be as simple as taking a walk during which you assess how supportive the streets and sidewalks are for walking. Walk audits are often conducted by a group of people using a checklist to assess street infrastructure and conditions, documenting barriers, positive features, activities, and perceptions of the walking environment. Walk audits let you survey a route, evaluating and documenting the street on a scale that helps assess the current walkability and identify how to make it better for people of all ages and abilities. Bike audits are similar to walk audits, but look at some different features of the street environment. A walk audit can occur as part of a bigger plan to assess overall walkability, or can be a one-time event to understand and communicate concerns about a specific area. Walk audits can be a great opportunity to get input on the street environment from different stakeholders and can allow community members to express concerns to local officials, who are often able to rapidly remedy some issues.

Target Audiences:

- Elementary school
- Middle school
- High school

Materials/Resources Needed:

- Walk audit worksheet or checklist
- Pencils or pens, clipboards

Potential Implementation Leader:

- School
- PTA
- Biking or walking organization

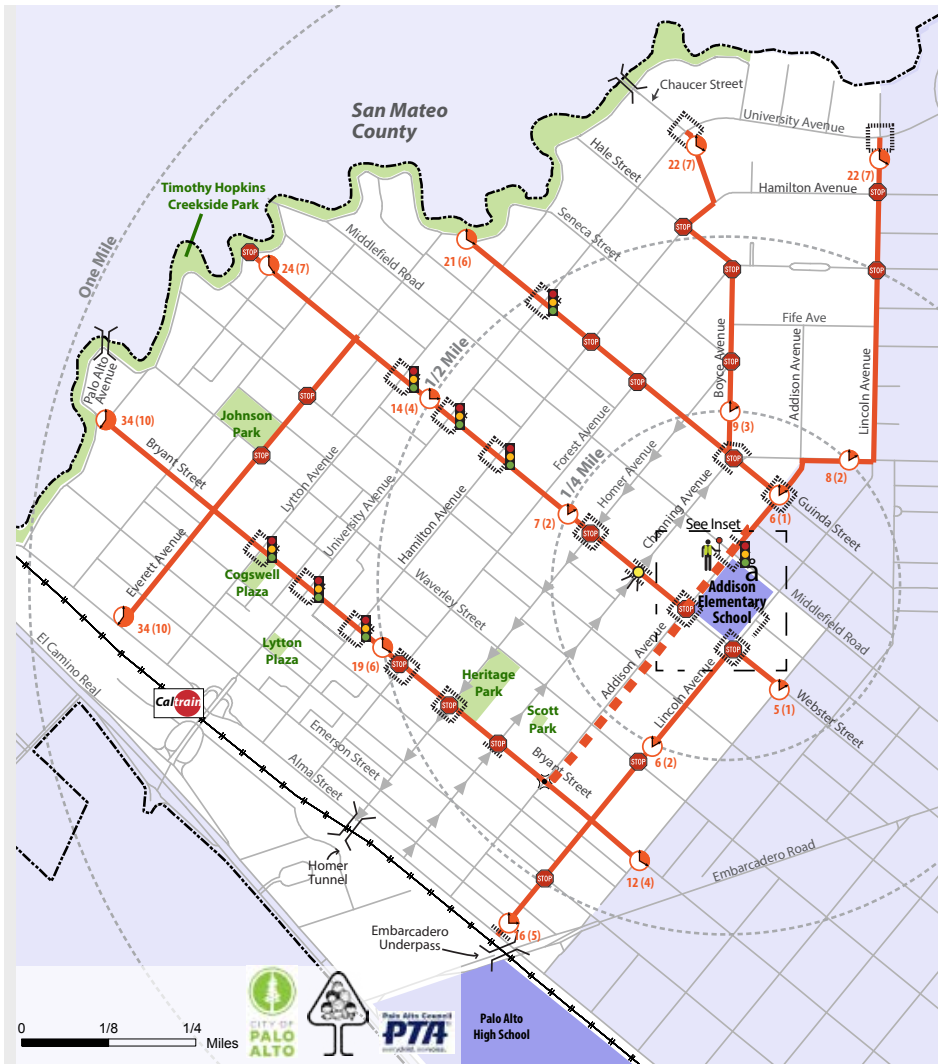
Potential Implementation Partners:

- City/county
- Health department
- Police department

Additional Resources:

- [Let's Go For A Walk: A Toolkit for Planning and Conducting a Walk Audit](#)





ACTIVITY: Walking and Biking Routes Maps

Walking and biking route maps look at the existing street conditions for walking and biking and suggest ways for students to get and from school. These maps take into account where there are sidewalks, marked crosswalks, crossing guards, and other things that make it safer and more comfortable for students walking and biking. Maps can be printed or provided on a school or school district website and should be provided to families at the start of school and during enrollment to encourage exploring ways to travel to school actively.

Target Audiences:

- Elementary school
- Middle school
- High school

Materials/Resources Needed:

- Handouts or webpage space

Potential Implementation Leader:

- School or school district
- City/county

Potential Implementation Partners:

- Health department
- Walking/biking organization

Additional Resources

- [Guide to Creating Walking Route Maps for Safe Routes to School](#): Tips on creating a route map and instructions for preparing maps using free online tools.

ACTIVITY: Arrival and Dismissal Assessments

High traffic volumes near schools and disorganized drop-offs and pick-ups make the front of the school into a high stress environment, with negative effects on student safety and the learning environment. Assessing the environment around school arrival and dismissal can identify challenges and ways to make engineering and operational improvements. These assessments can turn into recommendations for infrastructure changes on campus, in the drop-off/pick-up areas, or on the streets around the schools, as well operational changes.

Target Audiences:

- Elementary school
- Middle school
- High school

Materials/Resources Needed:

- Arrival/dismissal observation worksheet or checklist

Potential Implementation Leader:

- School district

Potential Implementation Partners:

- School
- City/county

Additional Resources:

- [Keep Calm and Carry On to School: Additional strategies to improve arrival and dismissal.](#)

Want to learn more about infrastructure improvements that support safe walking and bicycling? Visit the Pedestrian and Bicycle Information Center's [Facility Design](#) webpage for information about specific treatments and strategies.

EVALUATION



Assessing which approaches are more or less successful, ensuring that programs and initiatives are leading to equitable outcomes, and identifying unintended consequences or opportunities to improve the effectiveness of each approach.

What Is It?

Safe Routes to School programs should include evaluation. Evaluation is just a fancy word for stepping back to assess your program—considering which approaches are more or less successful and figuring out whether you are achieving the desired results. Evaluation also involves making sure that your program or initiative supports equitable outcomes, and identifying unintended consequences and opportunities to improve the effectiveness of an approach for a given group. Evaluation data is key to determining the scope and the success of a Safe Routes to School program. Evaluation involves collecting data as well as making reflections and drawing conclusions.



Evaluation Activities

Evaluation activities are helpful tools for assessing needs and progress in your program. The tools mentioned below are a great starting point to understanding travel choices at your school or district. They provide the understanding and foundation for an effective Safe Routes to School program.

ACTIVITY: Surveys

Surveys of families can help reveal why parents are driving their children to school instead of allowing them to walk or bicycle. Surveys also provide insight into what changes might encourage a shift in their behavior. Student surveys elicit information regarding young people's attitudes about transportation behaviors and provide insight on how to craft a program that will be appealing to the younger generation. Surveys can also gather helpful feedback on your activities and programs once you get started. The National Center for Safe Routes to School provides a standardized parent survey template at saferoutesdata.org.

Target Audiences:

- Elementary school
- Middle school
- High school

Materials/Resources Needed:

- Survey form (online or paper)

Potential Implementation Leader:

- School or school district
- City/county



ACTIVITY: Travel Tallies

It is important to know what percentages of students are walking, biking, taking the bus, being driven alone, and carpooling to school and then track changes over time. Taking these measurements will help you understand your community's starting place and gauge the effects of the program on student travel choices.

Student in-class travel tallies are best taken on several days in each school year. Students can raise their hands to demonstrate which mode of transportation they took to school or record their transportation mode on a piece of paper or class poster. The National Center for Safe Routes to School provides standardized travel tally forms that can be entered into the national online data system at saferoutesdata.org.

Target Audiences:

- Elementary school
- Middle school
- High school

Materials/Resources Needed:

- Travel tally form (online or paper)

Potential Implementation Leader:

- Teachers

ACTIVITY: Program Tracking and Periodic Assessment

Tracking participation in your programs and activities and identifying progress and areas for improvement is essential as part of your program evaluation. Track participation at the beginning, middle, and end of the program. Look for trends and try to figure out what may have caused unexpected outcomes. Look at participation levels of different demographic groups for both your youth-focused activities as well as your volunteers, and consider whether there are missing or under-represented audiences for further evaluation of equity and inclusion. Periodic assessments of your program are helpful for measuring goals, prioritizing needs, and making necessary program changes.

Target Audiences:

- Elementary school
- Middle school
- High school

Materials/Resources Needed:

- Training materials
- Vests and other safety materials
- Adult leader/organizer

Potential Implementation Leader:

- School or school district
- PTA

Potential Implementation Partners:

- City/county

Additional Resources/Examples:

- [Bay Area Safe Routes to School Evaluation Reports and Evaluation Guidebook](#)
- [Marin County Evaluation Report](#)

EQUITY



Ensuring that Safe Routes to School initiatives are benefiting all demographic groups, with particular attention to ensuring safe, healthy, and fair outcomes for low-income students, students of color, students of all genders, students with disabilities, and others.

What Is It?

Equity is how we make sure that Safe Routes to School initiatives are actually working for everyone in our schools and communities. That means thinking about and working to make sure that Safe Routes to School programs are serving all demographic groups, with particular attention on ensuring safe, healthy, and fair outcomes for low-income students, students of color, students of all genders, and students with disabilities. One program can't do everything, but stepping back to consider the equity impact of your work gives you the chance to make deliberate choices about where you will have the most impact in creating healthier, more just communities.

Schools and communities are different from each other. Student populations,

patterns of street investment and neighborhood layout, and community histories differ. As Safe Routes to School practitioners, we need to understand the particular challenges for health and barriers to program participation that affect different populations of students within our community context. We need to understand and address obstacles, use our creativity and community relationships to engage children and families who we may not be reaching, and work towards safe and equitable outcomes.

Equitable Safe Routes to School programs can prioritize schools and neighborhoods with the highest need for safe walking and biking conditions and encouragement programs. Health and injury data shows low-income

communities and communities of color often have the highest traffic injury rates as well as chronic disease rates. Equitable programs ensure that programmatic and infrastructure resources are bringing benefits to highest-need communities. That can help address health disparities and power imbalances that lead to disparate health, educational, and economic outcomes. Such disparities often emerge along lines of race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexual orientation, and disability. For more information on the barriers to walking and biking in low-income communities and communities of color, reference the report [At the Intersection of Equity and Active Transportation](#).



Equity Activities

Work towards building equity into your program. Equity should be considered in developing and implementing activities under each of the other five E's. Plan activities that include all different groups of kids and address their needs: students with disabilities, girls, nonbinary kids, and different racial, ethnic, and immigrant groups. By analyzing who is participating in programming, you may realize that your programs are missing or under-engaging some groups of students. Once you know that, you can tailor particular program offerings to fit the needs and interests of groups we may be missing.

Consider a range of potential barriers to participation: language, street violence, cultural relevance. Note that it is the rare program that really addresses the needs of every group—so if you have great engagement with Latino families, it still behooves you to think about whether you could make your program more inclusive and welcoming for kids with disabilities, and you will want to think about how you might address the disparate rates of walking to school for girls versus boys. The following are tools and activities that your program can undertake to build equity into your program.

ACTIVITY: Assessments

Begin to understand equity practices in your school and community by assessing current policies and programs. Gather health and collision data, often available from your local health department, hospital system, and/or law enforcement agency, to see which groups of students have the greatest need for Safe Routes to School initiatives that will improve safety and opportunities for physical activity. Conduct a scan of school, school district, and city/county policies related to transportation. Look for supportive language and opportunities to improve engagement with different kinds of groups. Other forms of assessment include tracking program participation. Look for missing audiences in your Safe Routes to School program and create a plan for targeted engagement.

Target Audiences:

- Elementary school
- Middle school
- High school

Materials/Resources Needed:

- Data

Potential Implementation Leader:

- School or school district
- City/county
- Safe Routes to School program leaders

Potential Implementation Partners:

- Health department
- Police department

ACTIVITY: Program and Project Prioritization

When resources to implement Safe Routes to School programs and projects are limited (and even when are they not), it can be helpful to have objective criteria that can be used to prioritize schools or neighborhoods. Prioritization criteria can be important in addressing the “squeaky wheel gets the grease” phenomenon, which otherwise may mean that resources are allocated based upon vocal parents rather than need. Criteria that Safe Routes to School programs often use focus on collision data, income level (based on eligibility for free- and reduced-price meals, household income, or poverty rates), health disparities, and school readiness.

Target Audiences:

- School district or city/county-wide population

Materials/Resources Needed:

- Data
- Input on prioritization criteria

Potential Implementation Leader:

- School or school district
- City/county
- Safe Routes to School program leaders

Potential Implementation Partners:

- Health department
- Police department

Additional Resources:

- Examples of Safe Routes to School prioritization: [Oregon Safe Routes to School Creating an Action Plan](#) and [Denver Safe Routes to School Strategic Plan](#).



ACTIVITY: Tailoring Activities and Programs

In order to be effective at engaging different student groups and their families, Safe Routes to School activities should be tailored. Use the initial assessments to identify needs and interests. This may include providing information and materials in different languages, addressing concerns around street violence, not just traffic safety, and ensuring programs are culturally relevant. In addition, think about how your activities will engage all different groups of students including those with disabilities, girls, non-binary students, and recent immigrants or English-language learners who historically walk and bike to school less frequently and may have more concerns about personal safety. Work with your school staff, PTA or parent liaison groups, and community organizations to understand the different groups within your community and how to address different needs.

Target Audiences:

- Elementary school
- Middle school
- High school

Materials/Resources Needed:

- Data and information

Potential Implementation Leader:

- Safe Routes to School program leaders

Potential Implementation Partners:

- School/school district
- PTA
- City/county
- Health department
- Community organizations

Addressing Street Harassment

Street harassment can have a strong negative effect on students who are trying to get to school or home on foot, by bicycle, or on public transit. Experiences of street harassment can cause students to miss school, and can affect readiness to learn and academic success. They can lead students to avoid convenient, affordable, and healthy ways of getting to school, discouraging walking and taking transit. Street harassment can also affect students mentally, resulting in negative self-esteem and depression. [Wolf Whistles and Creepy Compliments](#) provides background on street harassment, discusses some potential approaches to addressing street harassment, and summarizes lessons from these approaches that may be applicable for Safe Routes to School programs.



ACTIVITY: Girl-Focused Bicycle Clubs

Girls are less likely to walk or bike to school than boys, and the world of bicycle sales, repair, racing, and recreation can be inhospitable for girls, women, and transgender and non-binary people. To create an environment that nurtures girls' health, love for bicycling, and mechanical inclinations, some Safe Routes to School programs host afterschool clubs or programs that are designed to overcome the barriers that may impede girls and non-binary students in more traditional programs. Programs like Girls in Gear, sponsored by the Ohio Department of Transportation, use bicycle education to instill confidence, physical activity, and nutrition learning in girls ages 9-15. For the Girls in Gear eight-week curriculum, which covers bicycle safety, mechanics instruction, urban planning, and public speaking, see the [Girls in Gear Lesson Guide](#).

Target Audiences:

- Elementary school
- Middle school
- High school

Materials/Resources Needed:

- Data and information

Potential Implementation Leader:

- Safe Routes to School program leaders
- Community groups

Potential Implementation Partners:

- School/school district
- PTA
- Health department
- Community organizations



Stages for Creating a Strong Structure for Your Safe Routes to School Program

Although Safe Routes to School programs differ in each community and have to fit local needs, programs tend to experience a similar pattern of growth and development, and they benefit from the same structural components. In this section, we discuss some of the stages of growth of your Safe Routes to School program. This overview will help you see where your program will need to go in order to meet your goals.

STAGE 1

Start Your Seedling: Give Your Program a Good Start

In their initial stages, most Safe Routes to School programs involve the following components:



Goal setting:

As you get started, reflect on what is driving the effort to create a Safe Routes to School program. Programs often begin with the goal of improving public health or walking and biking conditions for

students. Take a look at existing behavior around walking and biking in your community. Will your program be primarily encouraging students to walk and bike, improving safety conditions, or doing both? Talk to parents, families, students, teachers, and others to begin to understand why your community needs Safe Routes to School and to develop a vision of what a successful program would look like.

Planning: Take steps to figure out the basic structure of your nascent program—do you have a budget? Do you have resources that the school or city is willing to provide? Who will take the lead on figuring out next steps and running your activities? Will you operate under the auspices of the school, PTA, health department, or just be informal for now?

Kicking off Safe Routes to School education and encouragement

activities: Many Safe Routes to School programs, especially those that begin as volunteer efforts by parents and family members, want to kick off without delay! Either as a pilot or on a small scale, you can jump in and get started with a few encouragement and education activities at individual schools. Popular initial activities include celebrating Walk to School Day and organizing a walking school bus.

Begin developing relationships with key partners:

Reach out to city staff, the school district, school board, PTA, and community groups. Let these partners know why Safe Routes to School matters and how it is going to benefit the students in your community..

Finding the Right Institutional Home for your Program

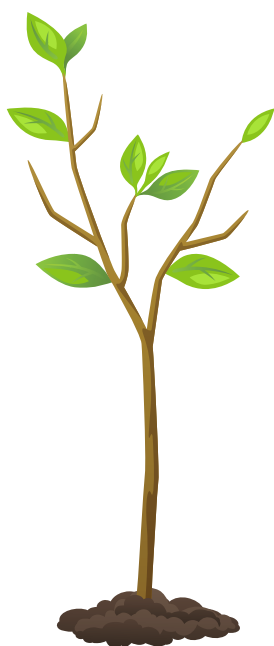
Safe Routes to School programs can be housed in or led by a number of different organizations and agencies: local or regional transportation agencies, non-profit organizations, schools or school districts, health departments, police departments, and other local government departments or agencies.

There is no one right place to house your program. Where your program is housed may be out of your hands – it will often depend on the position funding source, agency or organizational capacity, and broader agency or organizational goals. The focus of your Safe Routes to School program may influence where the coordinator is housed and vice versa. For example, programs focused on implementing education and encouragement activities in schools often benefit from being housed at the school district. Programs focused on infrastructure improvements along school routes may do well being housed within a city transportation department. Where your program lives may change over time. Funding, capacity, and interests of program leaders may change, and your Safe Routes to School program will evolve in response. As long as there are strong supportive structures in place, Safe Routes to School programs can thrive wherever they are housed.



STAGE 2

Grow Strong Branches: Develop Supportive Structures



Some communities start at this stage, often when a grant initiates a program. At this stage, you will most likely start to see buy in from the city, county, district, families, and other groups within the community. As your program grows, the components below will aid the development of supportive structures:

Community engagement to determine needs: Make sure that you have expanded beyond a cadre of true believers and have reached out to a wide array of residents, families, students, and other community leaders and partners. What needs do they see for the community? How can a Safe Routes to School program address those? Get their ideas for how to improve health and support safe walking and biking. In addition, look for leadership in your Safe Routes to School program. As your program expands beyond individual schools, you will need program leaders to coordinate efforts. Survey families, teachers, and students asking how they get to school and what barriers they face during this process. Assess walking and biking needs include by observing the walk or bike to school.

Task force: Organize a district or city task force to bring together the variety of different stakeholders and agencies that will need to collaborate to advance Safe Routes to School significantly. This team will focus on long-term plans and integrating plans with the district and city. Establish an action plan with task force members, program, and community leaders. See Section IV for more information about starting and running a task force.

Action plan: Develop an action plan to assist with prioritizing activities and achievements over several years. Document your community's vision for walking and biking. Using the six E's, outline actions and activities needed to achieve community goals for walking and biking. Prioritize actions within the plan, identifying where to start now. Incorporate an equity approach in the action plan and formal needs assessment. Be sure to start defining the roles and responsibilities of key leaders and partners as well as timeframes for specific actions. See Section IV for more information about developing an action plan.

STAGE 3 Become a Healthy Tree: Institutionalize Your Program

By this stage, your program is up and running and well established. To strengthen and sustain the program so that it is not just dependent upon current efforts, but will last over the long haul, it is important to institutionalize it—make it a permanent part of existing institutions. At this stage, programs are focused on:

Sustaining and expanding existing activities: At this stage, it is crucial to work on creating continuity with programming, and scaling your program up so that it is operating across the jurisdiction or area, including multiple schools, districts, or region.

Permanent staffing: An institutionalized program has permanent staffing to organize and facilitate Safe Routes to School. See Section IV for more information on staffing.



Funding: Long-term funding is essential to sustainability, and is a persistent challenge for Safe Routes to School programs. Long-term funding sources will likely need to be supplemented by short-term grants, donations, and sponsorships. See Section IV for more information on funding opportunities.

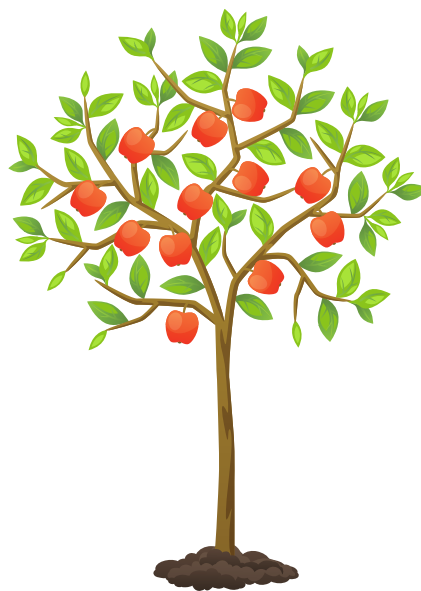
Collaborating with city or county: Work with city or county staff to plan for larger street improvements. Work together to catalogue needs, prioritize projects, and identify funding sources.

Advocate for strong district and city policies: Assess existing policies and identify gaps. Adopt good district and city policies that will advance Safe Routes to School and walking and biking more generally. Change any district policies that do not support safe walking and biking. See Section IV for more information on city and district policies.

STAGE 4 Reach Maturity: Become a Comprehensive Program

Some programs become strong, institutionalized programs, and yet only reach a small percentage of students within their jurisdiction. Safe Routes to School programs can be much more than that! The final step in building your program is becoming comprehensive. A comprehensive program will result in distinct changes in culture at school or schools and the surrounding community. School administration and teachers support new behavior around walking and biking with incentives, language, and activities. Similarly, students, caregivers, and the neighborhood will regularly engage in walking and biking opportunities. Other signs of a program reaching maturity come from the district and city level. A comprehensive program will have a strong Safe Routes to School commitment from the district and city. These entities will support Safe Routes to School to because they see the direct benefits for their agency in doing so.

All schools: A comprehensive program will have programming at all schools within the district and the surrounding community, although prioritization may result in different tiers of intensity for different schools.



Tailored programming reaching all students: A comprehensive program provides every student with basic walking and bicycling skills education, and has developed programming that is inclusive of all grades, languages, and backgrounds, and students with disabilities.

Deep involvement in substantial changes to street network to increase safety & comfort: A comprehensive program supports the implementation of larger street improvement projects.

Evaluation: There is often a robust evaluation and improvement process. A program continuously assesses its effectiveness and makes adjustments to improve and strengthen. This includes looking at program reach to ensure all groups are benefiting from the activities.

Roles of Different Partners

Safe Routes to School requires collaboration between the school system, city, families, students, and the community. Each group plays an important part in supporting and increasing safe walking and biking to school. Changes in behavior come through education and engagement, as well as physical changes to streets and neighborhoods and enforcement activities. Review this page to understand the role of key partners for Safe Routes to School. Programs are stronger when they consider how to engage and activate each of these groups in program planning, and how to tailor outreach strategies and materials for each.

Families

Families ultimately make the decision about how their children get to and from school. They play an important role in reinforcing behavior learned at school. There are many additional ways families can support Safe Routes to School, both at home and in a volunteer role. Organizing a walking school bus, participating in bicycling to school, or sharing information on student active travel options are all helpful for supporting Safe Routes to School. Families and caregivers can also be core members of Parent Teacher Organizations or Parent Teacher Associations (PTO/PTAs). Use the [How to be a Parent Champion for Safe Routes to School Handout](#) to provide families and PTOs/PTAs with information about Safe Routes to School.

Teachers

Most students spend six hours a day, five days a week at school. School and teachers play a unique role in shaping students' behavior. Teachers can provide education, resources, and encouragement about Safe Routes to School to students and families. Teachers have the ability to include Safe Routes to School activities in their curriculum, as well as organizing broader school programs and activities supporting Safe Routes to School. Teachers can also serve as role models for students. Reference the [Safe Routes to School Teacher Letter](#) and [Easy Ways to Incorporate Safe Routes to School in the Classroom](#) for more ideas.

Principals

Principals can have a significant influence on the way in which students travel to and from school. Principals can create an atmosphere of support and enthusiasm around Safe Routes to School. They can provide leadership for teachers and school staff and may be an important voice for supportive district policies and procedures. Engage school principals and administration in Safe Routes to School planning and outreach. [Reference A Primer for School Boards and Principals.](#)

School Districts

School districts set policy and expectations for schools. Engaging a school district in Safe Routes to School can lead to administrative support for district-wide policies and programs. School districts can encourage teacher and school buy-in for programs, and can provide [effective messaging and communication support](#). A school district can show a strong commitment to Safe Routes to School by integrating provisions for safe walking and bicycling to school in its wellness policy or by the school board adopting other policies. With a district policy in place, schools and staff can expand support through education and programs. Reference the [Safe Routes to School District Policy Workbook](#) to get ideas or create your own tailored policy using recommended language.

Community

Community buy-in and engagement is important for a comprehensive Safe Routes to School program. Improving safety for students walking and biking to school requires safe driving by community members, as well as support from residents for bike lanes, crosswalks, and other safety improvements on streets. Community organizations may have established relationships with families and students and could reinforce school messaging or support school initiatives. Conducting a [walk audit](#) near schools with community members is an excellent activity for starting or continuing conversations around Safe Routes to School.

City/County

Engage city or county staff in Safe Routes to School. Inform planning, public works, and transportation departments of safety concerns near schools. Building relationships with law enforcement can be important for effectively strategizing around traffic safety approaches, and can yield information on existing safety programs and potential support for Safe Routes to School. Working with city or county staff to prioritize infrastructure projects near schools and develop funding opportunities. Local governments may be able to provide assistance with walk audits, grants, or program resources for bike rodeos or walk to school day.

Students

Safe Routes to School can change students' lives in and outside of the classroom. Students are the primary benefactors from Safe Routes to School programs. Students need engaging messaging around Safe Routes to School to buy-in to the program. Use the [Student Quick Guide for Safe Routes to School](#) to provide students with information about Safe Routes to School.

IV

Essential Components for Your Program

As your program moves through the stages described in Section III, you will need to develop supportive structures that assist in operationalizing a coordinated effort among many partners. This section expands on some of the essential components of a Safe Routes to School program mentioned as part of the stages in Section III. By following the recommendations set out here, you can develop a strong and sustainable Safe Routes to School program.

A. Task Force

A Safe Routes to School task force is a group of community members who work to support and implement a Safe Routes to School program at the school, city, or district level. The core purpose of a task force is often described as bringing everyone together who is important to enabling students to walk and bicycle safely to school. Although not universal, Safe Routes to School task forces (also sometimes called collaborative or steering committees) are common, highly recommended, and can be essential to an effective Safe Routes to School program.

Note that individual schools may have a small committee or parent or youth team focused on specific activities at their school. However, school teams usually cannot engage the regular participation of district, city, and county personnel. In addition, they have little influence on policies, planning, or community design that might promote or hinder walking or biking to school, since such decisions primarily occur at the city or school district level. A community-wide task force helps guide community discussions and decision-making about encouraging active transportation and improving safety for all students walking, bicycling, skating, and rolling to school. It also provides opportunities for





Students learn bicycle and pedestrian education at Two Rivers Dos Rios Elementary, Oregon.

information sharing and for coordination among stakeholders, as well as informing stakeholders so that they become champions for Safe Routes to School within their respective spheres of influence.

If a bicycle and pedestrian or Vision Zero task force already exists, integrating Safe Routes to School initiatives into the existing group is an option. Safe Routes to School programs often share similar goals with Vision Zero and active transportation programs. A benefit to this type of collaboration lies in the addition of a school based perspective. If you are adding on to an existing task force, make sure to allocate a dedicated amount of the meetings and efforts to Safe Routes to School.

For more information on forming and running a task force, see [Building Momentum for Safe Routes to School: A Toolkit for School Districts and City Leaders](#)

B. Staffing

A Safe Routes to School coordinator is a person assigned to lead the implementation of a Safe Routes to School program in their community. Coordinators are essential to the long-term success of a Safe Routes to School program. Coordinators can be full time or part time and have a range of responsibilities. Safe Routes to School coordinators can either be paid or unpaid (volunteer) positions. A volunteer coordinator is most often a parent, family member, or teacher who takes on the role in order to move Safe Routes to School forward in his or her community. While a volunteer lead is beneficial to coordinate efforts when funding has not been identified, there are significant benefits to having a paid coordinator:

Paid coordinators tend to stay longer in their position than volunteer coordinators. Volunteer coordinators are likely to be parents, who eventually “age out” of the schools they are working with. Coordinating an effective Safe Routes to

School program involves a substantial amount of work; pay is an incentive for continued commitment to the role.

Paid coordinators can devote considerably more time to Safe Routes to School than volunteer coordinators. Based on a survey of Safe Routes to School programs, most volunteer coordinators spend 10 hours or less per month on Safe Routes to School and many spend four hours or less. But even a small program can require considerably more time than this. A paid coordinator might have 20 to 40 hours a week dedicated to Safe Routes to School.

Paid coordinators are generally more likely to have skills necessary to be effective in their role. Safe Routes to School coordinators need to have strong project management, communications, and cultural competency skills. While many volunteer coordinators may have these skills, others do not. Without a formal employment process there is no assurance that the right person for the job will be in place.

C. Safe Routes to School Action Plan

Developing a Safe Routes to School action plan allows your program to consider where it currently is, where it wants to be in five or more years, and what needs to happen to get there. With an action plan, you can think through each of the 6 E's, identify your goals for program development, and make a realistic plan. An action plan then helps assist with prioritizing activities and achievements over several years.

Action plans are strongest when developed through a community process. By including families, students, and other community members in the planning process, your community's vision for walking and biking will guide the plan, and it will include community needs and priorities. It is also important to include the various stakeholders who you are counting upon to implement the plan. Your action plan is more likely to be implemented if it has input and buy in from those who will need to carry out the actions.



Action plans can be as simple as a list of actions and a timeline, or as complex as a formal report that spells out the history and current state of the community, sets out processes that are underway, and describes needed infrastructure and non-infrastructure changes in detail with potential funding sources. Basic steps for developing any Safe Routes to School action plan include:

- Outline actions and activities under each of the 6 E's needed to achieve community goals for walking and biking.
- Incorporate an equity approach in the action plan and needs assessment. Consider how to address the needs of all groups; where will you expand your reach? Where will you take some initial steps?
- Identify actions that will develop the components needed for the growth and maturation of your program.
- Prioritize actions within the plan, identifying where to start now. Be realistic about what you will need to not do in order to achieve higher priorities.
- Define the roles and responsibilities of key leaders and partners as well as timeframes for specific actions.

A sample action plan matrix is provided in the appendix. Some states provide specific guidance for what is required for a Safe Routes to School action plan for it to function as a precursor to applying for state and federal funding. Check with your state department of transportation to see if this applies to your community.



D. Strong Safe Routes to School Policies

School districts, community stakeholders, and local jurisdictions have essential roles in implementing comprehensive Safe Routes to School initiatives. Adopting Safe Routes to School policies and integrating Safe Routes to School practices into existing policy advances Safe Routes to School and can contribute to healthy and sustainable cities. Policy supports the sustainability of Safe Routes to School efforts by institutionalizing supportive practices, providing more consistent program implementation, creating accountability, and establishing formal relationships and responsibilities. A policy can broaden the reach of a program beyond an individual school, to reach children and families across a city. Both municipalities and school districts can adopt Safe Routes to School policies and related policies, and can integrate Safe Routes to School practices into existing policy.

Resource: Safe Routes to School District Policy Workbook

The interactive [Safe Routes to School Policy Workbook](#), developed by the Safe Routes to School National Partnership and ChangeLab Solutions, is designed to help school board members, district administrators, Safe Routes to School practitioners, and families to create and implement policies that support active transportation and Safe Routes to School programs. The workbook walks through a series of policy options to build a customized Safe Routes to School policy, which can be downloaded for local use.

The idea of changing government and school policies may seem overwhelming, but it doesn't have to be. Schools, cities, and counties all make policies that govern the use of agency resources including funding. With families advocating for changes, you can help these agencies support opportunities for children to walk and bicycle to school and in daily life. The following are policy changes that can improve walking and bicycling to schools.

1. School District Policy Opportunities

A school district can support Safe Routes to School by integrating provisions for safe walking and bicycling to school in its wellness policy or by adopting standalone Safe Routes to School policies. A basic policy articulates the school district's support for Safe Routes to School and walking and bicycling. A strong policy articulates specific activities or commitments, such as establishing a district task force and school teams, providing traffic safety education, authorizing walking school buses and bike trains, integrating walking and bicycling into the responsibilities of the student transportation department, and addressing planning and design of school facilities to support walking and bicycling.

Examples of important opportunities for school district policy changes include:

Reversing a No Walk/Bike Policy: Does your school prohibit walking or bicycling to school? If so, you can change this! There are many examples across the country of schools that have changed their policies after parents have asked them to be reviewed or reconsidered. For more information, see our [Safe Routes to School Local Policy Guide](#) and [Safe Routes to School District Policy Workbook](#).

Integrating Safe Routes to School in wellness policies: Federal law requires all school districts that participate in the federal school meal program to adopt wellness policies that focus on nutrition and physical activity. Many schools have policies that focus on nutrition, but they need more ways to increase physical activity. Getting more students to walk and bike through this simple change is an excellent way to support your Safe Routes to School program. Find out if your school has a wellness policy, how it can be amended, and get Safe Routes to School included! This will help later with getting additional programs and policies initiated. For more information reference the [Safe Routes to School District Policy Workbook](#).

School siting and closure policies: When school districts grow, budgets contract, or the student population changes, there are often discussions around building or closing schools. Local districts have wide discretion regarding where they locate schools; where a school is built or which school is closed are critical components in enabling or preventing students from walking or bicycling to school. Reference [Smart School Siting](#) to find out more about school siting and closures. These policy initiatives provide preliminary ideas for how parents and community advocates can start implementing policies that support Safe Routes to School, changes to the built environment, and increased physical activity. Children can also get involved as advocates for better walking and bicycling conditions.

2. Policy Opportunities for Cities, Towns, and Counties

Some city or county policies that benefit Safe Routes to School are expressly about Safe Routes to School. Others are more general policies that are deeply beneficial to Safe Routes to School goals.

Two common ways that cities and counties adopt Safe Routes to School policies are either by addressing Safe Routes to School in the comprehensive plan, or by passing a separate resolution.

Safe Routes to School in comprehensive plans:

In a comprehensive plan, a city or county plans for its future development, and can include how to support safe walking and bicycling for students. Safe Routes to School can be incorporated into planning for new development and redevelopment of neighborhoods, infrastructure investments, and budgeting. Safe Routes to School should be integrated throughout a comprehensive plan to ensure that all aspects of future development are coordinated to support students' ability to walk and bike in the community.

Safe Routes to School resolutions:

A jurisdiction's governing body can also adopt a stand-alone Safe Routes to School resolution. A Safe Routes to School resolution articulates the city or county's support for Safe Routes to School and walking and bicycling. The policy can articulate specific commitments, such as identifying and prioritizing infrastructure improvements around schools, coordinating with the schools and school district, supporting education and encouragement activities, establishing a Safe Routes to School task force, and assigning responsibilities to agency staff. A sample city or county resolution is provided in the Appendix.



Policy Resources

- [Fact Sheet: Integrating Safe Walking and Bicycling to School into Comprehensive Planning](#)
- [Model Safe Routes to School Language for Comprehensive Plans](#), ChangeLab Solutions

E. Funding to Sustain Your Efforts

A central challenge as a Safe Routes to School program develops is obtaining sufficient funding. Safe Routes to School programs need funding to carry out existing programming and to expand to reach more students. The financial needs of Safe Routes to School programs vary based on program size, depth, and maturity. Depending on need, a program may use one or many of the options below. Funding opportunities vary in amount, ranging from a contribution to subsidize a one-time event to funding for a multi-year staffed program.

Federal and State Transportation Grants

The federal Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) is a major source of funding for walking, bicycling, and Safe Routes to School. TAP funds can be used for sidewalks, crosswalks, bike lanes, and trails, as well as Safe Routes to School projects. TAP dollars are awarded through a competitive process by the state or by regional bodies called metropolitan planning organizations. Eligible activities vary by state, but typical funding can be used for Safe Routes to School street changes (infrastructure) and programs (non-infrastructure). In addition to TAP funding, some states and regional transportation departments have other funding programs that support walking, bicycling, and Safe Routes to School. [Contact](#) your state Safe Routes to School coordinator, state bicycle/pedestrian coordinator, regional planning organization, or local city or county transportation department for more information on available funding.



The Portland, Oregon, Safe Routes to School program is housed in the Portland Bureau of Transportation. Five full-time Safe Routes to School staff positions, along with education and encouragement activities for over 100 schools in five school districts are funded through general transportation revenue, traffic safety fines and a grant from the Oregon Department of Transportation.

Health Grants

Health grants may fund Safe Routes to School as a program that supports healthy and active communities. Education and encouragement activities such as walking school buses, Walk to School Day, and bicycle skills clinics are a good fit. Health grants may support walk audits and parent surveys as they evaluate community needs for improving neighborhood environments for walking and biking to school, and provide opportunities for community engagement. Contact your local and state health departments for information on available grants that could support Safe Routes to School. Additional funding opportunities may be available via health foundations in your community.

Physical Education Grants

Physical education grants often strive to increase student physical activity. Safe Routes to School provides options for physical activity before and after school, as well as skills to enable students to walk and bike into adulthood. Physical education grants may support bicycle skills trainings and education in the classroom or may support other programming. Physical education grants vary—some are available for programs in or outside of school, and they range in funding amounts. Physical education grants are available through organizations such as Active Schools and SHAPE America. For assistance finding physical education grants in your region use the SPARK grant finder tool.

Local Foundations

Local foundations may have opportunities for Safe Routes to School funding. Research local foundations supporting the environment, health, schools, active transportation, community building, student empowerment, and street safety. Contact your [local community foundation](#) for assistance discovering available local grants. A community foundation may be able to provide information on deadlines and requirements for local foundation grants. Some local foundations provide free services such as grant writing or networking.

Local Business Sponsorships

Local businesses can be a source of funding for Safe Routes to School. Any kind of local business may be interested in supporting the health and safety of local schoolchildren. Businesses that champion walking, biking, health, physical activity, sports, or the environment may be particularly interested. Sponsorships can also come from building relationships between Safe Routes to School practitioners and a champion within a business. Create an opportunity for a business to sponsor a specific activity such as walk to school day or a walking school bus. Sponsorships can also be in-kind.

For examples, donations such as venue space, printing materials, bicycles, helmets, small giveaways, and food can be very helpful. Some businesses donate volunteer time, for example, allowing employees to spend an hour of work time assisting a walking school bus once a week.

Donations

Donations can be a source of funding for specific projects or materials for a Safe Routes to School program. Possible sources for donations include families, community leaders, or other community members. Online donation campaigns are useful for reaching larger audiences such as a school or neighborhood. Fundraising platforms such as [ioby](#) make it easy to donate online.



Reston, Virginia Lake Anne Elementary in Reston, Virginia hosts a monthly “Walk & Roll” to school program, which is similar to a walking school bus. Parents and students meet at a local park before school for 15 to 30 minutes of play time and activity, breakfast treats, and socializing. The event concludes with parents and students walking to school together. Encouragement events are organized by the PTA. These events are low-cost and use donations from local merchants as well as PTA funds. In addition to breakfast, the PTA has provided key chain tags from Fitness Finders, t-shirts, safety reflectors, and safety vests for participants. Participation ranges from 25 to 250 individuals each month.



Conclusion

Safe Routes to School initiatives bring enormous benefits to children, youth, and adults throughout a community. This toolkit describes how to develop and run a successful Safe Routes to School program, and sets out some of the most important ways that a community can support and sustain a Safe Routes to School program. By taking the steps outlined in this toolkit, we can create communities that support and prioritize health, safety, and sustainability for everyone.



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