

GETTING STARTED

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

SafeRoutes

Connecticut Safe Routes to School



STEPS TO CREATING A SAFE ROUTES TO SCHOOL PROGRAM

Bring together the right people

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.

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 coalition. 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.

Hold a kickoff meeting and set a vision

The kick-off meeting has two main goals: to create a vision and to generate next steps. One approach is to ask each participant to share a vision for the school five years in the future. Responses are often statements, such as: “a school with fewer cars at the entrance,” “more active children” and “safe walkways.” This focuses the group on the positive — what they would like to have — 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. Provide a presentation on SRTS programs including issues and strategies related to engineering, enforcement, education, encouragement and evaluation. The group can then discuss the appropriate next steps and the best way to work toward their vision. This may include forming committees to separate out the tasks.

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. Find out about existing policies that may make it easier or more difficult to walk or bicycle to school.

Second, determine how many children currently walk or bicycle to school. The school may already know this. Parent surveys can be used to understand parents’ attitudes towards walking or bicycling to school and identify barriers to walking and bicycling that need to be addressed.

Identify Solutions

Solutions will include a combination of education, encouragement, engineering and enforcement strategies. Safety is the first consideration. If it is not safe for children to walk and bicycle to school, then they should only be encouraged after problems are addressed. Some problems will require engineering solutions, while others may require a combination

of strategies. Here the expertise of the different partners is especially valuable. It is likely that the coalition will generate a long list of potential ideas and solutions. The next step will be easier if the list is prioritized. Identify the most critical issues as well as any “quick wins” that the group can identify that would help to generate additional enthusiasm early in the program.

Make a plan

The plan does not need to be lengthy, but should include encouragement, enforcement, education and engineering strategies. Create a time schedule for each part of these strategies, a map of the area covered by the plan, and an explanation of how the program will be evaluated. Strategies that can be implemented early will help the group feel successful and can build momentum and support for long-term activities.

Fund the Plan

Parts of a SRTS program will cost very little money. For example, most International Walk 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. There are several places to seek funding for SRTS program activities including:

- Federal programs.
- Environmental and air quality funds.
- Health and physical activity funds.
- County and city funding.
- Philanthropic organizations.

Get the plan and people moving

There are things that can be done immediately without major funding, so some parts of the SRTS plan can start right away while waiting on other parts. Hold a fun-filled kick-off event and invite the media. If the school is located too far for children to walk from home, identify places where families can park and walk part of the way. If improvements are needed before children can walk to school, start walking 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

After the program begins, careful monitoring will identify which strategies are increasing the number of children safely walking and bicycling to school. Proper adjustments can be made as this and other new information is gathered.

The coalition also needs to consider how to sustain energy and interest in the program so that children continue to walk and bicycle to school safely. Key strategies for keeping the program going include:

- Identifying additional program champions.
- Letting people know about the successes.
- Encouraging policy changes.
- Creating a permanent committee.

For more information on how YOU can make an impact in your community visit www.walkitbikeitct.org

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