Starting and Growing a Strong Safe Routes to School Program

Houston Health Department and the Safe Routes Partnership
Kori Johnson, Safe Routes Partnership
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The mission of the Safe Routes Partnership is to advance safe walking and rolling to and from schools and in everyday life, improving the health and well-being of people of all races, income levels, and abilities, and building healthy, thriving communities for everyone.
VISION

We know that our bodies were designed to move, yet many of our communities were created with intentional inequities that limit mobility. We believe change is necessary to achieve a vision of safe, active, equitable, and healthy communities – urban, suburban, and rural – for everyone.
Tell me something about Houston in the chat! Fun fact, unique feature, something you love about the area – anything!
Today’s Agenda

1. Introduction – Houston Health Department
2. What is Safe Routes to School?
3. The Six E’s: Strategies for a Comprehensive Approach
4. Helping Your Program Grow & Develop
5. Ideas for Initial Activities
6. Q&A
7. Reminders & Next Steps
WHAT IS SAFE ROUTES TO SCHOOL?
Safe Routes to School is a movement and a program to make school travel – including walking, biking, and scooting – safe convenient, and fun for children of all genders, races, and abilities.
Poll

How did you get to school growing up?
In 1969, nearly 50% of all children walked or bicycled to school. Today, just 13% walk or bicycle.
• 1/3 of children are overweight or obese – triple the rate of a generation ago (Fryar, et al, 2014 and Ogden, et al, 2016)

• Family car trips to school make up 10-14% of morning congestion (National Center for Safe Routes to School, 2011)

• Motor vehicle injuries are the biggest source of fatalities for children, whether as passengers, on foot or bicycle (CDC, 2016)

• Injuries and fatalities are especially high in low income neighborhoods (Governing, August 2014)
The Evidence is In: Safe Routes to School Works

- Safe Routes to School programs lead to a 35-45% increase in walking and bicycling to school

- Safe Routes to School programs result in a 45-75% decrease in pedestrian injuries near school

- Kids who walk and bike are more physically active, fitter and have lower BMIs than kids who don’t
Benefits of Safe Routes to School

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

**CLIMATE BENEFITS AND CLEANER AIR**
- Fewer student asthma attacks due to less driving & reduced air pollution results
- Cleaner air & reduced greenhouse gas emissions

**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

**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

**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

**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

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

**COST SAVINGS**
- Household savings from reduced gas & car use
- Education budget savings through reduced student busing costs
At the local level, Safe Routes to School programs are organized by cities, counties, schools, school districts, or community organizations. These programs can serve one school or many schools throughout a community.

At the state level, Safe Routes to School programs are usually administered by the state department of transportation (TxDOT). The program provides resources to help support local programs.
Houston Safe Routes to School Resources

- Bike Texas Safe Routes to School handbook
- Bike Texas SafeCyclist Curriculum
- *Add others to the chat!*
THE 6 E’S: STRATEGIES FOR A COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH
The 6 E’s of Safe Routes to School

**Engagement**
All Safe Routes to School initiatives should begin by listening to students, families, teachers, and school leaders and working with existing community organizations, and build intentional, ongoing engagement opportunities into the program structure.

**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.

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

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

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

**Evaluation**
Assessing which approaches are more or less successful, ensuring that programs and initiatives are supporting equitable outcomes, and identifying unintended consequences or opportunities to improve the effectiveness of each approach.
ENCOURAGEMENT
Questions?
HELPING YOUR PROGRAM GROW & DEVELOP
Creating a Strong Structure: Stages to Success

Starting Your Seedling
Growing Strong Branches
Becoming a Healthy Tree
Reaching Maturity
Starting Your Seedling: Giving Your Program a Good Start

- Set goals
- Make initial plans
- Kick off education and encouragement activities
- Begin developing relationships with key partners
- Make opportunistic infrastructure improvements
- Keep moving!
Growing Strong Branches: Developing Supportive Structures

- Engage more community members
- Create a task force
- Develop an action plan
- *Some communities start at this stage, often with a grant program*
Becoming a Healthy Tree: Institutionalizing Your Program

- Sustain and expand activities
- Identify permanent staffing
- Secure long and short term funding
- Plan for infrastructure changes
- Address district and municipal policies
Reaching Maturity: Becoming a Comprehensive Program

- Create comprehensive programming
- Implement a comprehensive equity approach
- Larger infrastructure changes
- Evaluate and improve
Essential Components of a Safe Routes to School Program

- Safe Routes to School Coordinator
- Safe Routes to School Task Force
- Program Structure
- Funding
- Safe Routes to School Policies
What does a SRTS Coordinator do?

- Manages overall program
- Leads Safe Routes to School task force
- Coordinates between district, municipality, other stakeholders
- Recruits & trains volunteers
- Coordinates city/district/multi-school events & activities
- Strategically expands program
- Seeks funding opportunities
- Evaluates what is working & not with program
Benefits of Volunteers:

- **Cost:** More affordable
- **Logistics/Bureaucracy:** Can be easier to get going
- **Commitment:** Personal passion & investment can create enormous change

Benefits of Paid Coordinators:

- **Stay in job longer:** Most volunteers are parents/family members of students
- **Time to do the job:** Volunteers average 4-10 hours/month
- **Skills and Experience:** More likely to have necessary skills
• Core goal: coordinate essential stakeholders to get work done

• Meets monthly, quarterly, etc.

• Usually: district or city level
Task Force Core Responsibilities

- Communicating & informing stakeholders
- Getting input from different perspectives
- Making informed joint decisions
- Determining community goals and needs
- Dividing up work
- Ensuring that equity is built in
- Determining needs for new policies or policy changes
Where should your program live?

- Local/regional transportation agency
- Planning department
- Non-profit
- School district
- PTA
- Health department
- Other
How do you decide where to locate your program?

- Often practical – who is willing?
- May depend on funding and staff
- May depend on focus area
- Likely to influence emphasis of work
Structure may not be simple and will likely change.

- Will likely change over time: affected by funding, formality, and growth

- Different parts of the work may live different places – planning department manages overall effort, but nonprofit has contract for programming
FUNDING YOUR PROGRAM
What do we need money for?

- Staff Salaries
- Infrastructure Improvements
- Incentives
- Expenses for Activities
- General operations
Common Funding Sources

- Volunteer time!
- Health funds
  - State or federal (CDC) grants
  - Local healthcare foundation grants/community benefits funding
- Foundation grants
- Business sponsorships
- General funds
- Transportation funds
  - State SRTS grants
  - Local transportation measures
Leverage Your Partnerships

• Pool resources or apply for joint funding opportunities

• Potential Partners
  • Safe Kids coalitions
  • Parks and Recreation
  • PTAs and parent/caregiver groups
  • Local biking and walking organizations
  • Youth organizations
  • Sports teams
  • Arts organizations

Add other potential partnerships to the chat!
Policy change is essential to long-term change.

A policy is a written law, rule, or principle that is binding and applies broadly.

Safe Routes to School policies include:
- School Board Policies
- Safe Routes to School Resolution
- Complete Streets Policy
- Comprehensive Plan
Questions?
IDEAS FOR INITIAL ACTIVITIES
Initial activities can inform and evolve into programs.
• Build awareness, brainstorm ideas, identify barriers to walking, biking, scooting

• Next steps: Get ideas from students and families, recruit volunteers and plan initial activities
Walk to School Day
Observed in October
www.walkbiketoschool.org
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www.walkbiketoschool.org
Walk to School Day
Observed in October
www.walkbiketoschool.org
Bike to School Day
Observed in May
Walking School Bus

- Group walk along designated “bus” route
- Led by adults – volunteers or staff
- Helps take the burden off of individual parents
- Reduces tardiness
- Can incorporate safety education
Walking Wednesdays

High School students lead a walking school bus in Pryor Creek, Oklahoma. Students received training from local experts, city staff, the school district, and Cherokee nation.
Safety Awareness Demonstration
Additional Resources Available on Our Website
SAFE ROUTES TO SCHOOL MESSAGING FOR PROS

A Comunications Toolkit for Schools and School Districts

Additional Resources Available on Our Website
Let's Go For A Walk:
A Toolkit for Planning and Conducting a Walk Audit

Additional Resources Available on Our Website
Webinars

One of the great ways that we love to share resources and expertise is through our regular webinars. Our webinars feature our staff and incredible advocates, Safe Routes to School program staff, government officials, elected leaders, and others from around the country sharing their knowledge and learning on a diverse range of topics.

UPCOMING WEBINARS

There are currently no upcoming webinars scheduled. Scroll down to see archived webinars.

ARCHIVED WEBINARS

October 17, 2019
Transportation Planning Innovations and Health: How MPOs Are Combining Core Skills and Creativity to Advance Health

Interested in learning about the innovative and promising ways that metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) are advancing public health in the United States?
Join Our Email Discussion Network
Exchange knowledge with advocates and practitioners working on Safe Routes to School, active transportation and healthy community design. If you have a Google account, click here to join. Otherwise, email margaux@saferoutespartnership.org to be added.

E-NEWS ARCHIVES
Read the current issue and browse the archives.

Email Discussion Network
Reminders

Next Webinar – Thursday, November 18th, 3pm CT
• Safe Routes to School Engagement, Education, and Encouragement Programming

Complete our post-webinar survey!
Kori Johnson, Program Support Manager
kori@saferoutespartnership.org

www.saferoutespartnership.org

Facebook.com/saferoutespartnership

@saferoutesnow