

SAFE ROUTES TO SCHOOL PROGRAMS IN COLORADO



2020 Statewide Program Assessment Report





Safe Routes to School Programs in Colorado

2020 Statewide Program Assessment Report

Table of Contents

| | |
|--|---------|
| Introduction..... | page 1 |
| Why Does Safe Routes to School Matter for Colorado?..... | page 3 |
| History and Structure of Safe Routes to School in Colorado..... | page 5 |
| Colorado's Policy Environment for Safe Routes to School and Active Transportation..... | page 7 |
| Colorado Safe Routes to School Program Landscape..... | page 9 |
| Conclusion..... | page 17 |

Author

Natasha Riveron

Contributing Author

Michelle Lieberman



1 Introduction

Studies show that Safe Routes to School programs are some of the most effective tools to help schoolchildren get vital physical activity and build healthy life habits. To help assess Colorado's progress in supporting Safe Routes to School, the national Safe Routes Partnership conducted a review of Colorado's programs, policies, funding, and practices related to Safe Routes to School. This report provides an overview of Safe Routes to School programming in Colorado and sets out a high-level assessment of challenges, innovations, and opportunities for Safe Routes to School programs in the state.

Our assessment found that in the state of Colorado, Safe Routes to School programming is well established in two population centers (Denver and Boulder) and the suburbs around them, but is limited in rural communities. This indicates that Safe Routes to School has yet to take hold as part of Colorado's culture statewide.



Project Summary

This report was developed for the Colorado Department of Transportation and draws in part from the national Safe Routes to School Program Census Project. Safe Routes to School programs are not funded or regulated through a centralized process, and may be volunteer-run or supported by local, regional, state, or federal funds. That means there is no easy way to know how many programs there are in the United States, where they are, or how many children and communities they are benefiting. Without this information, it is difficult to track trends and progress in the Safe Routes to School movement, or to provide targeted support and resources to local communities.

The lack of any kind of comprehensive inventory of Safe Routes to School programs has created challenges for program support, public health, policy change, and research. In response, the Safe Routes Partnership developed the Safe Routes to School Program Census Project to identify as many Safe Routes to School programs as possible and capture key data. The Safe Routes Partnership developed and piloted a survey instrument and collected data on a national basis in spring and summer 2019. Through the Safe Routes to School Program Census Project, we gathered detailed information about Safe Routes to School programs around the nation, their longevity, the types of programming they offer, their funding, and the key challenges they face. This report draws from data collected during the initial survey period in 2019 as well as additional responses and information gathered specific to Colorado in 2020.



Photo: Marisa Jones

2 Why Does Safe Routes to School Matter for Colorado?

Safe Routes to School is a movement that aims to enable and encourage safe active transportation of children while they walk or ride their bikes to school. The goals of Safe Routes to School in Colorado are:

1. To enable and encourage children kindergarten through 8th grade, including those with disabilities, to walk and bicycle to school;
2. To make walking and bicycling to school safe and more appealing; and
3. To facilitate the planning, development and implementation of projects that will improve safety, and reduce traffic congestion, fuel consumption, and air pollution in the vicinity of schools.

For example, Safe Routes to School street improvements address problems like broken or missing sidewalks, faded crosswalks, and lack of safe bike lanes. Safe Routes to School programs get more students walking and biking by providing skills and safety education while also creating encouragement activities that get kids moving together. This approach has the potential to benefit the 1.3 million school age children in Colorado, along with their families and other neighborhood residents.¹

While Colorado is often seen as one of the healthiest states in the nation with comparatively low obesity rates and higher levels of physical activity among adults, there is room for improvement. Only 27.4 percent of Colorado high school students meet the aerobic

physical activity guidelines set by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention.² The obesity rate among youth ages 10-17 is 10.7 percent.³ In addition, Colorado does not have any requirements for a minimum amount of time for students to participate in physical education for elementary, middle, or high school.⁴ Walking and rolling to school can provide opportunities to incorporate physical activity into students' days.

Obesity rates are higher for Colorado's adults, who have obesity at a rate of 23 percent.⁵ Active transportation is one way to increase levels of physical activity, but only 4.1 percent of Colorado residents commute to work by walking or biking and 2.9 percent commute by transit, indicating high car use.⁶

Safe Routes to School programs can also help improve school attendance. In Colorado, 22.5 percent of students were chronically absent during the 2018-2019 school year.⁷ That means that 22.5 percent of students were absent 10 percent or more of the days they were enrolled during the school year. Chronic absenteeism can have lasting impacts on students' development and academic success.⁸

Active transportation to school and other destinations can be dangerous in many communities, and the state of Colorado is no exception. Between 2008 and 2017, drivers struck and killed 590 people who were walking in Colorado.⁹ This is part of a national trend. Over the past decade, there has been a 35 percent increase nationally in the number of people killed by drivers while walking. In that same time period, pedestrian deaths have more than doubled in Colorado.¹⁰ In 2018, 22 people were killed while bicycling, making up 3.5 percent of total traffic fatalities.¹¹ In the context of Colorado's high car use, this is a significant safety issue. A core reason for the low rates of walking and biking and the number of fatalities for people who do participate in these activities is that many Colorado communities are not designed for walking and biking.

While Safe Routes to School projects and programs are focused on the trip to school, these initiatives can benefit surrounding neighborhoods and others traveling along school routes through infrastructure design changes, coupled with education on safe behaviors.



Photo: Margaux Mennesson



Benefits of Safe Routes to School

Safe Routes to School improves sidewalks and street crossings and creates safe, convenient, and fun opportunities for children to bicycle and walk to and from school. The CDC has recognized Safe Routes to School as one of a handful of programs that are cost-effective and show significant population health impacts within five years. saferoutespartnership.org

COST SAVINGS

- Household savings from reduced gas & car use
- Education budget savings through reduced student busing costs



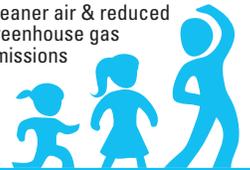
TRAFFIC SAFETY

- Reduced traffic injuries & dangers for students and community members at arrival & dismissal through street improvements near schools
- More chances to learn & practice road safety for students



CLIMATE BENEFITS AND CLEANER AIR

- Fewer student asthma attacks due to less driving & reduced air pollution results
- Cleaner air & reduced greenhouse gas emissions



SAFETY FROM CRIME

- Increased safety from crime & violence due to more people on the streets, good lighting & better street design
- Less harassment, bullying, or violence when students walk or bike together or with adults



COMMUNITY CONNECTEDNESS

- Stronger student friendships & relationships through walking & biking together
- Positive social connections for families & neighbors



HEALTHIER STUDENTS

- Better health & stronger bones, muscles & joints through more walking & biking
- Reduced risk of chronic disease, diabetes, & obesity



SCHOOL TRANSPORTATION FIXES

- Solutions to reduced or non-existent bus service through Safe Routes to School
- Reduced traffic congestion at pick-up/drop-off times



BETTER ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

- Better focus, improved concentration & less distraction for students who are active before school
- Fewer absences and less tardiness when students walk or bike in groups



SCHOOL

3

History and Structure of Safe Routes to School in Colorado



Photo: Megan Severson

The Safe Routes to School movement was launched in the United States at a national level in 2005. Alarmed by the tripling of childhood obesity levels, communities across the United States recognized the connection with a precipitous drop in rates of students walking and bicycling to school. These rates had decreased from 49 percent to less than 15 percent over a 30-year period, while rates of obesity, diabetes, and other chronic diseases grew. Safe Routes to School became a way to make bicycling and walking to school a safer and more appealing transportation alternative, thereby encouraging a healthy and active lifestyle from an early age while also improving safety and reducing traffic, fuel consumption, air pollution in the vicinity of schools.

In response, Congress authorized the first federally funded Safe Routes to School program. From 2005 to 2012, Safe Routes to School initiatives were funded through a standalone federal Safe Routes to School program and

each state had a Safe Routes to School coordinator tasked with supporting local- and state- level Safe Routes to School initiatives. While federal legislation mandated the establishment of the Safe Routes to School program in all 50 states in 2005, Colorado legislation codified Colorado Safe Routes to School in 2004. Colorado was the first state in the country to implement Safe Routes to School with federal dollars.

In 2012, the standalone federal program was merged with several other programs into the Transportation Alternatives Program or TAP (renamed TA for Transportation Alternatives), and the requirement for a state coordinator was eliminated.

Since 2012, state departments of transportation have received TA federal funds and have awarded money by selecting projects through a competitive process open to local governments and school systems. Colorado recognizes SRTS as an

important transportation program and has used various forms of funding including a one-time use of state appropriated funds in 2014. Since 2015, the Colorado Transportation Commission has allocated \$2.5 million per year to be used for both infrastructure and educational projects. At the local level, Safe Routes to School practitioners run education and encouragement programs with families and schools and push for strong municipal and district policies to support safe walking and bicycling. Cities and counties often take the lead on making Safe Routes to School infrastructure improvements near schools.

The Colorado Department of Transportation's Colorado Safe Routes to School (SRTS) Program is a federally funded aid program put in place to enable and encourage safe active transportation for children while they walk or ride their bikes to school. The program is currently managed by a consultant who acts as a team member of the Colorado Department of Transportation's Bicycle and Pedestrian program and Scenic Byways Section. They manage the grant process, collect and approve invoices, manage data, and provide oversight for both non-infrastructure and infrastructure projects. In addition, the program provides technical assistance to communities, training webinars, example materials, and other online resources for local Safe Routes to School programs.

4

Colorado's Policy Environment for Safe Routes to School and Active Transportation

A crucial part of Colorado's ability to create an environment that is safe and supportive for students walking and bicycling to school is the state policy environment. Safe Routes Partnership's [Making Strides: 2020 State Report Cards on Support for Walking, Biking, and Active Kids and Communities](#) provides a strong overview of Colorado's general policy landscape and commitment to Safe Routes to School and active transportation. Colorado's overall card score was 130 out of 200 points, putting it in the "Making Strides" category, the second highest scoring category. This score demonstrates that Colorado has taken meaningful steps to support walking, bicycling, Safe Routes to School, and active communities, but still needs to take significant steps to demonstrate a stronger and more effective commitment to enabling Coloradans to be safe and physically active. Below, we describe how Colorado performed on Safe Routes to School-related policy indicators reviewed in the State Report Cards, and note other Colorado policies where relevant.

A. Complete Streets and Active Transportation Policies, Planning, and Design

A Complete Streets policy sets out a state's commitment to routinely design, build, and operate all streets to enable safe use by everyone, regardless of age, ability, or mode of transportation. The Complete Streets indicator in the State Report Cards looks at whether the state is taking appropriate action to support a safe and robust walking and biking network, with particular emphasis on the quality of the state's Complete Streets policy. Colorado received almost all of the available points for this section, benefiting from the fact that the state has adopted Complete Streets policies in both the state legislature and at the Department of Transportation. However, neither policy had specific provisions to benefit all users equitably, particularly vulnerable users and the most underinvested and underserved communities.

The state has also adopted goals to increase walking and bicycling mode share and a Statewide Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan, creating strong foundations for active transportation improvements.



B. Federal and State Active Transportation Funding

The Federal and State Active Transportation Funding indicators look at how much money a state is making available to local jurisdictions for projects and programs that support safe walking and bicycling, and how the state is prioritizing high-need communities. This includes federal funds that the state is charged with administering (Transportation Alternatives /TA funding) as well as state funding.

Colorado received 39 out of 70 possible points in this section. As of December 2019, the state transferred 12 percent of their TA funds.¹² However, the state did hold at least one TA competition, has awarded at least 6 years' worth of funding, and

obligated 68 percent of state-controlled TA funds. Colorado does provide special considerations for high-need communities in TA awards as well as support for communities during the application process. However, the state does not provide any matching funds for those high need communities, which would make it less prohibitive for lower-income communities to implement projects using TA grants.

In addition to the federal TA funding, Colorado has dedicated state funding for active transportation. Colorado dedicates \$0.97 per capita to active transportation and there is no special consideration or funding set aside for state active transportation funding for high-need communities.¹³

C. Safe Routes to School Funding and Supportive Practices

These indicators look at whether the state prioritizes funding and support for Safe Routes to School infrastructure improvements and programs.

Colorado dedicates \$2.5 million per year (\$5 million per funding cycle) out of various pools of money to support Colorado Safe Routes to School. Additionally, Safe Routes to School infrastructure projects are also eligible within the TA program and give extra points to projects that support bicycling and walking. While the Colorado Safe Routes to School program does not fund planning grants, they are available through other programs such as Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ), Surface Transportation Program (STP) and others.

The Safe Routes to School Supportive Practices indicators look at what state DOTs are providing in terms of support and technical assistance to schools and local governments to further advance Safe Routes to School initiatives, beyond funding. Colorado currently has one full-time equivalent (FTE) consultant staffing the Safe Routes to School program. State DOT Safe Routes to School coordinators and other staff play an important role in making sure that Safe Routes to School funding is accessible, liaising between school systems and transportation professionals, and providing technical assistance to schools and communities.



D. School Siting and Design

The School Siting and Design indicators look at state policies and guidance regarding where schools are located, and if and how they are designed to support students safely walking and bicycling to school. Colorado does not have large school site minimum acreage guidelines or requirements that can be detrimental to creating opportunities for kids to walk and bicycle to school. Colorado's state school siting guidelines do contain criteria that encourage consideration of walking, biking, and Safe Routes to School in school siting and design. Specifically, the guidelines encourage school sites that safely separate pedestrian and vehicular traffic, coordinate with the municipality or county to provide for adequate signage, traffic lights, and crosswalk signals, provide well-maintained sidewalks and a designated safe path leading to the school entrance(s), and provide bicycle access and storage.

However, there are no incentives for schools to be located near parks or other community facilities and no guidelines for maximum school site acreage or minimum outdoor play or physical activity space. All of these provide opportunities to strengthen state policy to improve health and safety.

Colorado 2020

MAKING STRIDES



OVERALL SCORE

130 / 200

Scoring Key: LACING UP WARMING UP MAKING STRIDES BUILDING SPEED 100%

COMPLETE STREETS AND ACTIVE TRANSPORTATION POLICY AND PLANNING



| | | |
|--|--|----------------|
| Complete Streets Policies | Adopted state Complete Streets policy(ies) | 5 / 5 |
| | Has strong state Complete Streets policy | 18 / 20 |
| Active Transportation Planning and Design | Adopted goals to increase walking and bicycling mode share | 5 / 5 |
| | Adopted a state pedestrian, bicycle, or active transportation plan | 10 / 10 |
| | Adopted/endorsed NACTO guidelines | 5 / 5 |
| | | 43 / 45 |

FEDERAL AND STATE ACTIVE TRANSPORTATION FUNDING



| | | |
|---|--|----------------|
| Transportation Alternatives Implementation | Retained TAP funding without transfers | 0 / 10 |
| | Awarded TAP projects | 10 / 10 |
| | Obligated state-controlled TAP funds | 6 / 10 |
| | Provides special consideration for high-need communities in TAP awards | 5 / 5 |
| | Provides matching funds for high-need communities | 0 / 5 |
| | Provides support to TAP applicants | 5 / 5 |
| State Funding for Active Transportation | Dedicates state funding for active transportation | 10 / 10 |
| | Amount of state funding for active transportation | 3 / 10 |
| | Provides special consideration for high-need communities in state awards | 0 / 5 |
| | | 39 / 70 |

SAFE ROUTES TO SCHOOL FUNDING AND SUPPORTIVE PRACTICES



| | | |
|---|---|----------------|
| Safe Routes to School Funding | Provides special consideration for Safe Routes to School projects using TAP funds | 3 / 5 |
| | Dedicates state or other funding for Safe Routes to School | 5 / 5 |
| | Funds SRTS non-infrastructure projects | 5 / 5 |
| | Provides Safe Routes to School planning grants or minigrants | 0 / 3 |
| Safe Routes to School Supportive Practices | Staffs state Safe Routes to School program with state employees or consultants | 3 / 5 |
| | Provides a resource center or technical assistance to Safe Routes to School initiatives | 5 / 5 |
| | Supports equitable access to Safe Routes to School programming | 5 / 5 |
| | Facilitates Safe Routes to School education | 2 / 2 |
| | | 28 / 35 |

ACTIVE NEIGHBORHOODS AND SCHOOLS



| | | |
|--|---|----------------|
| Shared Use of School Facilities | Adopted state policy supporting shared use of school facilities | 6 / 10 |
| | Provides funding/incentives in support of shared use of school facilities | 5 / 5 |
| School Siting and Design | Requires large school sites (minimum acreage guideline) | 0 / 0 |
| | Supports walking, bicycling and physical activity in school design guidelines | 6 / 15 |
| Physical Education | Adopted PE minutes and graduation requirements | 0 / 15 |
| State Physical Activity Staff | Dedicates state staff to physical activity | 3 / 5 |
| | | 20 / 50 |

5

Colorado Safe Routes to School Program Landscape

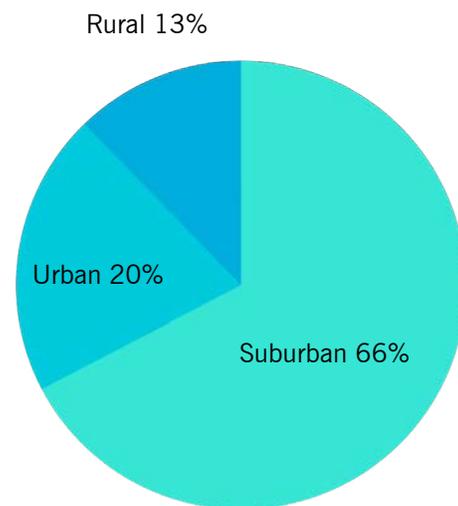
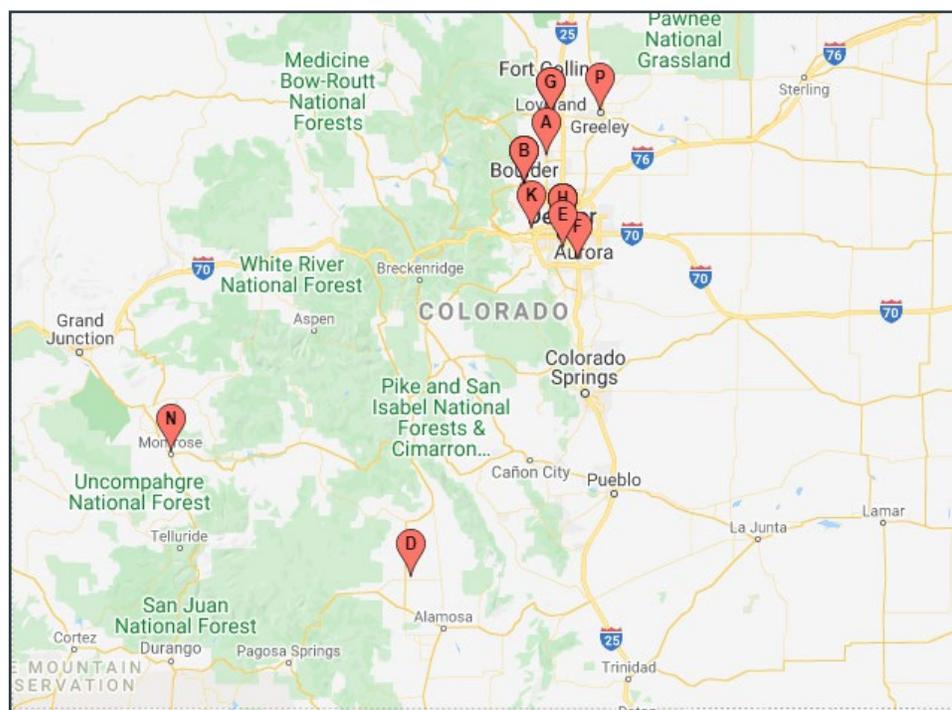
This section provides a look at the landscape of Safe Routes to School programs in Colorado based on the responses to the Safe Routes to School Census and additional research on local programs. Colorado findings are compared to national Safe Routes to School Census findings when applicable.

Overview

Limited Safe Routes to School Programming: Overall, our analysis revealed fairly low numbers of schools engaging in Safe Routes to School activities and few developed Safe Routes to School programs outside of the Denver Metropolitan Area and Boulder. According to the Colorado Safe Routes to School 5 Year Strategic Plan, as of 2017, 579 schools (approximately 43 percent of all elementary and middle schools) across the state in 30 percent of Colorado’s School Districts had implemented Safe Routes to School programs.¹⁴ We received 15 in-depth survey responses from programs across the state that are fairly representative of the variety of programs Colorado.

Lower-impact activities and few initiatives designed to engage specific groups of students: In Colorado, most programs reported that they had done a few lower-intensity activities such as Walk or Bike to School Day, rather than conducting higher-impact daily or weekly activities. A few programs have successfully developed more robust programs and have conducted activities focused on students who may be less likely to walk or bicycle, such recent immigrants and students with disabilities.

Urban/rural nature: Two-thirds of Colorado respondents indicated that their Safe Routes to School program was located in a suburban community, 20 percent in an urban area, and 13 percent in a rural area. This is generally aligned with the urban-rural split in Colorado with approximately 12 percent of Colorado’s population residing in rural areas.¹⁵



Above: The urban/suburban/rural breakdown of programs is generally representative of Colorado's population distribution.

Left: Markers indicate the locations of the fifteen Safe Routes to School programs that responded to the census.

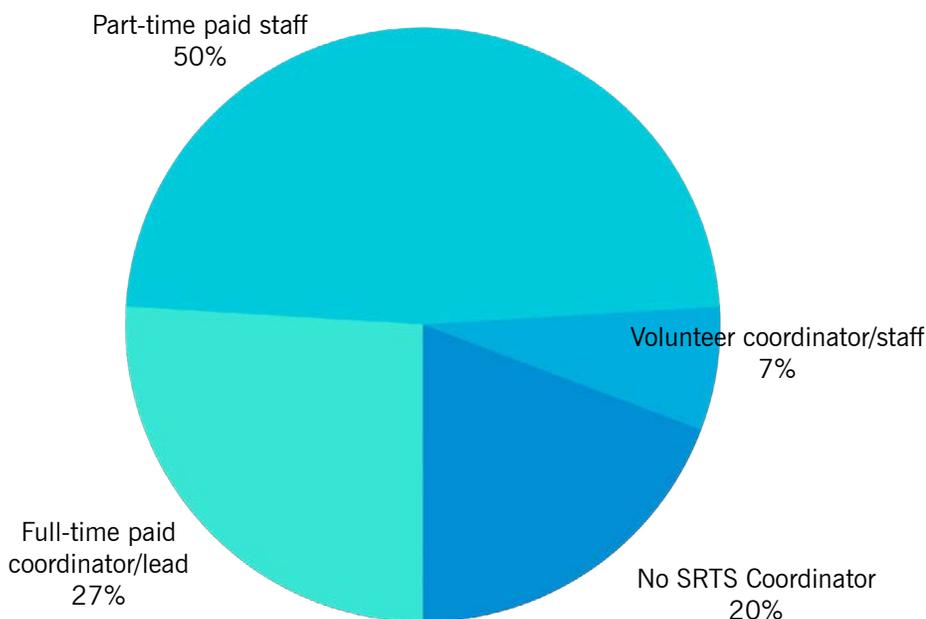


Program Assessment Methodology

Information about Safe Routes to School programs in each state was primarily collected through an online survey conducted from March through May 2019. The survey instrument can be reviewed [here](#). Surveys were collected through a combination of purposive sampling and a snowball approach. The survey link was disseminated nationally to people and organizations potentially affiliated with Safe Routes to School initiatives through a wide range of direct and indirect outreach including: emails from the Safe Routes Partnership, the Safe Routes Partnership and partner organization's newsletters, direct contact by state departments of transportation and health, webpage postings, and social media. Respondents were encouraged to forward the survey to peers or other interested parties. Additional information about existing Safe Routes to School programs as well as state practices and support was gathered through conversations with state department of transportation staff. Following initial data collection using the survey tool, the Safe Routes Partnership conducted follow up with individual program contacts as needed to clarify or obtain additional information. Data were compiled and analyzed to identify trends, program commonalities and differences, and to assess program characteristics. Although the programs surveyed are not scientifically representative, this report includes an analysis of collected data in order to provide a broad brush overview of trends in the state.

Structure of Local Programs

- Staffing:** Paid staff is one of the most important elements in a comprehensive and sustainable Safe Routes to School program. Of the local Colorado program respondents, only 27 percent of respondents reported that their program had a full-time, paid coordinator; almost half of respondents indicated that their program had a part time coordinator; 7 percent indicated that their coordinator worked on a volunteer basis; and 20 percent of programs had no coordinator, lead, or staff at all. Full time versus part time status is likely based on the number of schools and students served and the depth of programming. National results showed a lower percentage of programs with paid staff, a higher percentage of programs with an unpaid coordinator, and a similar percentage with no coordinator or staff.
- Sponsoring Agency:** Colorado Safe Routes to School programs are housed in a wide variety of agencies. Of the respondents, about half were housed at a school or school district, with others in transportation and public works departments, health departments, and nonprofit organizations. There appears to be more school and school district leadership of programs in Colorado in comparison to national results where 26 percent of programs were housed in schools or school districts.
- Task force:** 40 percent of local program respondents indicated that their program had an advisory team, a positive sign of health and sustainability for those programs. Other programs could benefit from developing a task force, advisory team, or other Safe Routes to School committee.





- **Geographic scope of program/ program service area:** Different programs define their service areas differently: some have the same boundaries as a town or a school district, others do not. Of our respondents, one third were countywide; one third were in a single school district, and the other third were working in a single school, city or town.
- **Funding Types:** The size and source of Safe Routes to School program budgets in Colorado vary widely, from no budget at all, to over one million dollars for capital improvements and programmatic work. 60 percent of respondents indicated that their programs received transportation funding through the state Safe Routes to School grants program or other federal grants. Colorado programs also depended on local funding, foundations, school funds,

and donations from community members and local businesses. The funding pattern is similar to national results where programs rely on state and federal transportation grants followed by local funds, education funding, and donations.

- **Policy:** Municipal and school district Safe Routes to School policies can provide enormous support and assistance to Safe Routes to School programs, formalizing support and prioritization and encouraging institutionalization of Safe Routes to School commitments. Of the local program respondents, only 20 percent indicated that their community had a Safe Routes to School policy or resolution at either the municipal or county level. 67 percent indicated that other policies in their community such as Transportation Master Plans, Bike and Pedestrian Plans, Vision Zero, and school district or school board

policy contain language supporting Safe Routes to School. Similarly, 61 percent of programs responding nationally had language supporting Safe Routes to School in some type of local city or school district policy or plan. 23 percent reported that their city or county had adopted a Safe Routes to School resolution or policy, with a similar number reporting a school district Safe Routes to School policy.

The E's of Safe Routes to School

The E's of Safe Routes to School Comprehensive Safe Routes to School initiatives have been shown to be more effective at increasing physical activity and reducing injuries. Colorado has promoted a comprehensive, integrated approach summarized by Five E's: education, encouragement, engineering, enforcement, and evaluation.



Case Study: Boulder County's Trip Tracker

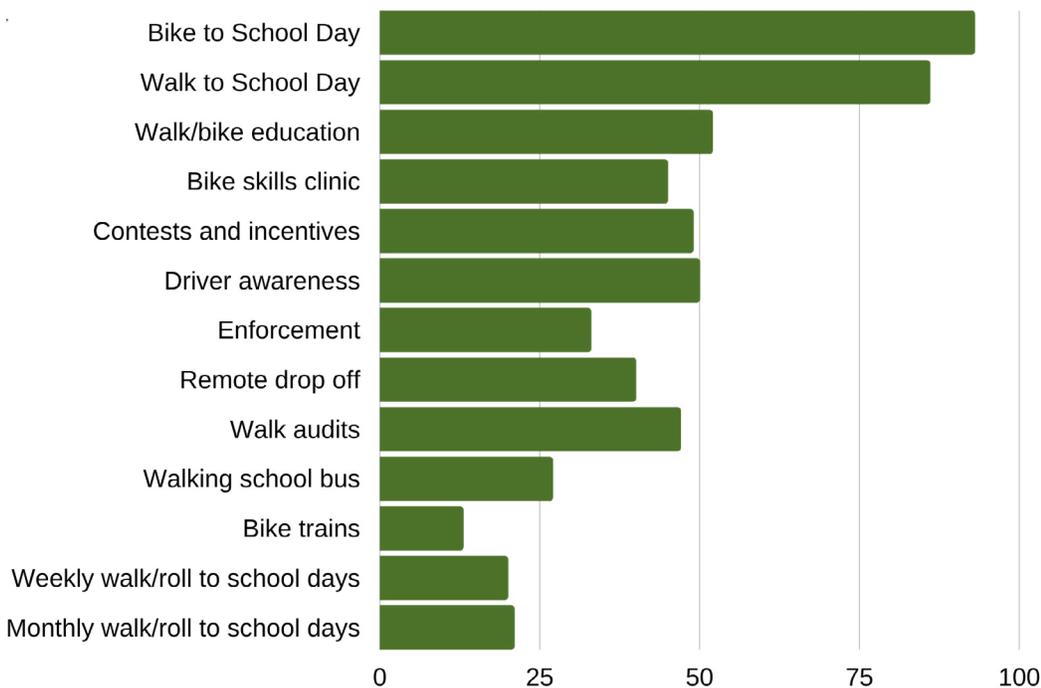
Trip Tracker is a unique incentive program that rewards participating students and staff in St. Vrain Valley and Boulder Valley School Districts for using transportation modes that keep a single family car from pulling up to school property. Students and staff track their trips and are rewarded with Tracker Bucks, which can be used like cash at locally-owned businesses. These local businesses are then reimbursed for the Tracker Bucks they redeem. Trip Tracker participants get to pick their own meaningful rewards and money is invested in the community all in support of healthier, greener, and safer travel choices.

Locally-owned businesses opt in to the program to support local schools and children, but they also see the program bringing more customers through their doors. Cammie Edson, Boulder County's Trip Tracker Program Manager noted, "To maintain program sustainability, the program currently reimburses businesses 50 cents on the dollar for the Tracker Bucks that locally-owned businesses redeem. Some businesses see it as a discount or donation, while others write off the other 50 cents as marketing because they know that the program brings in both new and repeat customers."

Two separate Trip Tracker programs cover all of Boulder County. Boulder Valley School District's (BVSD) Trip Tracker Coordinator works internally in their Transportation Department, while the program coordinator for St. Vrain Valley School District (SVVSD) is housed at the county government in the Transportation Planning Division and works in partnership with school district staff. Both programs collaborate often, evaluate and reward the same behaviors, are covered by full time hours, and occasionally get assistance from students or interns to help administer the program, build relationships with local businesses, and advocate for Safe Routes to School in local policies. Initially it was challenging to convince businesses to take part in the program, but after six years in SVVSD and nine years in BVSD of this successful program, word of mouth has spread and businesses and schools now regularly contact each of the coordinators to participate.

The continued growth and sustainability of Trip Tracker speaks to the strong partnerships between schools and school districts, public agencies, businesses, and community members in Boulder County. This program has taken a unique approach to sustaining behavior change through incentives by not just giving people a prescribed reward for a one-time action but actually incentivizing ongoing mode shift as an act that benefits the community. While it increases the amount of money invested into local businesses and decreases congestion at school drop-off and pick-up, it also decreases air pollution and improves overall health and safety.

Program Activities and Details



Active travel increase

- One third of local program respondents indicated that they had observed an increase in walking and biking activity. 27 percent indicated that between 11 and 25 percent of students currently walk or bike, one program reported up to 50 percent of students currently walk, and one program reported over 50 percent of students walk and bike.

Program Activities

- Bike to School Day and Walk to School Day were the most common activities reported, with 93 percent and 86 percent of programs participating respectively. According to the National Center for Safe Routes to School, 178 Colorado

schools participated in Walk to School Day and 157 schools participated in Bike to School Day in the 2018-2019 school year.¹⁶ Participation levels for both events had been steadily increasing over the last three years, but the 2018-2019 school year had lower participation for both events. (See maps on page 17.) This accords with our experience nationally -- single day events tend to be low-hanging fruit for programs, and are common starting places.

- Many programs conduct student walking and biking safety and skills education in and out of school. Over half of respondents reported that they held general education activities and just under half of respondents reported that they

hosted bike skills clinics (also known as bike rodeos). Thousands of students throughout the state benefit from these education efforts, which range from a few hours a year to longer trainings. Program offerings generally align with national responses where general safety education is offered in approximately 60 percent of programs and less programs offer bike skills training.

- Contests and incentives were also popular. Nearly half of program respondents said that they engaged in these types of activities. Incentives ranged from T-shirts, water bottles, and other bike related items to vouchers that could be spent at local businesses.
- Driver awareness activities to

support stronger driver safety behaviors, either through enforcement or driver awareness programs, are part of about half of the programs as well. About one third of programs said they participate in enforcement activities. For example, City of Loveland's Safe Routes to School program through the Public Works Department includes crossing guards and coordination with law enforcement.

- Remote drop offs (also known as park and walk in) and safe routes to bus stops, which provide opportunities for students to be driven in a car or bus part of the way to school and walk the other portion, are not as popular in Colorado. Only 40 percent of program respondents indicated that they include this approach in their programs. These may be promising approaches for rural and suburban programs to explore.
- Colorado programs are fairly involved in infrastructure issues. Of those programs that responded to this question, over half advocated for street improvements, 47 percent conducted walk audits, and 27 percent assisted with prioritizing and implementing street improvement. Only one program indicated that they did not work on infrastructure or street improvements. Similarly, national responses showed the vast majority of programs are involved in infrastructure in some way. Because research and experience tell us that both programming and infrastructure improvements are essential for improving safety and rates of walking and biking, this is a good sign.



Examples of Contests and Incentive Programs

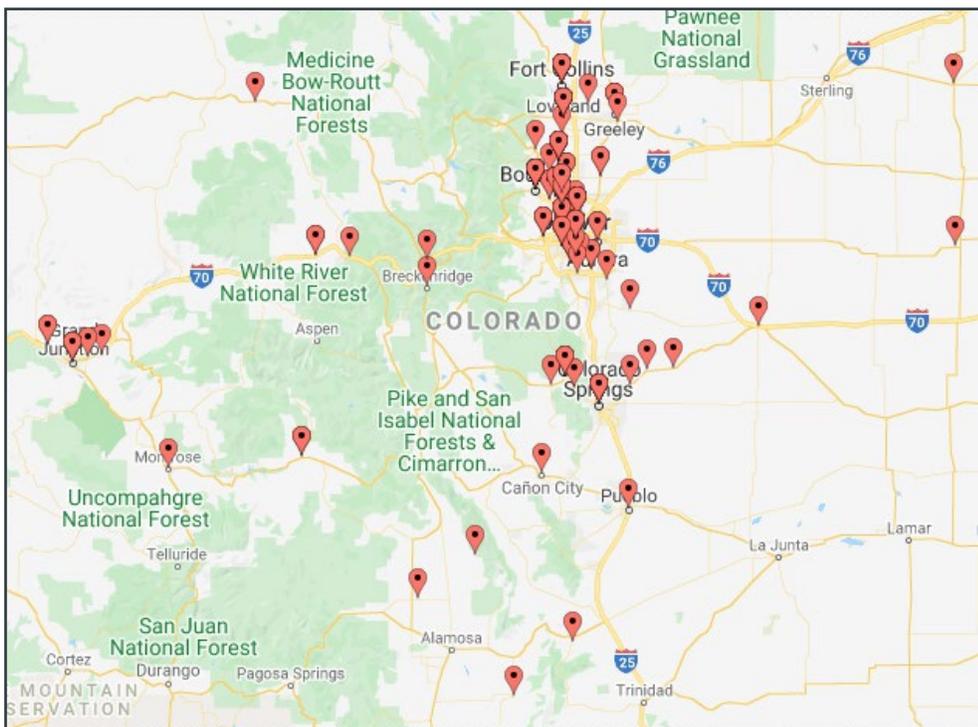
- "Every Wednesday morning we have SRTS staff standing outside giving Viking Bucks that can be used in the school's PBIS store to any elementary/middle student who biked or walked to school that morning."
- "Part of our grant budget included money for student incentives that provide a positive message about safe walking/biking. These incentives will either be given away to all students or will be won through a raffle based on participation in bike/walk to school day."
- "A 'Tires-n-Tennies Tuesday' program in which participating schools would compete for the Golden Tire award and students walking or biking over 50 percent of the year would receive a participation gift such as a water bottle or reflector at the end."

- Walking school buses and bike trains: 27 percent of program respondents held regular walking school buses and only two programs held regular bike trains. The walking school buses were mostly once or twice a month, although one program reported that they run walking school buses three or more days a week. One program reported that they run bike trains once or twice a week. National responses showed a slightly higher percentage of these activities that occur regularly - 37 percent conducted walking school buses, while 11 percent conducted bike trains.
- Weekly walk or roll to school day: 20 percent of program respondents held weekly walk or roll to school days. These days create more school-wide change and momentum than a yearly day by encouraging and celebrating students walking or biking to school with regular events. Nationally, more programs are conducting these regular events - 21 percent conducted monthly walk to school days and 20 percent conducted weekly walk or roll days.

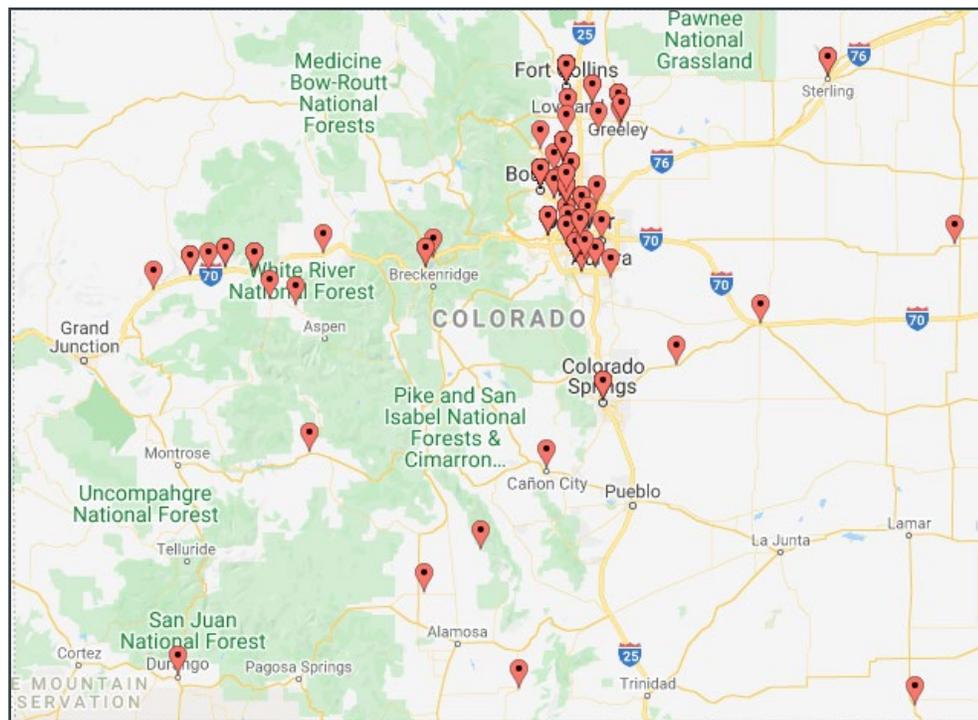
“One of our best features on walking and biking designated days is our World Drumming group and 8th Grade Jazz Ensemble playing for the school outside as students walk or bike up to the building. It is an excellent way to be greeted!”

-Bruce Geffen, Clague Middle School Safe Routes to School Program

Walk to School Day 2019 Participation



Bike to School Day 2019 Participation



Equity Considerations

Safe Routes to School programs have the potential to either create greater equity in our communities, or to exacerbate disparities, depending upon whether investments are prioritized in lower income communities and whether programs are designed and tailored for the needs of different demographic groups. While evaluating the overall health equity impact of Colorado's Safe Routes to School programs was outside the scope of this report, Colorado programs did work with communities with a range of income levels. However, Colorado programs did not seem to have very developed activities or initiatives focusing on specific groups of students.

- Of the program respondents, only one program reported that they work with mostly or all Title I schools (schools serving a substantial number of low-income students), one reported working with some (11 to 50 percent), 1/3 of programs worked with few or no Title I schools, over half of respondents did not know or were not sure if their programs worked with Title I schools.
- Two programs indicated that they did specific outreach to students who are immigrants; one noted that they had initiatives focused on students with disabilities, and one program indicated that they

did specific outreach to students from communities with higher needs related to equity index score established by their city. These programs seemed to involve outreach and tailoring of activities, but not necessarily additional activities. One program noted: "We share specific transportation and route information with students with unique learning or mobility needs. We customize this information to meet the unique needs of the student." This is fairly consistent with national responses where we saw few programs conducting specific outreach to these groups of students.

Case Study: Denver Equity Matrix

With over 300 public and private schools in the city of Denver, the Safe Routes to School program at the city's Department of Transportation and Infrastructure (DOTI) was looking for a tool to equitably manage resources and assess need. Staff found themselves responding to requests as they came in. That meant that neighborhoods with strong advocates would get resources and support, but it was more difficult to address safety and access in communities that did not have that strong advocacy or knowledge that support was even available.

Staff created a tool that uses a collection of data indicators at the census block level such as crash rates, portion of the population with obesity, and households without car access to assess overall need. Each indicator is assigned a score of 1-5 and some indicators are weighted based on relevance to Safe Routes to School goals. What emerged was a clear visual depiction of the alignment many advocates already understand, the same neighborhoods that have a higher number of crashes also have a higher exposure to toxins and other poor health indicators.

While Denver's Safe Routes to School staff support all of the city's schools, they prioritize which schools get dedicated infrastructure funds based on the equity matrix. The Department selects a handful of priority neighborhoods using the matrix and works with multiple schools in that neighborhood as a cohort to build travel plans and address needs. Lisa Diaz, a Public Health Administrator at DOTI thinks that this approach works particularly well, "With this approach, we are not just patching little things in different places, but looking all through the network, along streets and whole neighborhoods."

This data driven approach can be a useful model for other places looking to emphasize equity and prioritize limited funding for programming and infrastructure projects.

Successes and Lessons Learned

Programs reported a wide array of successes and key lessons learned.

- A variety of stakeholders: Many respondents spoke to the benefit of partnering with kids, parents, schools, school districts, community members, and municipalities in one effort to strengthen programming and ensure sustainability.
- "You have to have a PE teacher who is interested in the program and committed to implementing it well."
- Incentives: Giving people choice over their incentives works better than pre-prescribing an incentive.
- "I have found school district school wellness policy as the better avenue to sustain efforts but funding is always a limiting factor."
- Change takes time: Take a long-view of behavior change and infrastructure improvement.
- Evaluation: Genuine evaluation is ultimately critical and difficult to establish.
- One program expressed that they should have begun their work with evaluation and policy with all of the partnering agencies. Now they need to go back and catch up with that piece of the process to make things easier moving forward.
- Sustainability: It is relatively easy to start things and relatively difficult to sustain them over the years.

“*The biggest success recently was getting the Town of Berthoud to work toward a complete streets policy and implement an improvement plan. The town has had increased growth, but many of the neighborhoods are still within a reasonable walking or biking distance, the town infrastructure is lacking in complete sidewalks and no biking lanes. We recently were able to work together on an infrastructure grant that will supply the town with \$300,000 in new sidewalks. They will begin construction on making a completed corridor in the summer of 2019.*”



Photo: Andy Fry



Challenges and Opportunities Identified

Program coordinators identified an array of challenges.

- Open Enrollment: Some coordinators are thinking about how school choice impacts peak travel congestion and other aspects of their programming. While there are schools that consistently participate with high numbers of neighborhood area students, many schools do not implement programming. These are also schools that have high driving rates and low or no PTO/PTA participation making it difficult to get volunteers and involved parents.
- Getting buy-in from school district administration can be difficult because they can be difficult to reach.
- Data: Multiple respondents indicated that it is difficult to measure success and get trending data year to year.
- It is challenging to get access to a bike fleet.
- “We build local school district champions only to have them leave the district.”
- Funding: Programs reported difficulty in establishing a sustainable behavior change program when grants only go for two years and finding other sources of long-term funding for behavior change programming is difficult. Traditional funding for this work often emphasizes funding new programs for short periods of time. Applications for any of the funding can be difficult and time consuming to understand, complete, and report on.

“When I looked at the grant a couple of years ago re: getting bike lanes/wider sidewalks in around our neighborhood, it looked like a full-time job to understand it and fill it out. We don't have enough volunteers to do it and personally don't have the time.”

- Sustainability: This work is difficult to maintain. “The kids and parents that are going to walk or bike do so every day, you may get some to do it on an actual day but it's hard to sustain.”



Case Study: Engaging Diverse Elementary Schools in Montrose

Active transportation advocates in Montrose, CO saw that improving Safe Routes to School was a major opportunity to strengthen active transportation in the city as a whole. The Montrose Area Bicycle Alliance (MABA) took the lead and in 2019 they launched Safe Routes to School programming in two of the most diverse elementary schools in the city- one in a low income neighborhood and one in a high income neighborhood.

“We were able to work with students with different skill levels, some who had been biking for many years and others who had never biked before; students with different family dynamics, students with two working parents and those with a stay at home parent; students with disabilities and both English and Spanish speaking students,” said MABA.

Advocates understood that the diversity of their selected schools required context-sensitive engagement, so they heavily relied on school staff such as the principle, administrative staff, and P.E. teachers to help guide their efforts.

“[School staff] encouraged us to provide all of our parent communications in both English and Spanish and offered translation services. They also connected us with their Parent Advisory Committees to develop an engagement strategy,” said MABA.

The main goal for the first year was to generate community awareness of the new Safe Routes to School programming. They used low-cost communication channels such as newsletters and letters to potential donors that highlighted the benefits of Safe Routes to School to the whole community. They also reached out to members of the business community.

MABA notes, “awareness is the first step, which is hopefully followed by the development of champions and community wide buy-in and support, with the ultimate goal of institutionalizing SRTS as a new norm.”

Despite limited staff and funding, they ran two days of successful programming for 400 students and received wide ranging support.

“We also received support from many different types of local businesses, from bike shops to manufacturers and pediatric dentists. This community partnership was a nice reminder that SRTS is a valuable program for the entire community, not just the students,” MABA said.

As a follow-up, advocates put together a detailed summary report that they plan to use not only as a record of the program content for future use, but also as a reference point for future data collection. They specifically collected travel tallies and information on parents’ perceptions of walking and biking school. This successful programming and intentional data collection is a strong foundation for future Safe Routes to School work and safer active transportation for the city as a whole.



6 Conclusion: Reflections and Recommendations

Over the years, many strong Safe Routes to School local initiatives have developed and grown in Colorado. This shows in the number of programs that are flourishing in major population centers along the Front Range, especially in Denver and Boulder. However, there is room for considerable growth in Safe Routes to School in Colorado with the help of state level leadership and resources. There are significant population centers in the state that have little to no Safe Routes to School activity. In addition, existing programs have the potential for much higher levels of impact.

Although the state program is able to provide low levels of funding for many local Safe Routes to School programs, for real sustainability and comprehensive impact, programs need to be able to hire staff. State funding for Safe Routes to School could be expanded to provide more significant support for Safe Routes to School programs and for improved street safety in school zones around the state. Many communities around the country are ensuring the longevity and efficacy of their Safe Routes to School programs by providing guaranteed sources of local funding; more Colorado communities would do well to explore this approach. In addition, there are many schools and children who are not benefiting from Safe Routes to School, even in communities with robust programs. More funding, more staffing, and stronger commitments from local elected officials and other stakeholders have the potential to significantly improve children's health and safety in Colorado.

State Level Recommendations

- Grow and reinforce the state Safe Routes to School program at CDOT, including:
 - Explore a Safe Routes to School program minigrant fund as a low barrier to entry method to provide Safe Routes to School funding to interested communities. Minigrants could start at \$1,000 and provide seed funding for a walking school bus, a student safety patrol, incentives and materials to support walking and biking encouragement events, bicycle racks, and other items to support walking and biking programs.
 - Continue to develop a strong state Safe Routes to School technical assistance presence, either through contracting or by devoting sufficient CDOT staff time; include application assistance as well as program development assistance.
 - Continue a communications encouragement strategy that encourages local and state officials to celebrate Walk and Bike to School Days and other regular events.
 - Create a strong equity orientation in the state Safe Routes to School program through approaches such as regular outreach; providing prioritization for low-income communities in awarding Safe Routes to School program funds; working at the state level to develop resources, materials, activities, and relationships to assist local Safe Routes to School programs in tailoring initiatives for specific demographic groups; encouraging applications from communities with chronic



- disease or walking and biking injury disparities; etc.
- Provide guidance on data collection, tracking, and evaluation to programs.
- Developing training and resources for local programs on the following:
 - Remote drop off and Safe Routes to bus stops
 - Moving from one time activities like Walk to School Day to more regular activities like walking school buses and bike trains.
 - Specific resources focused on rural communities such as guidance on how to pair Safe Routes to School with school busing, addressing wildlife concerns, and ways to promote safe walking and bicycling when infrastructure is limited.
- Ensure that any new state active transportation funding moves into communities rapidly whenever possible and is used to support new connections throughout communities and to schools.
- Expand funding at the state level for local programs and identify alternative funding:
- Set traffic fines in school zones, but also consider the potential equity issues with using fines. Seattle, Washington state, Hawaii, and Arizona state all do this specifically for Safe Routes to School.
- Use toll credits as a match for federally funded projects. These could be used to provide matching funds to low-income/high-need communities.

State Level Recommendations, Continued

- For Transportation Alternatives funds:
 - Limit transfers of TA funding and increasing obligation of TA funding. TA is one of the largest sources of funding for local Safe Routes to School initiatives, and retaining and spending TA funding is crucial to the long-term health and sustainability of programs.
 - Prioritize high-needs communities in TA awards.
 - Provide matching funds for TA awards in low-income communities.
- Encourage communities to explore financing mechanisms at the local level to fund Safe Routes to School coordinators and local activities.
- Expand Colorado Department of Education school construction guidelines to include guidelines for maximum school site acreage, minimum outdoor play or physical activity space, and colocation of school sites with parks and other relevant destinations.
- Conduct regular state evaluations of levels of walking and biking to school as well as differences in participation and safety among demographic groups; commit resources to maximize equitable benefits.
- Revise the E's used in defining a comprehensive approach to Safe Routes to School to include Equity and Engagement and remove Enforcement, consistent with the [6 Es framework recommended by the Safe Routes Partnership](#).



Local Level Recommendations

- Few local programs report having a local Safe Routes to School policy or resolution. Pass local Safe Routes to School policies and resolutions with specific commitments, including equity actions, by school boards and local jurisdictions.
- Expand program partners and secure commitments to ongoing participation by developing multi-sector task force, advisory team, or other Safe Routes to School committee. This can help address issues of program turnover common when parents/volunteers move on when their student ages out of school.
- Work to identify and secure local level funding sources for Safe Routes to School such as local health and other foundation support, local fees, and inclusion in city/county or school district operating budgets.
- Allocate resources to build on the momentum of single day events such as Walk to School Day to create more ongoing activities such as walking school buses or weekly or monthly walk and roll days.
- Consider developing a remote drop off or Safe Routes to school bus stops program, especially in suburban and rural areas where distances to school are greater.

References

1. United States Census Bureau, "Quick Facts, Colorado," <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/CO>.
2. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "Chronic Disease Indicators," https://nccd.cdc.gov/cdi/rdPage.aspx?rdReport=DPH_CDI.ExploreByLocation&rdRequestForwarding=Form.
3. State of Childhood Obesity, "The State of Childhood Obesity in Colorado," <https://stateofchildhoodobesity.org/states/co/>.
4. State of Childhood Obesity, "State Policies to Prevent Obesity," <https://stateofchildhoodobesity.org/states/co/#policies>.
5. State of Childhood Obesity, "Adult Obesity Rates," <https://stateofchildhoodobesity.org/adult-obesity/>.
6. League of American Bicyclists, "Bicycling and Walking in the United States: 2018 Benchmarking Report," 2018, page 222, <https://bikeleague.org/benchmarking-report>.
7. 2018-19 Students with Chronic Absenteeism and Truancy Rate by District, <https://www.cde.state.co.us/datapipeline/2018-19chronicabsenteeismpdf>.
8. National Education Association, "Chronic Absenteeism NEA Research Brief," 2018, <http://www.nea.org/assets/docs/Chronic%20Absenteeism%20NBI%2057-2017.pdf>.
9. Smart Growth America, "Dangerous by Design: Colorado State Report," 2019, https://smartgrowthamerica.org/app/uploads/2019/06/Dbd2019_State_CO.pdf.
10. Smart Growth America, "Dangerous by Design: Colorado State Report," 2019, https://smartgrowthamerica.org/app/uploads/2019/06/Dbd2019_State_CO.pdf. National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, Traffic Safety Performance (Core Outcome) Measures for Colorado, <https://cdan.nhtsa.gov/stsi.htm>.
11. Safe Routes Partnership, "Transportation Alternatives Program-State of the States," 2019, <https://saferoutespartnership.org/sites/default/files/pdf/tap-state-states-dec-2019.pdf>.
12. Average annual funding from the Great Outdoors Colorado Connect Initiative.
13. Colorado Department of Transportation, Safe Routes to School Five-Year Strategic Plan 2017-2022, 2017, <https://www.codot.gov/programs/bikeped/safe-routes/assets/fiscal-year-2017-documents/csrts-external-strategic-plan-2017-2022>
14. <https://www.ruralhealthinfo.org/states/colorado>
15. UNC Highway Safety Research Center, Walk and Bike to School. "Who Biked or Walked?," <http://www.walkbiketoschool.org/registration/pastevents.php>.





12587 Fair Lakes Circle #251
Fairfax, VA 22033