

GETTING STARTED

A framework for developing a
Safe Routes to School Program
in your Community.

SafeRoutes

Connecticut Safe Routes to School



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STEPS TO CREATING A SAFE ROUTES TO SCHOOL PROGRAM

Bring Together the Right People— BE INCLUSIVE

Identify people who want to make walking and bicycling to school safe and appealing for children. Sharing concerns, interests and knowledge among a variety of community members with diverse expertise can enable groups to tackle many issues.

- Involve children in the program to learn what is important to them with respect to their journey to school and around their neighborhood.
- Find a program champion — someone who has enthusiasm and time to provide leadership for the group and keep things moving. Seek out support for the champion — the champion cannot do it alone.
- Think big—parents, teachers, administrators, planners, public works, law enforcement, youth services.
- Consider whether the group wants to plan for SRTS in a single school or district-wide.
- Look for existing groups where an SRTS program is a natural fit or form a committee.

Hold a Kickoff Meeting and Set a Vision

A fundamental purpose and added benefit of this meeting is to bring partners together and let everyone hear about the program. Provide a presentation on SRTS programs including preliminary thoughts on issues and strategies related to engineering, enforcement, education, encouragement and evaluation. The kick-off meeting has two main product goals: to create a vision and to generate next steps. The group can discuss appropriate next steps and the best way to work toward their vision; this may include forming committees to divide the tasks.

- One approach is to ask each participant to share a vision for the school five years in the future. This focuses the group on the positive — what they would like to have, such as: “fewer cars at the entrance,” “more active children”, “lower speeds in school zone”, and “safe walking routes” — rather than what is wrong.
- Another way to create a positive vision is to ask people to share a positive memory of walking or bicycling to school when they were young.

Gather Information and Identify Issues

Collecting information can help to identify needed program elements and provide a means to measure the impact of the program later.

- First, look at walking and bicycling conditions for students. This can be done by observing or mapping the routes that lead to school, collecting traffic counts, gathering speed and injury data, and walking around the school as a group to observe arrival or dismissal time. Remember to consider the needs and barriers to children with disabilities. Review related policies of the school and community policies that make it easier or more difficult to walk or bicycle to school.
- Second, determine how many children currently walk or bicycle to school. If this is not readily known by the school, parent/student surveys can be used to gather this data as well as to understand parents’ attitudes towards walking or bicycling to school and identify additional barriers that need to be addressed.

Document Findings and Identify Solutions

Safety is the first consideration. Solutions will include a combination of education, encouragement, engineering and enforcement strategies. If it is not safe for children to walk and bicycle to school, postpone the encouragement portion until after problems are addressed. Some problems will require engineering solutions, while others may require a combination of strategies. Don't underestimate the value of simply changing or clarifying the rules through policy changes. Here, the expertise of the different partners is especially valuable. Prioritization is also key — identify the most critical issues as well as some "quick wins" to generate additional enthusiasm early in the program.

Develop a Plan

The Plan does not need to be lengthy or fancy, but should include encouragement, enforcement, education and engineering strategies with a timeframe corresponding to each part. Strategies that can be implemented early will help the group feel successful and can build momentum and support for longer-term activities. Document what you have done, what you know, and what you plan to do, such as:

- the champion, stakeholders, and involved committees or town offices
- a map of the area covered by the plan
- summarized findings from surveys and walkability/bikeability checklist
- potential opportunities and fitting activities for the program
- potential improvements (short/long-term) to address student safety
- a schedule that includes year-round safety initiatives and activities, and
- an explanation of how the program will be evaluated.

Fund the Plan

Parts of a SRTS program will cost very little money. For example, most International Walk/Bike to School Day coordinators say they spend less than \$100 on their events. There are many low-cost engineering solutions that can be put into place in a relatively short amount of time, such as new signs or fresh paint on crosswalks. On the other hand, some changes, such as new sidewalk construction, may need large amounts of capital. Having a diversified group on your committee will help you to identify resources in and around the community for keeping Plan elements moving.

Get the Plan and People Moving

Get started right away. Again, safety is the priority. Hold a fun-filled kick-off event and invite the media. If the school is located too far for children to walk/bicycle from home, identify places where families can park and finish by foot or bicycle the rest of the way. If improvements are needed before children can walk to school, start safety education activities before, during or after school right on the school grounds. Enforcement, education, encouragement and engineering strategies will all come together as pieces of the plan are implemented.

Evaluate, Adjust and Keep Moving

The plan should be a living document. After the program begins, careful monitoring through surveys or other means will help distinguish strategies that are increasing the number of children safely walking and bicycling to school. Once you know, you can make adjustments to further progress. Key strategies for keeping the program going include:

- identifying additional program champions
- letting people know about the successes
- making efforts year-round through summer safety clinics
- including a combination of education, encouragement, engineering and enforcement strategies
- encouraging policy changes, and
- creating a permanent committee.

For more information on how YOU can make an impact in your community visit

www.walkitbikeitct.org

or

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