



# Implementing Safe Routes to School in Low-Income Schools and Communities

**A Resource Guide for Volunteers and Professionals**





# Acknowledgements

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*The Safe Routes to School National Partnership is a fast-growing network of nearly 500 organizations and professional groups working to set goals, share best practices, secure funding and inform agencies that implement Safe Routes to School programs. The Partnership's mission is to serve a diverse national community of organizations that advocates for and promotes the practice of safe bicycling and walking to and from schools throughout the United States. The Partnership is hosted by the Bikes Belong Foundation, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, which is a sister organization to the Bikes Belong Coalition. For more information, visit [www.saferoutespartnership.org](http://www.saferoutespartnership.org).*



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# Foreword

Safe Routes to School (SRTS) is a federal program designed to make it safer for more children to walk and bicycle to school. While Safe Routes to School is a relatively new program, all 50 states have funding to help schools and communities improve the environment for walking and bicycling. The program helps get children more physically active, and can help schools and communities struggling with safety, rising bus transportation costs, traffic challenges and a lack of connection between the school and the community.

Children from low-income families are twice as likely to walk to school as children from higher-income families. And they face greater risks—children from low-income households have a higher risk of being injured or killed as pedestrians. So it is critical that as Safe Routes to School is implemented across the country that low-income schools and communities are able to access funds and implement Safe Routes to School programs.

The Safe Routes to School National Partnership is pleased to present *Implementing Safe Routes to School in Low-Income Schools and Communities: A Resource Guide for Volunteers and Professionals*. Our intent is to inspire nonprofit organizations, schools and community residents to come together to implement and sustain successful, culturally sensitive and inclusive Safe Routes to School initiatives.

By using this guide, parents, professionals and school and government leaders will be better positioned to overcome common challenges and build strong Safe Routes to School programs in low-income schools and communities. This guide can also be helpful to organizations and agencies that are already implementing Safe Routes to School programs but want to expand their reach to low-income communities.

As you will read in the pages that follow, parents, nonprofit leaders, school personnel and local government officials are finding creative and effective solutions to make it safer for more children to walk and bicycle to and from school in low-income communities. We hope that you find these stories compelling and inspiring.

We look forward to hearing about your successes with Safe Routes to School.

Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of Deb Hubsmith in blue ink.

Deb Hubsmith, Director  
Safe Routes to School National Partnership  
[www.saferoutespartnership.org](http://www.saferoutespartnership.org)



# Introduction and Overview

Safe Routes to School (SRTS) programs and projects help schools and communities improve safety and get more children walking and bicycling to and from school. Communities are using federal, state and local Safe Routes to School funding to construct new bicycle lanes, pathways and sidewalks, as well as to teach children bicycle and pedestrian safety skills, address safety challenges around schools and encourage more children to walk and bicycle to school.

While there are many resources that document how to implement a Safe Routes to School program, few of them address the challenges and circumstances unique to low-income communities. This resource guide, which focuses on schools and communities where at least half of students or community residents are low-income, is intended to fill that gap.

## Defining Low-Income

While the federal poverty limit for a family of four is \$22,050 in 2009, research suggests that families need approximately twice that level of income to meet their basic needs.<sup>1</sup> A low-income family is generally defined as one in which the family income is no more than twice the federal poverty limit. Approximately 41 percent of children—29.9 million children—are from low-income families. Looking at income level by where children live, half of children in urban and rural areas live in low-income families.<sup>2</sup>

In the education system, family income is used to qualify for free and reduced prices in the federal School Lunch Program. Free or reduced lunches are available to students with family incomes of up to 185 percent of the federal poverty limit. Schools are often categorized as low-income when more than half of their students qualify for free and reduced school lunch. Approximately 38 percent of schools in America fall into this category. Low-income schools are more prevalent in cities: 58 percent of schools located in cities as compared to 31 percent of rural schools and 26 percent of suburban schools have at least half of their students qualifying for free or reduced school lunch.<sup>3</sup>

## Why Focus on Low-Income Schools and Communities?

Low-income neighborhoods or communities—particularly in urban settings—often have greater traffic-related risks. Residents in low-income urban areas are more likely to report greater neighborhood barriers to physical activity, such as higher numbers of busy through streets and poor pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure.<sup>4</sup> Rural communities have their own set of traffic-related challenges. Many low-income rural communities are faced with challenges such as distance to school and a shortage of sidewalks and safe places for students to walk or bicycle. In addition, many low-income neighborhoods, both rural and urban, lack access to play areas and parks, resulting in children playing in and around streets in the afternoon and evening hours.<sup>5,6</sup>

These neighborhood factors have an impact on safety, physical activity and obesity rates. Children from low-income households have a higher risk of being injured or killed as pedestrians.<sup>7</sup> Children in neighborhoods lacking access to sidewalks, parks, playgrounds and recreation centers have a 20 to 45 percent greater risk of becoming obese and overweight.<sup>8</sup> Residents in low-income communities are reported to have lower activity levels and higher body mass indexes (BMIs).<sup>9</sup>

Because children from low-income families are twice as likely to walk to school as children from higher-income families,<sup>10</sup> implementing Safe Routes to School programs in low-income communities and schools can have a significant impact on improving safety. And, since Safe Routes to School programs work to improve the infrastructure and environment around schools by installing sidewalks, bike paths and crosswalks, it can help give children and residents safer opportunities to be more physically active. In creating this resource guide, the Safe Routes to School National Partnership spoke with a wide variety of community leaders,



## How This Resource Guide Can Help

*By showcasing programs and practices that have been successful in a range of low-income communities, this resource guide is designed to provide you with basic guidance from professionals, teachers, parents and community organizers that can be applied towards launching a Safe Routes to School program in your community.*

parents and representatives from schools, nonprofits and government agencies implementing Safe Routes to School in low-income schools and neighborhoods. These interviews and conversations, plus consultations with national organizations that serve low-income communities, helped identify challenges that must be overcome to reach more low-income children and schools through Safe Routes to School.

Experts identified some common themes that may emerge when implementing Safe Routes to School in low-income schools and communities:

- Fears of crime and violence near schools that may endanger children walking and bicycling;
- Lack of awareness about the health benefits of walking and bicycling;
- A shortage of access to professional expertise, such as planners and engineers, that are critical to planning and obtaining funds for Safe Routes to School programs;
- Challenges in recruiting parent volunteers to carry out Safe Routes to School programs;
- Longer distances to school either due to school choice or a rural setting preventing more children from walking and bicycling to school; and
- High volumes and speed of traffic combined with few sidewalks, crosswalks and paths that create traffic safety hazards for children walking and bicycling.

These themes guided the creation of this resource guide. It highlights promising Safe Routes to School practices and creative strategies that have been successfully employed in low-income communities. Most of the examples in this guide focus on urban schools and communities, but a few promising practices for rural communities are included. Every school, neighborhood and community is different – and has its own challenges and assets. There is no one solution to address any challenge in low-income communities. By showcasing programs and practices that have been successful in a range of low-income communities, this resource guide is designed to provide you with basic guidance from professionals, teachers, parents and community organizers that can be applied towards launching a Safe Routes to School Program in your community.



By using this guide, parents, professionals and school and government leaders will be better positioned to overcome common challenges and build strong Safe Routes to School programs in low-income schools and communities. This guide can also be helpful to organizations and agencies that are already implementing Safe Routes to School programs but want to expand their reach to low-income communities.

The Safe Routes to School National Partnership hopes this resource guide inspires nonprofit organizations, schools and community residents to come together and collaboratively develop culturally sensitive, inclusive and successful Safe Routes to School initiatives. Together, we can ensure that children of all income levels, races and ethnicities—particularly those most in need—are able to safely and securely walk and bicycle to and from school.





# The Basics: Getting Started in Your Community

The federal Safe Routes to School program was first created in August 2005 through the SAFETEA-LU federal transportation bill. State Departments of Transportation (DOT) have received nearly \$800 million since 2005 to provide awards to local communities and schools to make it safer and more desirable for children to walk and bicycle to and from school. Each state Department of Transportation has their own application timelines and procedures for local communities and schools interested in accessing these funds. In addition to the federal funding, many Safe Routes to School programs in low-income communities seek alternative funding sources like local community foundations, local health agencies, businesses, local government and other state funding sources.



The National Center for Safe Routes to School has developed a Safe Routes to School Guide, available at <http://www.saferoutesinfo.org/guide/steps/index.cfm>. It can be a helpful resource as you plan to get Safe Routes to School started in your community. As the guide indicates, it is important to start by bringing together the right people and hosting a meeting to create a vision for the program. The team must then work together to gather information and identify issues. Solving challenges

## The “Five E’s” of a Safe Routes to School Program

The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) recommends that Safe Routes to School efforts in the United States incorporate—directly or indirectly—five components, often referred to as the Five E’s, outlined below:

**Engineering**—Creating operational and physical improvements to the infrastructure surrounding schools that reduce speeds and potential conflicts with motor vehicle traffic, and establishing safer and fully accessible crossings, walkways, trails and bikeways.

**Education**—Teaching children and parents about the broad range of transportation choices, instructing students on important lifelong bicycling and walking safety skills, and launching driver safety campaigns in the vicinity of schools.

**Enforcement**—Partnering with local law enforcement to ensure traffic laws are obeyed in the vicinity of schools (including enforcement of speeds, yielding to pedestrians in crosswalks and proper walking and bicycling behaviors), stepping up law enforcement around schools to protect children and initiating community safety activities such as crossing guard programs.

**Encouragement**—Using events and activities to promote and increase walking and bicycling, such as walk to school days, walking school buses and bicycle trains.

**Evaluation**—Monitoring and documenting outcomes and trends through the collection of data, including the collection of data before and after the intervention(s).



often takes a comprehensive approach. Successful Safe Routes to School programs incorporate the “five E’s”—evaluation, education, encouragement, engineering and enforcement. The team should develop an action plan for how to proceed and secure funding to move forward with the plan. Finally, it is important to evaluate the program to make improvements and keep moving forward.

While these basic steps are applicable to any community seeking to start Safe Routes to School, there are additional nuances in low-income communities. Community leaders, parents and nonprofit representatives we interviewed for this guide shared additional insight that may be helpful as you think about starting a Safe Routes to School program in your school or community.

**1. Develop Partnerships.** To establish a successful Safe Routes to School program, especially in low-income neighborhoods and schools with limited resources, you will need the buy-in and involvement of a range of partners, including parents and students, the mayor or city manager, your local transportation or public works department, the school nurse and local health officials, school district transportation officials and school personnel. It is important to establish a formal team with a variety of stakeholders and clearly define the goals of the committee, as well as the roles of various team members.

If possible, see if you can work with an existing group, such as a civic association, nonprofit organization, parent teacher organization or school wellness committee, so you don’t have to start from scratch. Often there are already organizations working in low-income neighborhoods and schools that may already have trust and buy-in from the community, school and parents, especially those that culturally and economically represent the neighborhood’s residents. These organizations may also have established relationships with local government officials, school leaders or funders. Collaborate with these organizations for effective access to and relationships with residents and leaders, and engage them in your Safe Routes to School efforts. If you are an outside group trying to start a Safe Routes to School program, community buy-in is critical for success. By partnering with influential and respected community organizations and residents, you may find it is easier to get community support.

Another tactic for engaging residents and community organizations is through face-to-face conversations or by holding “house meetings,” in which a small group of people gather at the home of someone they know to discuss issues of shared concern. Make sure you ask about their interests, passions and issues, and think about how they intersect with your concerns. These personal interactions allow community stakeholders and residents the opportunity to voice their concerns and to help brainstorm solutions. You may even discover that you have similar goals for community improvement that can be best addressed through collaborative efforts.



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**2. Know your community.** Assess your community’s needs and assets through formal and informal evaluation and assessments. It is important to understand what your community perceives as problems, what they want out of a Safe Routes to School program and what your community has to offer in the development of a Safe Routes to School program. Work with community partners such as local officials, activists and neighborhood residents to use formal observations of traffic and crime patterns—often called walking audits or walkabouts—to understand the condition of the neighborhood, and focus groups and surveys to understand the concerns of parents and students. The National Center for Safe Routes to School has resources available to help communities assess their needs.

## Evaluation and Sustainability

It is important to be able to demonstrate that your Safe Routes to School program is having a positive impact on students and the school. These successes are an important part of securing longer-term funding and support from volunteers and school and community leaders. To make your program sustainable:

- **Document the impact of your program.** Make sure you keep track of participation levels in events, contests and other encouragement activities such as walking school buses; changes you have been able to secure to enforcement or infrastructure; and how many children are taught bicycle and pedestrian safety. Count how many children are walking and bicycling to school before you start your Safe Routes to School program and conduct counts each fall and spring once the program has begun. Work with local health departments, public works and law enforcement to see if they can help track changes in safety around the school and how that impacts walking and bicycling to school.
- **Tailor your evaluation method to your goals.** For example, if your community efforts are addressing crime and personal safety, be sure to collect crime rates from before your program begins and after programming has successfully been implemented. Standardized parent surveys and student tallies can show changes in how kids get to school as well as parent and student concerns. Be creative in your evaluation efforts – you may be able to work with local government and law enforcement to document increases in physical activity and safety improvements such as crime, traffic and vehicle speeds in school zones.
- **Use your outcome effectively.** If and when you have tangible results that your program has made a positive impact on your community – share that information with stakeholders and the media! Be sure to use your results to ask the school system and local government to build Safe Route to School into their budgets to secure additional funding. Results can also help you secure support from local community foundations, local health agencies and local businesses. Your success can also help lead to the expansion of the program into nearby schools and communities.

Additional information on evaluation, including downloadable parent surveys and student tallies, is detailed in the National Center for Safe Routes to School’s Evaluation Guide, available at <http://www.saferoutesinfo.org/guide/evaluation/index.cfm>.

It is also important to ask residents what they perceive as barriers or challenges to improving safety—including traffic hazards and threats to personal safety, such as gangs, stray dogs or abandoned houses. By engaging community residents, parents and children, you will be better able to craft a Safe Routes to School plan that is meaningful and responsive to your community's priorities.

When gathering information, it is important to focus on the positive aspects and assets of the community in addition to the challenges. Catalog the positive aspects of the physical and social environment around the school, such as sidewalks or parks, as well as local attitudes and activities. Identify community groups and organizations that have strong resident participation, such as churches, youth groups and neighborhood associations. Make a list of businesses and institutions that work in your community already, such as hospitals, restaurants and government agencies. Building on your community's assets and engaging already active groups and individuals will help unite the community behind Safe Routes to School.

With a strong understanding of your community, be sure to choose the right focus given your community's assets and challenges. When there are limited resources, start with small and achievable goals. Try to identify one achievable activity that will be seen as a "win" by parents and community residents. Success in that area can draw additional enthusiasm, support and volunteers to move forward with a more comprehensive effort.

**3. Identify your champions.** Teachers, parents and students are an important part of any Safe Routes to School initiative, as they provide a lot of the volunteer time and energy needed to keep the effort moving. These champions can be particularly useful in encouragement and education efforts.

However, parents, teachers and students cannot always do it alone. Because Safe Routes to School often involves changes to the infrastructure and enforcement around the school, local government agencies and elected officials must be at the table since they maintain the roads and have engineering, public works and law enforcement staff and other resources. In addition, the school principal or school district superintendent is the "gate-keeper" to the school system and must be an ally to ensure that the Safe Routes to School program is sustainable. Finally, leaders in school systems and local government also have the power to pass supportive policies and allocate funding streams that can allow for more robust and sustainable Safe Route to School efforts.

So, these government and school leaders are very important to engage as champions. The challenge is that schools and governments in low-income communities are often under-resourced, overburdened and financially strapped. These leaders are likely dealing with many priorities, and can be reluctant to take on new initiatives. One strategy for engaging their assistance is to have a group of partners approach the potential school or government champion with the list of assets and challenges you have gathered. It is important to stress that Safe Routes to School can help bring grant funding, community manpower and new partners to help with overall community and school goals. Make sure you come prepared to make a specific ask for how the potential champion can help your Safe Routes to School initiative. Some ideas are included on the next page for roles different types of champions can play.



*Try to identify one achievable activity that will be seen as a "win" by parents and community residents. Success in that area can draw additional enthusiasm, support and volunteers to move forward with a more comprehensive effort.*

<b>Champions and Their Roles</b>	
<b>School Board Members, Superintendents and Principals</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allow the Safe Routes to School program to communicate with staff, parents and students</li> <li>• Provide visible leadership on walking and bicycling by participating in events and reaching out to the media</li> <li>• Make sure that school or school district policies support safe walking and bicycling to school</li> <li>• Direct school transportation staff to assist with Safe Routes to School efforts</li> <li>• Step up student safety patrols and/or crossing guards around the schools during arrival and dismissal</li> <li>• Partner with the city or county to apply for Safe Routes to School grants</li> </ul>
<b>Mayor, county executive or local elected officials</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bring community attention and awareness to the Safe Routes to School initiative</li> <li>• Direct city staff (such as engineers, planners and law enforcement) to assist with the effort</li> <li>• Build funding for longer-term efforts into the city or county budget, pass policies like complete streets or prioritize improvements and enforcement around schools within existing budgets</li> <li>• Partner with the school district or individual schools(s) to apply for Safe Routes to School grants</li> <li>• Partner with the school district(s) to site schools near where students live</li> </ul>
<b>Local Transportation and Public Works Staff</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide engineering and planning assistance to identify traffic safety problems around the school and prioritize solutions</li> <li>• Make small improvements like painting crosswalks and bike lanes, installing signage or repairing sidewalks</li> <li>• Help with the application for Safe Routes to School grants, and with implementation of any infrastructure improvements that receive funding</li> <li>• Pass policies that will lead to improved safety such as complete streets and lower school zone speed limits</li> </ul>
<b>Law Enforcement Officials</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Place a “mobile speed trailer” near the school to show drivers their speeds</li> <li>• Participate in walkabouts, promotional programs and Safe Routes to School meetings</li> <li>• Step up traffic patrols and crossing guards around the schools during arrival and dismissal</li> <li>• Work with the media to encourage drivers to slow down in school zones</li> <li>• Utilize community policing to address crime and traffic dangers around schools</li> </ul>
<b>Local Health Department Staff</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Help develop a marketing or public awareness campaign focused on walking and bicycling and health benefits</li> <li>• Provide local data on health-related issues that can strengthen Safe Routes to School initiatives</li> <li>• Partner with city or county elected officials to conduct a Health Impact Assessment of the community with a special focus on low-income children</li> <li>• Develop and carry out an evaluation plan for the Safe Routes to School effort</li> </ul>

**4. Reach out to the state Safe Routes to School coordinator to identify what kinds of financial assistance and support are available.** Each state Department of Transportation (DOT) has a full-time employee specifically charged with implementing the Safe Routes to School program, called the Safe Routes to School coordinator. Reach out to your DOT's Safe Routes to School coordinator to see if resources and assistance are available to help low-income communities and schools in your state. Contact information and websites for all state Safe Routes to School coordinators are available at: <http://www.saferoutespartnership.org/state/5043>. Here are just a few examples of the types of assistance your state DOT may offer:

- Arizona Department of Transportation offers a Planning Assistance Program open to low-income communities. If selected, a community is paired with a consultant paid for by the state who helps the community assess its needs, develop recommendations for needed improvements and write an application for the next Safe Routes to School funding cycle.
- Iowa Department of Transportation offers engineering assistance at no cost to small communities that are experiencing traffic problems around the school but do not know how to resolve the problem. Communities can receive up to \$10,000 to pay for assistance from an engineering firm, which evaluates the problem area at the school, suggests solutions and assists the community in applying for Safe Routes to School funding.
- New Hampshire Department of Transportation (NHDOT) offers up to 20 bonus points on a 100-point scoring scale for applications from disadvantaged communities. NHDOT also offers two categories of awards that are particularly useful to low-income communities: start-up awards with a simple application form and funds to support development of comprehensive travel plans.
- New Mexico Department of Transportation (NMDOT) factors in community resources and size when reviewing applications to ensure that communities with fewer resources and staff are not disadvantaged. Since most New Mexico communities fall into the low-income category, NMDOT offers \$15,000 awards for communities that want to develop Safe Routes to School Action Plans. The state also provides engineering assistance to all funded communities, as most do not have access to engineering staff.
- South Carolina Department of Transportation (SCDOT) offers extra points during the application review process for low-income schools. All schools and communities that receive funding have access to planning workshops and technical assistance from SCDOT to help them implement a successful program. In addition, SCDOT provides free incentives and educational information to schools that participate in Walk to School Day.



## Additional Resources

### **Safe Routes to School National Partnership:**

*The Safe Routes to School National Partnership has a number of reports, guide books and case studies on Safe Routes to School. The Partnership also works on federal and state-level policy that supports Safe Routes to School.*

<http://www.saferoutespartnership.org/>

### **National Center for Safe Routes to School:**

*The National Center for Safe Routes to School assists communities in enabling and encouraging children to safely walk and bicycle to school. The Center strives to equip Safe Routes to School programs with the knowledge and technical information to implement safe and successful strategies.*

<http://www.saferoutesinfo.org>

### **State Departments of Transportation:**

*Contact information for each state's Safe Routes to School Coordinator is available at*

<http://www.saferoutespartnership.org/state/5043>.

### **Alliance for Biking and Walking:**

*The Alliance for Biking and Walking includes more than 140 member organizations across the country that seek to make it easy and safe for citizens to bicycle and walk. These organizations may be able to help provide expertise and assistance for Safe Routes to School.*

<http://www.peoplepoweredmovement.org/site/index.php/site/memberservices/C530>



# Addressing Challenges through Promising Practices

This section focuses on the most common barriers to implementing successful Safe Routes to School programs in low-income schools and communities. The following topics are addressed:

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Each section includes a description of the challenge followed by promising practices that communities across the country have used to address the challenge. These local case studies help illustrate real-world solutions that can be adopted by others. Each section also includes links to websites that provide additional resources or information.







# Personal Safety: Crime and Violence

*Fear among children and parents about their personal safety can prevent children from walking or bicycling to school. In one study, 19 percent of students reported that they fear being attacked while going to and from school.<sup>11</sup>*

Many Safe Routes to School programs focus primarily on the dangers that traffic poses to children walking and bicycling. But, in low-income neighborhoods, children may also be facing threats to their personal safety on the trip to school. When children are walking or bicycling through areas with drug or gang activity or alongside liquor stores, abandoned buildings, stray dogs and people loitering, safety must be a top priority for Safe Routes to School programs.

Fear among children and parents about their personal safety can prevent children from walking or bicycling to school. In one study, 19 percent of students reported that they fear being attacked while going to and from school.<sup>11</sup> These concerns extend to parents as well: a Seattle study found that children are five times more likely to walk or bicycle to school when neighborhood safety is not a primary concern for their parents.<sup>12</sup> Unfortunately, many children are walking and bicycling to school despite high rates of neighborhood crime and violence.

Safe Routes to School initiatives are addressing both risks and fears associated with crime and violence. Programs such as the walking school bus have shown promise in improving children's safety by walking in organized groups under adult supervision, particularly when paired with neighborhood crime watches, parent patrols and safety zones.

Communities are using other creative techniques to abate crime including a safe passages program in Chicago, Illinois and a corner captain program in Austin, Texas. Community efforts to clean up derelict public spaces and abandoned houses can also decrease neighborhood crime, as can no-tolerance policies on public loitering and graffiti. The following community profiles highlight effective and innovative efforts to create safer communities for low-income students to walk and bicycle to and from school.



## **Flagstaff, Arizona: A Community Effort to Clean Up the Park**

*Urban community with a population of approximately 60,000 people*

*85 percent of students are eligible for free or reduced lunch*

*33 percent of students are American Indian, 33 percent are Latino, 33 percent are white*

Thomas Elementary School serves a predominantly low-income neighborhood in Flagstaff, Arizona, surrounded by several Indian reservations. About 480 students



in grades kindergarten through sixth grade attend this neighborhood elementary school. Thomas Elementary School was targeted through two rounds of Safe Routes to School grant funding given to the Coconino County Health Department. The \$42,000 and \$80,000 grants were used to pay for a Safe Routes to School program coordinator, incentive programming and classroom education.

The Health Department knew that a key aspect of their intervention had to address safety in Bushmaster Community Park, which is adjacent to Thomas Elementary School. Incidents of drug deals, gang activity and public drunkenness in the park were exposing children to violence and drugs on their way to school. Parents and school officials were legitimately concerned about allowing children to walk or bicycle to school.



To address these significant safety issues, the Health Department asked the principal, teachers, employees from the Department of Parks and Recreation, local law officials and members of city council to join the new Bushmaster Park Community Task Force. Task Force members examined the safety challenges in the park, and identified three specific interventions that would improve safety at minimal cost. The interventions were also selected to engage community residents and businesses in making it safer for more children to walk and bicycle. Their key initiatives included:

- **Police substation:** A local business donated office space just one-quarter mile from the park so that a police substation could be located there. As a result, police presence near the park increased—making parents feel safer and reducing drug and gang activity in the park.
- **Pull the 40s campaign:** A significant contributor to public drunkenness in the park and related broken glass was the widespread availability of 40s (large bottles of beer often sold individually). With support from the city council and the Mayor, local volunteers walked door to door, accompanied by police officers, to ask local businesses to sign a petition promising they would voluntarily stop selling 40s. More than 150 businesses participated in the campaign, dramatically reducing incidents of public drunkenness, loitering and broken glass littered in the park.
- **Walking school bus:** Parents, teachers, community members and police teamed up to reclaim the park for children walking and bicycling to school through weekly walking school bus events. In the spring of 2009, each Wednesday police did an early morning walk-through of the park to ensure it was safe. Then, community volunteers, teachers and parents walked with children through the park to and from school. Between 12 and 20 children participated each week over an eight-week period. The program was repeated in fall 2009, and organizers plan to continue the walking school bus on a regular basis. They have set a goal of increasing participation by five percent each year.

While safety has improved as a result of these activities, there is still more work to be done to get more children walking and bicycling to school on a regular basis. Even though approximately 80 percent of students live within two miles of school,



only 30 percent of students walk and bicycle to school. Thomas Elementary has recently implemented an incentive program to encourage more children to walk. Students receive a hole in their punch card every time they walk to school. After their tenth punch, children earn green bucks which can be used in the Safe Routes to School store. Three times each school year, students can spend their green bucks on temporary tattoos, backpacks and other Safe Routes to School items or save their money for larger prizes.

The school is also working to encourage bicycling. Students in the third grade learned bicycle safety and helmet use from a “bikebot” name Maggie, a robot that rides a tricycle. In a partnership with Safe Kids Coconino County, the Flagstaff Biking Organization, Flagstaff Police Department and local bicycle shops, the school held a bicycle rodeo in May 2010. The rodeo gave children an opportunity to learn safe bicycle skills and practice them in a safe setting.

**Chicago, Illinois: Parent Patrol and Chicago Alternative Policing Strategy (CAPS) Crack Down on Crime near Elementary School**

*Urban community with a population of approximately 2.8 million people within city limits*

*More than 95 percent of students are eligible for free or reduced lunch*

*68 percent of students are Latino, 26 percent are black*

The Dawes School, located in the Ashburn neighborhood of Chicago, is packed with more than 1000 pre-kindergarten through eighth grade students, nearly two-thirds of whom walk to school. Crime is common in the neighborhood and consistently tracked by Principal Mary Dixon through the Chicago Police Citizen Law Enforcement Analysis and Reporting (CLEAR) map. The CLEAR map system, which is updated daily, was developed by the Chicago Police Department so that residents and community organizations can understand crime patterns nearby and work together to combat crime.



Principal Dixon found that the mapping data consistently showed a high prevalence of gang activity, robberies and graffiti in the area, much of which stemmed from students at Bogan High School, located next door to Dawes Elementary. Having identified the source of many crimes, Principal Dixon realized that she had to step up her enforcement efforts. In the past, Dawes School had tried to use parent patrols and parent volunteers at crosswalks, but the high school students would often ignore the parents, posing a safety risk for the large number of children walking and bicycling to school.

Principal Dixon reached out to Jim Venckus of the Chicago Police Department and the Chicago Alternative Policing Strategy (CAPS) Program to revamp the parent patrol. The Chicago Alternative Policing Strategy is a partnership between police and the

community. CAPS recognizes that it takes a combined effort of police, community and city government working together to solve crime. CAPS is funded through the Chicago Police Department’s annual budget.

The CAPS program provided the Dawes Elementary School Parent Patrol with hats and vests for parent patrol members and taught a one-day parent patrol safety training. Dawes School also purchased walkie-talkie radios and red jackets for parent patrols. The jackets give the parents legitimacy and identify parents as patrol leaders, and the walkie-talkies allow parents to radio for help if they are confronting a situation they have not been able to resolve. The school employs three off-duty police officers to assist parent patrols with challenging situations. The officers can also write tickets if necessary. Principal Dixon also changed the elementary school’s arrival and dismissal time by 30 minutes so that younger children would not be out at the same time as the high school students.

While the time change and revamped parent patrol have reduced the number of incidents between Dawes students and Bogan students before and after school, the parent patrol has been struggling with traffic safety issues around the school. As part of the CAPS program, Jim Venckus introduces parent and school leaders to their local alderman so they can discuss challenges and solutions. Each alderman has access to a small budget to improve their community, so Alderman Lola Lane of the 18<sup>th</sup> Ward has assured parents she will use a portion of her budget to install traffic humps on streets surrounding the school this year.

### **Austin, Texas: Walking School Buses and Corner Captains Keep Neighborhood Children Safer**

*Urban community with a population of approximately 750,000 people  
94 percent of students are eligible for free or reduced lunch  
89 percent of students are Latino, 9 percent are black*

Zavala Elementary School, located in central east Austin near downtown, serves a low-income Latino community, with many residents living in a nearby housing project. The school is a cultural hub and community for many families. Approximately 92 percent of the nearly 450 students at Zavala Elementary School live within two miles of school, and no school bus service is provided to students. The prevalence of drug and gang-related crime and violence in the neighborhood prompted Zavala Elementary to implement measures to get more parents and volunteers out on the street to help protect children on the trip to and from school.

The school’s parent support specialist, who is responsible for connecting parents with community resources to help their children, was instrumental in the effort. The specialist recruited and trained parents to be walking school bus leaders. Parents and students now meet in a central location at two separate housing facilities and walk to and from school together. Other adults have also volunteered to serve as “corner captains,” which are stationed on key street corners to increase the presence of responsible adults and watch over children as they walk and bicycle to school. A nun at a nearby Catholic Church is one of the corner captains.



### **Additional Safety Improvement Efforts in Chicago through CAPS Program**

*The assistance provided by the Chicago Alternative Policing Strategy (CAPS) at Dawes Elementary is only one aspect of what the Chicago Police Department can offer to help schools improve safety on the trip to and from school. Through the Safe Passages program, Jim Venckus and the Chicago Police Department support parent patrols, train walking school bus leaders and engage area businesses and agencies as “safe haven” locations.*

*Safe haven locations are identified by a sign in the window indicating that children can find a friendly and safe shelter inside, and ask adults for assistance. Any child walking to or from school who feels threatened or in danger can find refuge in a safe haven location. CAPS has recruited convenience stores, barber shops, retail establishments, police stations, libraries and other businesses as participants in the safe haven program.*

*Through this three-pronged strategy, the CAPS program has helped more than 200 elementary schools and 12 high schools in inner city Chicago provide “safe passages” for young people in Chicago.*



The Austin/Travis County Health Department also committed \$300,000 to carry out a social marketing campaign at ten schools across Austin, including Zavala Elementary. Through TV, radio and billboard ads plus posters and promotional activities in schools, the campaign encourages low-income Latino families and children to walk and bicycle to school safely. Staff members at Zavala Elementary have noticed an increase in the number of students participating in the walking school bus since the campaign launched. They have also noticed that the walking school bus has helped ensure that more students arrive at school on time for the school breakfast program and class. Because the majority of children at the school participate in the free or reduced school breakfast and lunch programs, being late can mean missing the nutritious breakfast and going hungry until lunch, which is not healthy or helpful for school achievement.

To build on the initial success, Zavala Elementary has added a new after-school bicycle club and is working to integrate Safe Routes to School into the school's health and wellness initiatives and parental involvement programs. The Austin Department of Health is helping sustain the Safe Routes to School effort by providing ongoing training and support for parent walking school bus leaders and by running frequent promotional events to encourage more students to participate in the walking school buses.

**Martinsburg, West Virginia: Infrastructure Improvements Address Crime and Traffic Safety**

*Rural community transitioning to urban community with a population of less than 20,000 people*

*65 percent of students are eligible for free or reduced lunch*

*74 percent of students are white, 17 percent are black*



Martinsburg has rapidly changed from a rural community to a more densely populated community, located in one of the fastest growing counties in West Virginia. Opequon Elementary School (kindergarten through third grade) and Martinsburg North Middle School (sixth through eighth grade) are located on adjacent corners of a five-way intersection in the northern city limits near large shopping centers and major roadways which can be major hubs for crime. Despite the fact that most students live within two miles of school, only 20 percent of middle school students walked or bicycled to school. Very few elementary school students walked to school due to significant concerns about crime, drug activity, limited sidewalks and traffic dangers.

Then-Principal Kitty Cauffman identified multiple safety concerns for students walking and bicycling to and from school. Because the school is located on a major roadway, many students would cut through the bushes surrounding the school to more quickly reach nearby housing developments and large shopping centers. One section just 60 feet from the school was frequently used by students as a short-cut, even though it was the site of regular crime and drug activity.

The principal worked with the recreation department, local merchants and other community groups to apply for Safe Routes to School funding to create a safe walkway to replace the troubled cut-through. A \$147,000 federal Safe Routes to School grant from the West Virginia Department of Transportation paid for the construction of a six-foot wide walkway parallel to the roadway adjacent to school. The path serves students at the elementary and middle schools.

Since the path was installed in fall 2009, more students are walking and bicycling to school, and community members are also using the pathway. The middle school is installing a bicycle shelter to accommodate the growing interest in bicycling. The increase in pedestrians has provided more “eyes on the street” in the area around the school. As a result, drug traffic, criminal activity and vandalism in the area has declined dramatically.

## Additional Resources

### Engaging law enforcement in addressing crime and violence:

- National Highway Traffic Safety Administration tool for law enforcement professionals: <http://www.saferoutesinfo.org/lawenforcement/>
- Walking School Bus Guide from the National Center for Safe Routes to School: [http://www.saferoutesinfo.org/guide/walking\\_school\\_bus/index.cfm](http://www.saferoutesinfo.org/guide/walking_school_bus/index.cfm)

### More information on highlighted success stories:

- Chicago Alternative Policing Strategy (CAPS): <https://portal.chicagopolice.org/portal/page/portal/ClearPath/Get%20Involved/How%20CAPS%20works/What%20is%20CAPS>
- Chicago Police CLEAR Map: [http://gis.chicagopolice.org/CLEARMap\\_crime\\_sums/startPage.htm](http://gis.chicagopolice.org/CLEARMap_crime_sums/startPage.htm)
- Habitat for Humanity: <http://www.habitat.org/>



## Community Collaboration Creates a Safer Neighborhood for Students

*Urban community with a population of approximately 450,000 people*

*88 percent of students are eligible for free or reduced lunch*

*74 percent of students are black, 26 percent are Latino*

*Kimberley Park Elementary School in Winston-Salem, North Carolina struggled with neighborhood issues including crime and violence centered around dilapidated buildings. The City of Winston-Salem and Habitat for Humanity partnered to revitalize the area around the school by building ten new homes, five of which are occupied by families attending the school.*

*School and community officials capitalized on the initiative to improve safety for children walking and bicycling. Police patrols were increased, and public works regularly pick up trash in the area. More students are walking and bicycling regularly, and over 200 students participated in the most recent walk to school day.*

*As Habitat for Humanity continues its revitalization effort in the neighborhood around Kimberley Park Elementary, school and community leaders hope to establish a neighborhood watch program and expand the walking school bus program—with a goal of eventually eliminating the school bus route serving an apartment complex close to the school.*



# Community Readiness: Awareness and Attitudes

*After all, there is substantial evidence showing that physical activity has a positive impact on academic achievement in both young children<sup>14</sup> and teenagers,<sup>15</sup> regardless of other factors such as age, income level and ethnicity.*

An important aspect of Safe Routes to School is changing the transportation habits of parents and children. Building awareness of the many benefits of bicycling and walking can encourage walking and bicycling by choice and reinforce a Safe Routes to School program. However, these efforts must be tailored to the attitudes and awareness of the community. It is important to understand whether walking or bicycling is commonplace or less familiar to community residents. When walking or bicycling is less accepted, it may take a targeted effort to raise awareness levels and change habits about walking and bicycling.

Social marketing campaigns emphasizing health, safety and community benefits can build support for bicycling and walking. Methods for getting the message to parents and residents can include radio ads, billboards, earned media, school newsletters and flyers in students' backpacks. Walking and bicycling programs and clubs can offer increased opportunities for parents and children to learn traffic safety and develop skills while having fun. However, these practices show the most promise when they are culturally sensitive and endorsed or run by respected local people and organizations.

Health and safety are often messages that are persuasive to parents. Research suggests that parents who perceive physical activity as important for their families' health and who walk regularly themselves are more likely to have their children walk or bicycle to school.<sup>13</sup> Many families in low-income communities do walk regularly, but it is important to help the families make the connection to how walking is healthy. After all, there is substantial evidence showing that physical activity has a positive impact on academic achievement in both young children<sup>14</sup> and teenagers,<sup>15</sup> regardless of other factors such as age, income level and ethnicity.



On the other hand, parents with significant concerns about traffic or road safety are more likely to have overweight children that are less physically active.<sup>16</sup> Even after safety improvements are made, parents may still not be aware of the changes. It is important that any safety improvements also be accompanied by marketing and awareness efforts to show parents that walking and bicycling is now safer.

The following profiles highlight community efforts to increase awareness of the benefits of walking and bicycling to and from school and to change attitudes that may be preventing more children from bicycling and walking to school.

**Columbia, Missouri: Social Marketing Builds Enthusiasm for Walking School Buses**

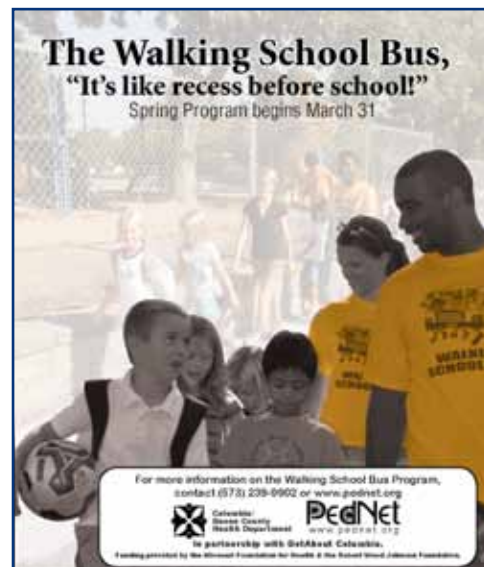
*Urban community with a population of approximately 100,000 people  
More than 90 percent of students are eligible for free or reduced lunch  
55 percent of students are black, 35 percent are white*

Over the past seven years, Columbia, Missouri has taken great strides in creating a walkable and bikeable community. Strategies include making improvements to the built environment and running robust encouragement programs such as the walking school bus, in which parents and volunteers walk with groups of children to and from school. The Pedestrian and Pedaling Network (PedNet), a local nonprofit organization, and the Columbia/Boone County Department of Public Health and Human Services, among others, have been leaders in these efforts.

Columbia was also fortunate to become a Federal Highway Administration’s Non-Motorized Transportation Pilot program city. These pilot funds have supported educational programs, promotional efforts and infrastructure changes focused on making Columbia more pedestrian- and bicycle-friendly. Columbia Mayor Darwin Hindman has been a tremendous advocate for active living efforts in Columbia and is a recent recipient of the League of American Bicyclists’ Lifetime Achievement Award and the 2009 Healthy Communities Leadership Award from Leadership for Healthy Communities.

West Boulevard Elementary School is located in the First Ward of Columbia, one of the older sections of Columbia with a high prevalence of low-income families and a large black population. Despite the fact that approximately 30 percent of children live within a walkable distance, many children were not walking to school. Parents perceived there to be safety risks from crime and heavy traffic, and many parents did not consider the benefits of walking to school. In 2005, PedNet received a grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) and Missouri Foundation for Health to implement walking school buses at four local elementary schools in Columbia. PedNet chose West Boulevard Elementary School as a pilot school with the RWJF funding to provide services to a low-income school centrally located near downtown Columbia.

PedNet realized that an important part of increasing levels of walking and bicycling to school was to change parent perceptions. PedNet worked with the Columbia/Boone County Department of Public Health and Human Services to develop a community-wide social marketing campaign to encourage more parents to walk with their children to school or to join the walking school bus. To better understand the attitudes of the parents and students, the team conducted a randomized survey





of more than 400 families and children at four elementary schools, including West Boulevard Elementary.

Two key results revealed that parents did not have time to exercise, while their children thought walking to school was fun. This feedback allowed for the creation of a social marketing campaign. Marketing messages alerted parents that they could spend time with their children and get exercise by walking with them to school. Ads targeted to children played up the fun angle, with messages comparing walking to school with “recess before school.”

Messages were disseminated through a wide range of methods, including radio ads, posters, print ads in local newspapers, magazines, brochures, postcards, fridge magnets, a website and a jingle. By implementing a walking school bus program along with an innovative social marketing campaign, the walking school bus has built a brand and has created quite a buzz in Columbia.

A subsequent grant from the Missouri Foundation for Health is allowing PedNet to engage residents at the Columbia Public Housing Authority property near West Boulevard Elementary. PedNet created a walking school bus route between the public housing complex and the school. A separate walking school bus route was developed to link students from their school to the location of a popular after-school tutoring program, called Moving Ahead, for public housing residents. Families are being encouraged to join the walking school bus through family informational meetings, flyers and letters—all of which use the marketing messages.

Finally, PedNet is working to address safety challenges around West Boulevard Elementary. Approximately \$15,000 in Safe Routes to School funds supported a charrette, which allows neighborhood residents and parents to share their concerns with officials and work together to develop a visionary plan for what their neighborhood should look like. At the charrette, residents indicated they would like to be able to reclaim a neighborhood park adjacent to the elementary school and use it for walking and bicycling to school. As a result, school buses now drop off students at the park entrance, and teachers meet children there and walk with students across the park to school.



The combination of these efforts to raise awareness and engage neighborhood residents and parents has been very successful in Columbia. Ten schools are now enrolled in PedNet’s walking school bus program, six of which have more than 90 percent of students enrolled in the free and reduced lunch program. More than 400 children are regularly participating in the walking school bus program across the ten schools.



## Diversifying Cycling in Urban America

The National Brotherhood of Cyclists (NBC) was founded in March 2008 by a group of grassroots cycling clubs from around the country made up of black cyclists. Club leaders wanted to provide a supportive atmosphere and increase racial diversity in cycling, promote a love of cycling and bring attention to the health benefits of cycling. More than 30 cycling clubs are currently affiliated with the NBC. The association is open to cycling clubs regardless of race, color, ethnic origin, religion, sex, national origin, age or handicap.

Many of the clubs and participants take their inspiration from Marshall Walter “Major” Taylor. Taylor was an American cyclist who won the world one-mile track cycling championship in 1899 after setting numerous world records despite widespread racial discrimination. He was the first black American athlete to win a world championship, and his legacy continues to motivate cyclists and advocates seeking to engage more people of color in cycling.

Even today, professional cycling tends to attract primarily white riders. One way to create greater diversity in the cycling community is to expose more children of color to cycling. Anthony Taylor of the Major Taylor Club in Minnesota believes that, “Safe Routes to School needs to tap into this organic movement that is happening throughout the country, in which diverse cycling clubs want to encourage community involvement in bicycling as a means for improved quality of life.” Organizations like the National Brotherhood of Cycling and its affiliated clubs can be important partners in Safe Routes to School efforts in communities of color. Three examples of programs follow that are providing urban youth of different races and cultures with the opportunity to ride a bicycle. The hope is that these young people will use their bicycles to get to and from school and throughout their lives.

### Seattle, Washington: Major Taylor Project, Cascade Bicycle Club

*Urban community with a population of approximately 600,000 people  
More than 65 percent of students are eligible for free or reduced lunch  
77 percent are students of color*

Sponsored by the Cascade Bicycle Club in Seattle, Washington, the Major Taylor Project is a collaborative grassroots partnership of youth agencies, schools and bicycle educators. They have created a multicultural bicycling community where teenagers have the opportunity to spend time outdoors on a bicycle. With the support of a two-year grant of \$20,000 provided by the Group Health Cooperative, a Seattle-based nonprofit health care system, the Cascade Bicycle Club opened Major Taylor clubs in the spring of 2009 at a high school and several community organizations.

The clubs engage young people of any bicycling skill level who have a demonstrated need for increased out-of-school-time activity, mentorship, social support or physical activity. The program integrates bicycle riding, community service, healthy living, fitness, safety, bicycle maintenance and road safety awareness. In the year since the clubs began, 90 percent of active club participants have each completed more than 1,400 miles of riding. Nine Major Taylor teens completed the Group Health Seattle



*“I’m expanding my knowledge of how bikes work, about how bikes are usually better than cars. You get around places easier, you get to know new places...”*

*~ Major Taylor Project Club Member*



*In the year since the clubs began, 90 percent of active club participants have each completed more than 1,400 miles of riding.*

to Portland Bicycle Classic ride, and three Major Taylor teens recently completed Cascade’s High Pass Challenge ride (114 mile ride that includes 7,500 feet of uphill riding).

These statistics are even more impressive given that many of the Major Taylor teens have six months or less riding experience. Many of these young people have also lived in the United States for less than a year and many speak English as a second language. So far, more than half of the Major Taylor Project teens have completed the “earn-a-bike” course, a class in which kids refurbish a donated bicycle they then get to keep, and are currently commuting to school and work on their earned bicycles.

From May to June 2010, King County Metro sponsored Major Taylor public bus ads that were featured on the side of 48 buses traveling through downtown Seattle. The ads are intended to raise awareness of the Major Taylor program as a tool to help young people of color learn critical bicycling skills and to spread the word about bicycling as a form of transportation.

**Kansas City, Missouri: Urban Kansas City Community of Cycling**

*Urban community with a population of approximately 475,000 people  
100 percent of students are eligible for free or reduced lunch  
85 percent of students are black, 10 percent are Latino*

Kenneth Walker is getting black children on bicycles in urban Kansas City. After years of working with the Boys and Girls Club and being a bicycle commuter himself, Walker wanted to give urban youth the opportunity to ride bicycles. With Major Taylor as an inspiration, Walker’s program, the Urban Kansas City Community of Cycling (UKCCC), works to build a culture of bicycling in communities of color. The UKCCC offers an eight-week course in charter schools, community centers and after-school programs. The program includes three components:

- **Education:** Teach children about the history and legacy of cycling, tailored to the audience, plus bicycle safety;
- **Resources:** Provide children with equipment, including bicycles and helmets; and
- **Opportunity:** Show children where there are safe places to ride.



These components help children see the value in riding a bicycle, which Walker has found is the key. He also believes that parents and community members must trust the person implementing the program for it to be successful in getting children riding regularly.

On a larger scale, Walker is a founding member of the National Brotherhood of Cyclists and the 2010 Missouri State Ambassador for the League of American Bicyclists, demonstrating that black cyclists and advocates are becoming a part of the “mainstream” cycling community. When asked about diversifying cycling, Walker shares, “we want to be able to bring other individuals forth from our community to begin crossing into mainstream cycling community.” Walker believes that Safe Routes to School is an important means of achieving that vision. To take steps towards that future, Walker has become a partner in the newly established Missouri Safe Routes to School State network.

### **Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Cadence Cycling Foundation**

*Urban community with a population of approximately 1.5 million people*

*More than 50 percent of participants come from families whose incomes are below the poverty line*

*More than 85 percent of students are black*

The Philadelphia-based Cadence Cycling Foundation (CCF) was established in 2007 with the mission of providing young people with opportunities through cycling. CCF uses the sport of cycling as a platform for helping young people realize their potential as athletes, students and young adults. More than 85 percent of CCF participants, called Cadence Kids, are black and approximately half live in households with a single parent or relative. Most Cadence Kids, who range in age from nine to 18, are from families whose incomes are below the poverty line.

CCF uses the bicycle as a gateway to a life enriched by physical activity, community involvement, teamwork and academic achievement. Cadence Kids receive coaching and training on cycling and participate in bicycle races on the weekends. All participants receive bicycles, helmets and transportation to races free of charge.

Through participation in the CCF program, kids are exposed to life-shaping activities and opportunities that would otherwise be unavailable, including team affiliation, access to equipment, coaching and racing. To grow their skills outside sports, Cadence Kids can also join a college preparation program to help them achieve academically, learn how to apply for college and develop life skills necessary to succeed in college.

Through personal ties, CCF founder Ryan Oelkers initially teamed up with Interstate Realty Management, a real estate management company that manages properties in Philadelphia and across the country. Interstate Realty Management provided space for bicycle storage and access to residents for several of the Oelker’s initial programs. CCF has grown to nine cycling teams, each consisting of 10 to 20 students, based at schools, subsidized housing complexes and nonprofits throughout Philadelphia.

With support from the bicycle industry, CCF has been able to break down one of the most difficult barriers to getting low-income young people on bicycles: provide them with equipment. Fuji/Advanced Sports, Inc. donated \$10,000 worth of bicycles in 2008 and continues to support the program today with significantly discounted bicycles.





Over the past four years, Oelkers has pedaled with more than 350 children and youth, and has 120 young people enrolled in spring programming for 2010. When Oelkers goes to a new school to recruit riders, he is constantly reminded that many urban children and youth don't know that bicycling even exists as a sport. The Cadence Cycling Foundation exposes them to cycling with hopes of expanding their worlds to include good health, independent transportation, discipline and commitment.

**Wymore-Blue Springs, Nebraska: "No Child Left on Their Behind" in Rural Communities**

*Rural community with a population of approximately 2,000 people  
46 percent of students are eligible for free or reduced lunch  
90 percent of students are white*

Public Health Solutions, a district health department serving five rural counties in Nebraska, has received two Safe Routes to School grants from the Nebraska Department of Transportation totaling approximately \$110,000 to get more children walking and bicycling to school. Public Health Solutions calls their program "No Child Left on Their Behind" to emphasize the importance of physical activity to children's health.

One of the rural communities Public Health Solutions has worked with is Wymore-Blue Springs. These two towns, which make up the school district of Southern Schools, are located one mile apart. But the population is fairly spread out, and approximately 70 percent of students live one mile or more from school. Distance combined with the lack of sidewalks, speed of traffic, amount of traffic and the need for many students to cross a busy highway, make it difficult for parents to allow students to walk or bicycle to school.



Wymore-Blue Springs received funding from Public Health Solutions to promote physical activity through a social marketing campaign intended to modify walking and bicycling attitudes and behaviors. Families and children were encouraged to walk and bicycle to school, to walk during school and to walk and bicycle in the evenings and weekends. Families were alerted through educational materials distributed at a kick-off event, through backpack mail sent home with children and through church bulletins. Wymore-Blue Springs also incorporated walking and bicycling messages and activities into already-planned community events to reach more parents and students:

- **Fall and Spring Walking Challenge:** The school initiated a month-long walking challenge twice throughout the school year. Students could accumulate miles by walking to school or on school grounds. In the fall 2009 event, 275 elementary students participated in the walking challenge throughout the month. The winning classroom walked a total of 1,548 miles during the month-long event. When the outdoor awards presentation was rained out, students still celebrated by walking the halls of the school for a half-hour.

- **National Night Out:** National Night Out is a popular community event focused on strengthening relationships between communities and police to prevent crime and drug use. More than 500 community members celebrated National Night Out in 2009. Wymore-Blue Springs added a healthy aspect to National Night Out with healthy food choices and more than 20 different activities meant to get parents and children moving. Children received a take-home bag including health and safety information.
- **Pull the Plug On Screen Time:** In February, parents and students were invited to pull the plug on “screen time” and replace it with one hour or more of outdoor physical activity. “Screen time” education flyers were sent home to parents in backpack mail, were posted in public buildings and were inserted in church bulletins. Parents who returned the form promising to cut back on screen time were entered into a drawing for a Nebraska games and parks entry permit, and participating children received a token to wear on their backpack. During the month of February, children at Wymore-Blue Springs spent nearly 1,100 hours being physically active instead of watching television or using computers and video games.



*During the month of February, children at Wymore-Blue Springs spent nearly 1,100 hours being physically active instead of watching television or using computers and video games.*

Encouragement activities were successful in raising awareness and shifting attitudes on walking and bicycling to school and physical activity. One-third of parents reported on surveys at the end of the year that their child’s school strongly encourages walking and bicycling to school, an increase from 19 percent at the beginning of the year.

Wymore-Blue Springs is looking to build on their success by making infrastructure improvements around the school. The Blue Springs City Council and the Blue Springs Street Superintendent recently completed crosswalk and school zone sign improvements with Safe Routes to School funds. These changes will enhance safety around the school and encourage walking and bicycling to school well into the future. Parents have expressed additional concerns about other safety and infrastructure concerns, so the schools’ Health and Wellness Program Coordinator is working with the Blue Springs City Council to discuss ways to address remaining barriers to walking and bicycling to school in Blue Springs.

### **New York City, New York: Beyond Walking – Getting Kids and Parents on Bicycles**

*Urban community with a population of approximately 8.3 million people  
90 percent of Ride Club participants come from low-income neighborhoods*

For a variety of reasons, many parents in low-income communities do not ride bicycles, which can make it more challenging to get their children on bicycles. Access and opportunity are essential to building a cycling community, especially in low-income neighborhoods that often lack bicycle shops. Recycle-A-Bicycle, a community-based bicycle shop and nonprofit organization in New York City, is getting out in the community, building relationships and creating opportunity for more young people to ride bicycles.

Recycle-A-Bicycle is about to embark upon its fifteenth season of Kids Ride Club. Each spring, summer and fall, more than 200 youth ages 10 to 17 participate in the Kids Ride Club. The club is open to all young riders free of charge, and parents and



*In 2009, Ride Club's youth participants collectively pedaled more than 16,000 miles and burned more than 1.7 million calories.*

educators are welcome to join too. The goal of the program is to introduce young people to cycling as a safe and effective means of transportation that also increases physical activity and healthy living. Kids Ride Club includes workshops on basic bicycle mechanics, "on-the-bike" riding skills and practice riding safely in city traffic on the streets of New York City and beyond.

In 2009, Ride Club's youth participants collectively pedaled more than 16,000 miles and burned more than 1.7 million calories. For the 2010 season, consisting of 18 rides, Recycle-a-Bicycle provided bicycles, helmets and experienced ride leaders. Health partners, including insurer Health First and Woodhull Hospital, supply volunteers, first aid and equipment.

To prepare for each new season, Recycle-A-Bicycle visits local middle schools to give a presentation about Kids Ride Club. Representatives from Recycle-A-Bicycle and staff from Woodhull Hospital, as well as past youth participants, give an overview of the program to prospective participants and encourage them to join. Parents of all interested students must sign a permission slip and must also attend a presentation given by Kids Ride Club staff. This ensures that parents learn about the safety precautions and procedures of Kids Ride Club and are also encouraged to participate and volunteer. Recycle-A-Bicycle refers parents who want to learn to bicycle to Bike New York's Adult Learn-to-Ride classes.

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### **Still struggling to get community buy-in? Here are some tips to help you get started:**

*Changing attitudes and culture about walking and bicycling takes time – be diligent and be patient!*

- Get out in the community to build relationships with students, parents, teachers and neighborhood residents. Host outreach events at block parties, community centers, churches and other community-based events.
- Listen and understand where your audience is coming from. What are residents' concerns around walking and bicycling? What are the issues that may prevent community members from bicycling and walking to school? If you can identify specific concerns, you have a better chance of solving those problems and encouraging more walking and bicycling.
- Diversify your message. If you are working in a low-income community or a community of color, seek cultural competence by providing bilingual instructors or language-appropriate information.
- Meet with organizations and stakeholders that already have relationships with the community in which you are working, such as housing associations, churches, neighborhood groups, cultural or youth groups, or community centers.
- Partner with groups, officials and businesses that have similar goals and activities, such as bicycling and walking clubs, neighborhood watch, safety groups and customer service businesses in the neighborhood.

## Additional Resources

### More information on highlighted success stories:

- Missouri Foundation for Health: <http://www.mffh.org/>
- The Pedestrian and Pedaling Network (PedNet): <http://www.pednet.org/>
- National Brotherhood of Cyclists: <http://www.thenbc.org/>
- Major Taylor Project, Cascade Bicycle Club: <http://www.cbcef.org/youth-major-taylor.html>
- Urban Kansas City Community of Cycling: <http://www.urbankccc.com/>
- Cadence Cycling Foundation: <http://www.cadencefoundation.org/>
- Fuji/Advanced Sports, Inc.: <http://www.fujibikes.com/>
- Public Health Solutions: <http://www.healthsolutions.org/>
- Recycle-A-Bicycle: <http://www.recycleabicycle.org/>
- Bike New York, Adult Learn-to-Ride class: [http://www.bikenewyork.org/education/classes/learn\\_to\\_ride\\_adults.html](http://www.bikenewyork.org/education/classes/learn_to_ride_adults.html)





# A Shortage of Professional Expertise

Applying for a federally-funded Safe Routes to School grant through a state Department of Transportation can be a time-consuming endeavor requiring expertise and assistance from local planners and engineers, as well as coordination with the school district and the city or county. Once a project is awarded funding, local recipients must comply with federal highway regulations, which can require additional expertise and staffing to complete paperwork and submit it for approvals. In addition, all Safe Routes to School grants are actually reimbursements, meaning that schools and localities may have to expend the funds first and then wait for reimbursement. While reimbursements can be made in various stages of the project, this still places a high financial burden on the local school or community.

These aspects of the Safe Routes to School program can create challenges for low-income communities in a number of ways. Schools in low-income areas are often understaffed, meaning that their availability to spearhead a Safe Routes to School award may be limited. These communities also face significant challenges in absorbing the costs of carrying out a Safe Routes to School project while waiting for reimbursement. Finally, these communities may lack access to city or county engineering staff with the expertise necessary to implement the project and comply with federal and state regulatory processes. Yet, these schools and communities are often the very locations where significant numbers of children are already walking to school in areas with dangerous traffic conditions and other threats to personal safety.



Oftentimes, the best solutions require a state Department of Transportation to be proactive in providing additional resources, such as technical planning assistance, to economically disadvantaged communities. Locally, promising practices also exist, including communities partnering with nonprofit organizations, foundations and local universities. Below are three examples of collaborative efforts to implement Safe Routes to School programs in communities with limited resources.



### East Moline, Illinois: Active Transportation Alliance Assists with School Travel Plan

*Small urban community with a population just over 20,000 people  
64 percent of students are eligible for free or reduced lunch  
50 percent of students are white, 32 percent are Latino*

Ridgewood Elementary in East Moline, Illinois, serves nearly 400 students in kindergarten through fourth grade. Half of students are children of color, and 15 percent have limited English proficiency. As of November 2009, 20 percent of students walked, 30 percent rode the bus and nearly 50 percent arrived in a family car or truck. Due to heavy traffic at a nearby intersection, bicycling is not allowed to Ridgewood Elementary School.

For the past few years, Ridgewood Elementary School has participated in Walk to School Day and from time to time offered walking school buses. But like many communities with limited resources, the school was unable to develop a plan for longer-term educational and encouragement activities and needed infrastructure improvements.

To ensure that more low-income schools were able to participate in Safe Routes to School, the Illinois Department of Transportation provided funding to the Active Transportation Alliance, a Chicago-based nonprofit transportation advocacy group. Funds allowed the Active Transportation Alliance to help ten underserved schools create a school travel plan, which is a required part of the application for Safe Routes to School funding in Illinois. Christy Filby, community wellness director at the Quad Cities YMCA and a parent, attended a Safe Routes to School training in summer 2008 where she heard of the program. In early 2009, she asked Active Transportation Alliance to select Ridgewood Elementary School as one of their ten schools.

The Active Transportation Alliance provided hands-on assistance to East Moline. They conducted focus groups and parent surveys, hosted public meetings, interviewed key stakeholders and led a community “walkabout” to assess the environment around the school. The Active Transportation Alliance analyzed all of this information to help the community create a school travel plan. This travel plan makes Ridgewood Elementary School eligible to apply for the next cycle of Safe Routes to School funding.

In addition, the process of developing the school travel plan was instrumental in engaging city officials. The city engineer participated in the development of the school travel plan, creating a relationship between the school and the city. As a result, Safe Routes to School infrastructure improvements needed at Ridgewood Elementary were incorporated into the city improvement plan. The city engineer also invited the principal of Ridgewood Elementary to serve on the City of East Moline Sidewalk Taskforce.

Moving forward, Ridgewood Elementary School partnered with the local YMCA and



*“The best thing about being a part of Safe Routes to School is that it makes our school and our stakeholders step back and really look at how our students are coming to school. Most schools worry about what happens when the children enter the doors of the school. SRTS has opened our eyes to the impact we can have on our students BEFORE they get to our doors every morning. This makes us really examine how we can facilitate getting our kids to school in a safe manner and promote wellness at the same time.”*

*~ Sheri D. Coder,*

*Principal Ridgewood Elementary School*



*"This program has certainly heightened our awareness of the walking environment around our school. The educational activities have given our students a better understanding of what a safe walking path looks like."*

*~ Pat Thomas, Principal,  
Elbert-Palmer Elementary School*

Activate Quad Cities to help implement Walking Wednesdays in spring 2010. Media support has also helped get parents and students more involved in Safe Routes to School efforts. Thanks to the initiative of an astute parent champion and support from a proactive local nonprofit, East Moline demonstrates that it is possible for communities with limited resources and funding to be part of the Safe Routes to School movement.

**Wilmington, Delaware: State, Regional, City and Community Collaboration Improves Walkability in Southbridge Neighborhood**

*Urban community with a population of approximately 70,000 people  
89 percent of students are eligible for free or reduced lunch  
82 percent of residents are black, 12 percent are Latino*

The residential heart of South Wilmington is the mostly black, working-class neighborhood of Southbridge. The neighborhood is 1.65 square miles with just over 2,000 residents and one elementary school. Southbridge has been identified by Wilmington Area Planning Council (WILMAPCO) as one of the region's targeted Environmental Justice neighborhoods. WILMAPCO is a metropolitan planning organization that creates transportation plans and priorities for the region. Through its Environmental Justice initiative, WILMAPCO seeks to ensure that federal funds are not used in ways that would discriminate against minority and low-income populations.

Since 2005, WILMAPCO has partnered with the Southbridge community and other relevant agencies to identify and address the neighborhood's transportation issues. According to a 2008 Southbridge Circulation Study, residents were most concerned about speeding traffic, heavy truck movement and walkability, which is particularly important since about 90 percent of Southbridge elementary school students walk to school. The Safe Routes to School Program was identified as a way to finance some of the walkability improvements needed in Southbridge, while also promoting walking and bicycling as a form of transportation at Elbert-Palmer Elementary School.



To move forward, WILMAPCO established a collaborative partnership between the Southbridge Civic Association, the City of Wilmington, Nemours Health and Prevention Services, the HOPE Commission and the Delaware Department of Transportation (DelDOT). These partners secured a \$130,000 Safe Routes to School grant to formally establish the program at Elbert-Palmer Elementary School. Because WILMAPCO had already created the Southbridge Circulation Study, the team and DelDOT had much of the necessary information about infrastructure needs already in hand. The Safe Routes to School planning team focused on a slate of walkability improvements that would have the biggest impact on student safety, including replacing and adding sidewalks, striping crosswalks, adding curb ramps and

enhancing signage. Because DeIDOT absorbs the cost of carrying out Safe Routes to School projects, Elbert-Palmer Elementary School did not have to come up with the funds for the project and wait for reimbursement. DeIDOT's procedures allowed the planning phase to be completed quickly, and begin construction without delay.

Marvin Thomas, President of the Southbridge Civic Association, expressed excitement about the funding opportunity and found the collaboration with WILMAPCO, the city and DeIDOT invaluable in navigating the application process and implementing the project. Bill Swiatek, a senior planner at WILMAPCO, noted, "grant programs like Safe Routes to School can in practice be discriminatory, as the application processes are often not designed with the needs of low-income communities in mind." Fortunately, between WILMAPCO's Environmental Justice initiative and DeIDOT's innovative procedures, Southbridge received the support it needed to access Safe Routes to School funding and improve safety for their children.

Now that the infrastructure improvements are complete, the Safe Routes to School planning team is turning to education and encouragement activities to get more children walking and bicycling safely to school. Approaches include safety education assemblies, a *Steps Across Delaware* program that provides students with pedometers and maps, daily morning safety pedestrian announcements at school, articles in the elementary school newsletter and a walking at recess program. The Safe Routes to School team will soon begin planning a second phase of infrastructure improvements as well as additional education activities. The success in Southbridge has already encouraged another low-income school in Wilmington to request help in starting a Safe Routes to School program.



### **Seattle, Washington: Local Nonprofit and AmeriCorps Partner to Implement Safe Routes to School Program**

*Urban community with a population of approximately 600,000 people*

*80 percent of students are eligible for free or reduced lunch*

*64 percent of students are Latino, 13 percent are Asian, 55 percent of students are non-native English speakers*

In 2009, Feet First, a Seattle-based nonprofit organization promoting walkable communities, teamed up with Seattle Department of Transportation (DOT) to secure a \$315,150 Safe Routes to School grant from Washington State DOT for Concord International Elementary School. Concord International Elementary School is located in the southwest Seattle neighborhood of South Park, an industrial neighborhood tucked between two major freeways.

In collaboration with Seattle DOT, Concord International Elementary School parents, the principal, local residents and representatives of community organizations took part in the first step of Safe Routes to School program implementation in October 2009 – a walking audit. Feet First and Seattle DOT worked hard to engage the entire school community, and nearly 80 percent of walking audit participants were parents or family members of children attending the school. The walking audit was led in English with simultaneous Spanish translation to allow all participants to contribute fully.



*In higher-income schools, stay-at-home parents and PTA volunteers provide much of the manpower. But that is not a realistic option for schools like Concord where parents work full-time, sometimes at multiple jobs.*

Safe Routes to School programs often rely on a great number of volunteer hours to carry out activities and programs. In higher-income schools, stay-at-home parents and PTA volunteers provide much of the manpower. But, that is not a realistic option for schools like Concord where parents work full-time, sometimes at multiple jobs. So for schools like Concord International Elementary, the resource in shortest supply is volunteer time.

To address this challenge, Feet First resourcefully employs a bilingual AmeriCorps volunteer to act as a community organizer for Concord International Elementary. It costs Feet First approximately \$7,000 to host an AmeriCorps volunteer for 1,700 hours of service spread over 10 months. Because language barriers have the potential to paralyze a program, having a bilingual staff person breaks down the language barrier and helps establish trust.

The AmeriCorps volunteer takes on the responsibilities of launching and implementing the Safe Routes to School program, including: working with staff to educate and encourage them on Safe Routes to School programming, recruiting volunteers, engaging partners, creating and distributing flyers, translating documents for parents and students and developing a walking school bus program. The AmeriCorps volunteer also meets directly with parent volunteers and the PTA to coordinate a volunteer program. Feet First's goal is to act as catalyst, create the structure for Safe Routes to School and eventually turn the program over to the parents.

Since October 2009, Safe Routes to School has made notable progress at the school. The AmeriCorps volunteer has helped develop many inroads into the community. A walking school bus now departs the Sea Mar Housing Unit every Wednesday, crossing a foot bridge that connects the housing unit to the school. Sea Mar public housing, which is run by health provider Sea Mar Community Health Centers, serves low-income and formerly homeless individuals and families, many with children who attend the local school. Infrastructure improvements, including the installation of a new sidewalk on a key walking route to the school, are expected to be completed in the summer of 2010.



Feet First will continue to provide a community organizer through December 2011 to get the program off the ground and will then take a step back and work with the community to develop a sustainable Safe Routes to School Program. At the end of the Safe Routes to School grant project, Feet First will leave the school and its partners with tools including suggested timelines, sample communications and templates for walk-to-school campaigns, as well as an open invitation to access any of Feet First's free services.

Concord International Elementary School has strong principal and staff enthusiasts, and several involved parents with younger children who are likely to be in the school for several years longer. The partnership with Sea Mar Community Health Centers also provides a mechanism for sustainability for years to come. Sea Mar is interested in maintaining momentum past the life of the Safe Routes to School grant as part of its mission to provide comprehensive health care services to South Park residents. It is expected that Sea Mar will help perform some of the legwork necessary to sustain the walking school bus program at Sea Mar Housing Unit into the future.

Another positive sign for the future of Safe Routes to School in Seattle is that the Seattle School District is changing its policies and will assign more children to their neighborhood schools starting in the 2010-2011 school year. This will reduce the number of students bused across town and increase the number of students that live near and attend their local school—increasing opportunities for and the importance of walking and bicycling to school.





## How States Can Facilitate Implementation of Safe Routes to School in Low-Income Communities

Several state Departments of Transportation (DOT) are utilizing different approaches to address the special needs and challenges of low-income communities, either in the application process or the implementation phase. As the federal Safe Routes to School program is still relatively new, state DOTs have chosen different mechanisms or initiatives to support low-income communities. Examples of state DOT best practices include:

1. **Develop a comprehensive initiative specifically for low-income communities.** Some states have chosen to develop and fund a special Safe Routes to School program to ensure that Safe Routes to School infrastructure improvements and programs are implemented in low-income communities, and to learn more about what types of assistance would be most valuable to these communities in future application cycles.
2. **Carry out a special outreach or awareness campaign.** Given the staffing shortages many low-income schools experience, it can require an extra effort to ensure that low-income communities are aware of Safe Routes to School awards and consider applying. Some states have carried out special outreach efforts to reach low-income communities.
3. **Provide funding for planning awards.** Another approach that some states use is to provide small planning awards with simplified applications. These awards provide funding to help smaller and low-income communities do the initial assessments and develop plans that are necessary for applying for a larger-scale award.
4. **Award extra points on applications.** Some states have chosen to ensure adequate representation of low-income communities by providing extra points or consideration during the application review process if a community or school meets a certain income level criteria or has a minimum percentage of children receiving free or reduced school lunches.
5. **Offer engineering assistance.** A shortage of engineers or planners in low-income communities can deter applications or hinder completion of projects. Several states have contracted with statewide planning or engineering firms that provide expertise to low-income communities at the state's expense, or with costs built in to the award amount, to help them develop plans and carry out Safe Route to School projects.

To find out whether your state DOT offers special assistance for low-income communities, contact your state's Safe Routes to School coordinator. Contact information is available at <http://www.saferoutespartnership.org/state/5043>. Specific examples of state best practices for addressing the needs of low-income communities are available at <http://www.saferoutespartnership.org/state/5764/232695>.

You can also join the effort to advocate that more state DOTs offer special support to low-income communities. The Safe Routes to School National Partnership maintains State Safe Routes to School Networks in 20 states. State network partners work together to remove barriers to walking and bicycling to schools. One key priority for the years 2010 and 2011 is to ensure that Safe Routes to School programs are benefiting low-income schools and communities. More information on the State Networks, including contact information, is available at <http://www.saferoutespartnership.org/state/network>.

## Additional Resources

### More information on highlighted success stories:

- Active Transportation Alliance: <http://www.activetrans.org/>
- Wilmington Area Planning Council (WILMAPCO):  
<http://www.wilmapco.org/>
- Environmental Justice Initiative: <http://www.wilmapco.org/EJ/>
- Nemours Health and Prevention Services: <http://www.nemours.org/service/preventive/nhps.html>
- HOPE Commission: <http://www.wilmingtonhopecommission.org/>
- Feet First: <http://feetfirst.info/>
- Sea Mar Community Health Centers: <http://www.seamar.org/>
- AmeriCorps: <http://www.americorps.gov/>





# Limited Parental Involvement

Parents and caregivers are heavily relied upon as volunteers for Safe Routes to School programs. But they can be hard to reach and engage in low-income communities for a variety of reasons including lack of free time, language barriers and a lack of connection to the school. Even parents that are actively involved with the school are likely to move on when their children change schools, so parent recruitment is frequently an ongoing activity for Safe Routes to School programs.

Many single-parent families or families where parents work multiple jobs give a lack of available time as a major reason for limited parental involvement. One study on parental involvement in childhood education at schools found that 51 percent of low-income parents agreed that their jobs prevented them from becoming involved in school activities, whereas only 26 percent of middle-income parents and 12 percent of high-income parents agreed.<sup>17</sup> Time constraints among parents, especially working mothers, reduce walking and bicycling to school for children aged 5-14.<sup>18</sup> In communities with large immigrant populations, language barriers are often reported as a reason for limited parental involvement.

While these challenges may sound daunting, Safe Routes to School programs in low-income communities are finding successes. Parents and caregivers can be reached through a range of organizations and groups, like parent teacher associations, parent resource centers and English as a Second Language courses targeted to parents. Many low-income schools employ parent liaisons that may be able to help make connections to parents and caregivers.



It is important to listen to parents and caregivers and to find ways to engage them in Safe Routes to School that is a direct response to their concerns and motivations. Safe Routes to School programs have a range of benefits, including increasing physical activity and safety, and this may help persuade parents to get involved. For example, a parent with a particular concern about their child's safety may be more motivated to help with activities like parent patrols specifically focused on safety. Outreach to parents must be audience-appropriate, taking into account the varying languages, backgrounds and education levels of parents.

The following profiles highlight promising practices to increase parent participation in Safe Routes to School programs in Detroit, Michigan and Alameda County, California.



## **Detroit, Michigan: Older Students Step Up to Lead Walking School Buses after Stipend for Parents Runs Dry**

*Urban community with a population of approximately 900,000 people  
90 percent of students are eligible for free or reduced lunch  
99 percent of students are black*

Located in Southeast Detroit, Nichols Elementary School is situated in the historic Indian Village neighborhood, which borders some of the most blighted areas of the city. More than 340 students attend the kindergarten through eighth grade school, which has a record of academic excellence. Nearly 85 percent of students qualify for free or reduced school lunches, and nearly half the students live close enough to walk or bicycle to school.

Nichols Elementary embarked on a Safe Routes to School initiative in 2006. Key participants in the school team included school administration, city department staff, Wayne State University's Center for Urban Studies and The Southeastern Village, a community organization that includes leaders from area schools, churches and nonprofits.

In 2008, the school team worked with the Michigan Department of Transportation, the Michigan Fitness Foundation and the Michigan State Housing Development Authority to develop a Safe Routes to School Action Plan (which is required in Michigan to receive federal Safe Routes to School funding through the state) and complete a Safe Routes to School funding application. Nichols Elementary was awarded \$14,749 for sidewalk and curb repairs and installation of bike racks. An additional \$27,680 supported the creation of a youth-produced video, a walking school bus program, parent volunteer training, walk and bicycle to school day activities and volunteer stipends.

Walking school buses can be difficult to maintain over time given the amount of planning and scheduling, volunteer training and encouragement, communication and ongoing oversight that is required. Nichols Elementary School provided parents who led walking school buses with \$100 monthly stipends, which did help engage adults as volunteers for the program. However, several of these individuals were unable to continue when stipends ran out due to work commitments and financial challenges.

To fill the gaps in the walking school buses, older students at Nichols Elementary have stepped up as leaders. Older students are inviting younger students to join them on the walk to school. This is helping ensure that younger children are safe on their walk to school. As an outgrowth of the adult-led walking groups, a program that encourages older youth to walk together to and from school with younger youth is promising.

"One of the biggest lessons learned," reports the teacher who coordinated Safe Routes to School activities at the school, "is that we don't always have to depend



*"One of the biggest lessons learned is that we don't always have to depend on parents. Now, with little parent involvement in the walking school bus program, seventh and eighth graders are taking on the walking school bus driver role because they believe in the value of students walking together. The most positive part of Safe Routes to School activities at Nichols Elementary is that students are paying attention to safety and following pedestrian safety rules."*

*~ Teacher, Nichols Elementary*



*"It's very important to give your time and participate in your school and community because our children will feel proud of us. This will also motivate them to be active just as much as we are. This is the only way to make positive changes in your school and community."*

*~ Parent champion Diana De La Hoya at Global Family School*

on parents. Now, with little parent involvement in the walking school bus program, seventh and eighth graders are taking on the walking school bus driver role because they believe in the value of students walking together. The most positive part of Safe Routes to School activities at Nichols Elementary is that students are paying attention to safety and following pedestrian safety rules."

**Alameda County, California: Training Parent Advocates Leads to Increased Parental Involvement**

*Urban county with a population of approximately 1.5 million people  
95 percent of students are eligible for free or reduced lunch  
83 percent of students in the county are Latino*

By the time the federal Safe Routes to School program launched in 2005, Safe Routes to School fever had already spread well beyond Marin County, California, one of the first two pilot Safe Routes to School programs in the country. TransForm, a nonprofit organization based in Oakland, California, is dedicated to creating world-class transportation and walkable communities. They saw a need to bring Safe Routes to Schools to Alameda County and stepped up as the lead agency for the Alameda County Safe Routes to School program. Alameda County is a diverse area that includes the city of Oakland, with significant Asian, Latino and black populations. Twenty-five percent of households speak a language other than English.

Many parents encounter language barriers within their school and communities, and some parents are unable to read and write. Many immigrant parents are afraid to interact with the schools, as immigration agents have raided schools in recent years. These situations create unique challenges when attempting to recruit parents to participate in Safe Routes to School programs.



While many traditional Safe Routes to School programs follow the model of having a parent champion implement and lead programming such as walking school buses, TransForm instead seeks to create parent leaders and advocates first, and then engage them in Safe Routes to School. As parents begin to understand their valuable role in the community and their role as a parent advocate, Safe Routes to School leaders emerge.

The Alameda County Safe Routes to School program partners with Parent Leadership Action Network (PLAN), a nonprofit organization that provides leadership development and advocacy skills to low-income parents and parents of color. Together, they developed a model of parent training that develops leadership skills tailored to the Safe Routes to School program. The foundation of the training is based off the following values:

- Parents are natural leaders and have the capacity to advocate for their children.
- Adult learning must build on existing experiences and knowledge of participants.
- Adult learning must be action-oriented and balance conceptual thinking with the chance to take concrete actions in order to advocate for children and families.

TransForm believes that these parent leadership trainings are critical to having a more holistic, equitable and inclusive Safe Routes to School program in Alameda County.

One example is the Global Family School in Oakland. Global Family School is a kindergarten through fifth grade school with 95 percent of students eligible for free or reduced lunch. The student body is 83 percent Latino. To help the overwhelmingly poor and underserved student population, the school employs a full-time community liaison. The role of the community liaison is to increase parental involvement in the school, and to bring outside resources from the community into the school. Parents were often asking the community liaison for help with personal and traffic safety concerns, so the liaison reached out to the Alameda County Safe Routes to School program.

Alameda County Safe Routes to School responded by offering parent advocacy trainings at Global Family School that also incorporate walking school bus skills. Parent workshops are held monthly in English and Spanish, simultaneously. Workshops are announced in newsletters, flyers and through other community partners, such as the Alameda Public Health Department.

Parents are using the skills learned in the workshops to form walking school bus groups and spread the word to other parents. Several of these parents have also started attending local neighborhood crime prevention council meetings and are informing their neighbors about the school's efforts to bring about safety into the school and neighborhood. By incorporating leadership skills into the walking school bus trainings, TransForm is giving parents the tools they need to become strong advocates for their children and their school, and to make changes happen in their community.



### **Alameda County Safe Routes to School's Goals for Making Connections with Parents**

1. *Because the scope of our program is to work directly with parents, our plans should be to develop and build relationships with these parents.*
2. *Given our values, our goal for connecting with parents is to first listen to their stories and then understand their issues and concerns.*
3. *Find how their issues, concerns, fears and dreams relate to the work that we do with the Safe Routes to Schools Program.*
4. *Once we present our information and the scope of our program, we need to relate them back to their issues of concern and share that there are ways for them to take action and change some of their situation(s). We should work towards making parents feel inspired to get involved in the Safe Routes to School Program.*
5. *Once we have inspired and dedicated parents we need to continually nurture those relationships AND find creative ways to encourage leadership with the parents. Find ways to also find new and motivated parents to help keep the program sustainable.*

*Reproduced with the permission of Karla Perez-Cordero, TransForm*



## Tips for Successfully Engaging Parents and Caregivers as Leaders and Volunteers

1. **Raise awareness of the *REAL* rates of crime and violence in the neighborhood.** Jim Venkus of the Chicago Alternative Policing Strategy program in Chicago often uses a map showing crime and violence rates around schools at civic association and school meetings. These maps also show families and neighbors where criminals are living in relation to the school. When parents become aware of the real dangers in their community, they are more willing to give their time as a volunteer.
2. **Host volunteer trainings during a time when you will need parent volunteers.** Many parents want to volunteer and often will attend an evening volunteer meeting. But, you need volunteers during school hours. By hosting volunteer meetings at times when you will need volunteers, you will have more success actually engaging volunteers that are available when you need them for school-related activities.
3. **Enlist active parent volunteers to recruit other parents.** Don't try to put parent recruitment on the plate of teachers and school administration – they often have too much on their plates already. Principals are typically overextended, but a parent coordinator or liaison already has access to parents. Give active parent volunteers a volunteer sign-up form to carry with them while they themselves are volunteering; word of mouth is a great recruitment strategy.
4. **Recruit volunteers from parents that are already walking their children to school.** By engaging parents that are already participating in desired behaviors, you have won more than half the battle. With a direct approach, you can ask that parent or guardian if they would be interested in expanding or sharing their duties to help other children. Parents that are already walking with children may be able to more easily lead a walking school bus.
5. **Be creative — see how you can provide a stipend for parent involvement.** Parent stipends can be an effective tool for engaging parents that are in need of employment but can't because of childcare responsibilities. But, be careful – this approach can backfire when funding runs dry, leaving programs short on parent leaders and volunteers.
6. **Build relationships with parents and residents.** Go to or host community events such as open houses. These experiences will provide you with opportunities to engage in conversations with parents and caregivers—listen and learn. These personal relationships are more likely to motivate parents to become engaged in leadership activities.
7. **Partner with other nonprofits and community organizations that work with parents.** Housing developments, English as a second language classes or parent resource centers are just a few of the types of organizations that have already gained the trust of parents in the community and have a voice. Work with them to approach parents and caregivers they already know.
8. **Appreciate your volunteers.** When parents and volunteers feel appreciated they will come back, spread the word and engage other parents. Be sure to celebrate and reward parent involvement and enthusiasm. Not only will it be a great way to appreciate your parent volunteers, it can lead to a larger community of volunteers.

## Still having a hard time finding parent volunteers? Look to other community residents!

**Recruit High School Students.** In Crete, Nebraska, Public Health Solutions partners with high school students through clubs such as TeamMates, Fellowship of Christian Athletes, Future Farmers of America and National Honor Society to engage volunteers for Walk to School Day and walking school bus leaders. Student volunteers can serve as role models by leading walking school buses, while also demonstrating safe pedestrian skills.

**Recruit College Students.** Many college and university students are required to complete community service hours or interactive learning experiences. By working with your local university or college you can collaborate and incorporate public health, nursing, kinesiology, planning and education students in Safe Routes to School program efforts – oftentimes in exchange for class credit for the students.

- In Flagstaff, Arizona, as part of course requirements for health education, students at Northern Arizona University complete Safe Routes to School projects. Projects include helping out with International Walk to School Day, Bike to School Day and developing an interactive curriculum for kids that incorporates Safe Routes to School in the classroom. Subject topics are age-appropriate and include topics such as mapping, the environment and interactive activities such as a community clean-up prior to Walk to School Day along the most traveled routes.
- Sharon Canclini, Public Health Nursing Clinical Faculty at Texas Christian University in Fort Worth, Texas, put her nursing students to work for the Safe Routes to School movement. Canclini had nursing students, as part of their public health class, collect data on Safe Routes to School and report findings to the city council. Nursing students evaluated the walkability and bikeability of a school neighborhood in the Mansfield Independent School District. After seeing the data, the school board hired an engineering company to help prioritize infrastructure issues. While there are many obstacles to overcome before the infrastructure improvements will be completed, the Safe Routes to School movement has been initiated at little cost to community. It also provided a number of nursing students with valuable insight into how the built environment can influence physical activity levels.
- Nutrition and fitness students at the University of Missouri complete mandatory safety training, lead walking school buses to school on a consistent schedule and journal throughout their experiences for additional credit with professors. This simple approach provides consistent walking school bus leaders, promotes walking to school and has resulted in students adopting this behavior and walking home together in groups.

**Recruit Seniors and Other Community Groups and Members.** Working with neighborhood residents and organizations can build community and provides guidance and support for Safe Routes to School programming efforts. Some ideas include local church groups, service organizations, neighborhood business employees and seniors. Murch Elementary in Washington, DC is located next to a retirement community and a nonprofit organization, Iona Senior Services. Parents and school officials partnered with senior citizens living nearby to form a neighborhood pedestrian safety working group. Together, the working group is raising awareness of the need for Safe Routes to School and pedestrian safety improvements that will benefit children walking to school and help senior citizens be more independent.





## Additional Resources

### More information on highlighted success stories:

- Wayne State University's Center for Urban Studies:  
<http://www.cus.wayne.edu/>
- Michigan Fitness Foundation:  
<http://www.michiganfitness.org/>
- Michigan State Housing Development Authority:  
<http://michigan.gov/mshda>
- TransForm: <http://transformca.org/>
- Parent Leadership Action Network (PLAN):  
<http://www.parentactionnet.org/>







# The Barrier of Distance to School

*Unfortunately, distance to school has been increasing over time. In 1969, just over half (55 percent) of students lived a mile or more from their schools. By 2001, three-quarters of children traveled a mile or more to school. In rural areas, just 2.7 percent of students live within one mile of school.<sup>20</sup>*

Distance from school is consistently reported as a primary factor influencing whether children walk or bicycle to school. The odds of a student walking or bicycling to school decrease the farther a student lives from his or her school.<sup>19</sup>

Unfortunately, distance to school has been increasing over time. In 1969, just over half (55 percent) of students lived a mile or more from their schools. By 2001, three-quarters of children traveled a mile or more to school. In rural areas, just 2.7 percent of students live within one mile of school.<sup>20</sup> While suburbanization and trends towards increasing the size of schools and campuses is one reason for the increasing distance to school, rural and urban areas have other factors.

Distance to school can also be a challenge in urban areas where a changing educational structure gives parents the choice to send students to magnet or charter schools, often not their neighborhood school. This can require students to travel longer distances and use a variety of transportation methods to get to and from school, including the family vehicle, public transportation or school buses. One study found that one-third of students attending neighborhood schools walked and bicycled to school, while just 6 percent of students attending schools throughout the city walked or bicycled to school.<sup>21</sup> Urban areas with school choice policies must use creative approaches to increase safety for children on their trip to school.



In rural areas, longer distances to schools are a significant barrier. In West Virginia, for example, 84 percent of students in kindergarten through twelfth grade are bused to school because they live too far to walk or bicycle. However, many rural communities are implementing innovative strategies to increase physical activity levels by implementing remote drop-offs for school buses and having children walk from the drop-off point to school, or creating walking opportunities before school or during physical education class.

The examples below demonstrate how two very different urban and rural communities are addressing the challenge of distance to school.



### **New York City, New York: Safety City Promotes Pedestrian Education for Urban Students**

*Urban community with a population of approximately 8.3 million people  
New York City schools serve 1.1 million students in more than 1,600 schools*

It is no longer the case that kids always go to their neighborhood school. With the growth of school choice, charter schools and magnet schools throughout the United States, it is common for parents and students to apply for a school that best fits their needs. Often, this school is not a neighborhood school, requiring students to travel across the community. This type of structure provides a challenge for schools to implement more traditional Safe Routes to School encouragement and education programming, such as neighborhood walking school buses.

In New York City, students attend schools throughout the city and take a wide variety of modes of transportation to get there. Many students take public transportation, and walk or bicycle to the nearest transit stop. To help increase safety for students on the trip to and from school, the New York City Department of Transportation has developed six “Safety City” facilities throughout the five city boroughs.

Safety City consists of a simulated, fenced-in New York city street and intersection, complete with realistic pavement markings, traffic and pedestrian signals and street signs. These facilities provide children with hands-on experience and practical lessons in how to make safe choices when walking to and from school, taking public transportation, riding in a car or riding a bicycle.

Safety City is designed for third grade students with a learn-by-doing method that keeps students looking, listening, talking and examining in a realistic, yet protected environment. The Safety City program serves more than 50,000 children annually throughout the school year and summer, and has been credited with contributing to the 90-year low rate of pedestrian and vehicular-related fatalities.<sup>22</sup>

Safety City is an effective learning and encouragement tool that can be used in large urban communities where school choice is a barrier to more traditional Safe Routes to School approaches.





**Crete, Nebraska: “No Child Left Inside” Program Promotes Physical Activity in Rural School**

*Rural community with a population of approximately 6,000*

*38 percent of students are eligible for free or reduced lunch*

*55 percent of students are white, 40 percent are Latino*

In rural Nebraska, distance can prevent some students from participating in Safe Routes to School encouragement activities. But rather than accept that rural students will be less active, rural communities in Nebraska are implementing before-school walking and bicycling programs and promoting walking during physical education time. Schools are also looking at alternative drop-off locations for school buses and parents where children can then walk together to school.

In 2009, the rural community of Crete, Nebraska implemented a project entitled “No Child Left Inside” to encourage kids and parents to get outdoors and move more. A primary focus of this project is to limit screen time and increase a child’s physical activity. Crete Elementary partnered with Public Health Solutions District Health Department, a nonprofit whose mission is to prevent disease and injury, to promote wellness and to protect the personal, community and environmental health of all people in five counties in southeast Nebraska.

Crete Elementary School hosted two walk and bicycle to school days incorporating walking school buses that featured college athletes and high school students as guides. These volunteers safely walked kids to school from two locations. Students who rode the bus and had a parent’s permission were dropped off at one of the two walking school bus sites so they could join the walk to school. More than 200 students participated in the fall and spring events.



While children who live far from school may at times be excluded from regular encouragement activities, Crete Elementary School is making strides at incorporating all students, whether they live in town or in the country, in Safe Routes to School programming.

## Additional Resources

### More information on highlighted success stories:

- New York City, Department of Transportation, Safety City: <http://www.nyc.gov/html/dot/html/safety/safecity.shtml>
- Public Health Solutions: <http://www.healthsolutions.org/>





# Traffic Safety and the Built Environment

*Low-income neighborhoods often have greater traffic-related risks, and children from low-income households are more likely to be injured or killed as pedestrians.<sup>25</sup>*

A 2008 report from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention investigating why more children do not walk or bicycle to school found traffic safety to be the second most common barrier, after distance.<sup>23</sup> Traffic safety concerns encompass high levels of traffic, high vehicle speeds, crumbling or missing sidewalks, lack of crosswalks and lack of street lights.

Vehicle speeds are a particular threat to the safety of pedestrians and bicyclists, as fatalities increase exponentially the faster the vehicle is going. A pedestrian hit by a vehicle traveling 20 miles per hour (mph) has a 95 percent chance of surviving; at 30 mph the chance of survival is 55 percent, and at 40 mph the chance of survival decreases to only 15 percent.<sup>24</sup>

Low-income neighborhoods often have greater traffic-related risks, and children from low-income households are more likely to be injured or killed as pedestrians.<sup>25</sup>

In rural areas, state highways often bisect towns, creating a barrier for students to walk safely to school. State highway speed limits average between 45 and 55 miles per hour and may not have crosswalks, stoplights or even sidewalks. These state-managed highways can pose a challenge to local communities seeking safety improvements in the built environment because local residents have little to no control over the traffic pattern, speed limit or other traffic flow changes that local communities seek to improve safety. Many rural communities also do not have neighborhood sidewalks, roadway shoulders or paved and lighted streets, which makes it more dangerous for children to walk and bicycle to and from school.



Urban areas can also face these challenges, along with high volumes of traffic near schools. While crossing guards can often be an effective tool for improving pedestrian safety around schools, many schools and cities lack the financial resources needed to train and employ an adequate number of crossing guards. Urban areas may also lack sidewalks and crosswalks, or they may be in disrepair.

Infrastructure improvements such as repairing crumbling sidewalks, building new sidewalks near schools, creating roadway shoulders or slowing traffic can have profound effects. Simply completing a sidewalk improvement near three elementary schools in California increased walking rates by 38 percent.<sup>26</sup>

The following profiles highlight urban and rural communities that addressed traffic safety challenges through improvements to the built environment.

### **Highland Park, Michigan: Local Nonprofit Takes Initiative to Improve Traffic Safety for Students**

*Small urban community with a population of approximately 14,000 located within Detroit*

*53 percent of students are eligible for free or reduced lunch*

*100 percent of students are black*

Highland Park was home to Henry Ford's first assembly plant, but it has been in economic decline for decades. Consequences of job and industry loss include abandoned buildings, personal safety concerns, crumbling infrastructure, unsafe street crossings and low municipal government budgets. With a small footprint of just three square miles, it is fitting that Highland Park is now pioneering ways to improve safety and get more children walking and bicycling to school.

The Reggie McKenzie Foundation, a nonprofit serving Highland Park youth since the mid-1970s, took the initiative to start a Safe Routes to School program in late 2006 after Foundation staff attended a Safe Routes to School training provided by the Michigan Fitness Foundation. Immediately, the Foundation began to recruit community and school leaders to join the effort. With the assistance of Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) regional representatives, three schools in Highland Park serving nearly 1,500 students submitted Safe Routes to School Action Plans and funding applications in 2008.

Highland Park prioritized a number of infrastructure improvements, including sidewalk repair, replacement and installation, demolition of abandoned buildings and cleanup of vacant lots. Funding was awarded in late 2008 in the amount of \$900,000 for infrastructure improvements and \$53,850 for traffic safety education, volunteer recruitment and encouragement activities.

The state of Michigan prioritizes efforts in its eight Cities of Promise, the cities with the highest unemployment rates and lowest income levels. Because Highland Park is located in a City of Promise, MDOT will design and construct the infrastructure projects for the city. Because the local government budget is stressed, it would likely have been unable to undertake such a significant project otherwise. In addition to alleviating the financial burden, this approach also ensures that infrastructure projects can be completed more quickly. Infrastructure improvements will be completed in time for the start of the 2010-2011 school year.

The Reggie McKenzie Foundation used the smaller Safe Routes to School grant to hire a Safe Routes to School coordinator for the Highland Park schools. During the 2009-2010 school year, the coordinator recruited school, community and parent volunteers





*The Burlington Safe Routes to School program has met its goal of providing sidewalks along streets in town. Students no longer have to walk along the high-speed state highway or in the middle of gravel roads. A 2009 survey showed that about 44 percent of kids now walk to school and that 14 percent of children have switched from walking to bicycling now that sidewalks are available.*

and partners; taught personal and traffic safety to more than 500 students through student-led Safe Routes to School puppet shows and Safe Routes to School activity coloring books; trained parents as volunteer crossing guards; and led a community-wide recruitment of adult pedestrians to walk community streets during school start and end times.

Safety has already improved even though the new infrastructure has not yet been built. Uniformed parent crossing guards help students safely cross streets, and adults are more visible on the street during arrival and dismissal times. Older students are regularly walking together with younger students, and the police have increased their presence around the schools and in the neighborhoods. The Reggie McKenzie Foundation has also decided to provide stipends to keep the parent crossing guard program going even after Safe Routes to School funding ends.

**Burlington, Wyoming: Rural Community Making Great Strides to Create a Safer Built Environment**

*Rural community with a population of approximately 250 people  
Approximately 50 percent students are eligible for free or reduced lunch  
80 percent of students are white, 20 percent are Latino*

Burlington is a small rural Wyoming town located southeast of Cody. With a population of only 250 residents, Burlington has one school, serving 159 students in kindergarten through twelfth grade. One-third of students live within one and a half miles of school. Even for students who live relatively close to school, the roads are unpaved gravel, there are just a few street lights scattered through town and the only sidewalks in town run for just five blocks along a the high-speed state highway that bisects the town.



Susan Davidson, a parent and also a town council member from 2001 to 2008, worked with the school principal to submit the first Safe Routes to School grant for Burlington. In 2007, a Safe Routes to School grant of \$197,019 was used to install ten lights on existing poles and to build 11 more blocks of sidewalk, completed in spring of 2008. Davidson has continued to serve as a parent champion for Safe Routes to School in rural Burlington, and has worked with the school to submit additional Safe Routes to School grant applications. In 2009 Burlington was awarded \$168,900, and has already constructed eight blocks of sidewalks, with two remaining blocks due to be completed in the spring of 2010.

The Burlington Safe Routes to School program has met its goal of providing sidewalks along streets in town. Students no longer have to walk along the high-speed state highway or in the middle of gravel roads. A 2009 survey showed that about 44 percent of kids now walk to school and that 14 percent of children have switched from walking to bicycling now that sidewalks are available.

Parent comments on the surveys expressed excitement about the new sidewalks in town. Said one parent: "I believe the sidewalks leading to school have been a great benefit to those who use them, especially those who bike, rollerblade, skateboard or ride a scooter." The sidewalks have also provided safe places for the elderly and mothers with strollers to walk into and around town.

### **New York City, New York: StreetsEducation Brings Traffic Dangers in School Zones to Life**

*Urban community with a population of approximately 8.3 million people  
New York City schools serve 1.1 million students in more than 1,600 schools  
10 percent of students are English Language Learners*

New York City is not only the largest city in the United States; it is also one of the most diverse. With a population of approximately 8.3 million people, nearly 50 percent of residents speak a language other than English at home.<sup>27</sup>

New York City has made a concerted effort in recent years to improve pedestrian safety. In January 2009, New York City Transportation Commissioner Janette Sadik-Khan announced an all-time record year for traffic safety with 256 traffic fatalities, the lowest level recorded in city history.<sup>28</sup>

However, pedestrian injury and fatality rates, especially for children, are still too high. The New York City Child Safety Report from 2007 reports that half of fatal child pedestrian incidents occurred within 700 feet of a city elementary or middle school. This is due both to the amount of time children spend near schools and the high density of schools across the city.<sup>29</sup>

With so many child pedestrian deaths occurring close to schools, StreetsEducation, a New York City-based nonprofit, is working with school-aged students to advocate for the change they want to see on their streets and in their neighborhoods. Through interactive programming, StreetsEducation works with students to identify traffic risks and to request that the city change traffic patterns and reduce vehicle speeds in their communities. Students complete StreetsEducation lessons by writing letters to the New York City Department of Transportation requesting specific changes to their school environment to improve safety for children walking and bicycling to and from school. Below are brief descriptions of a few of the programs sponsored by StreetsEducation.

#### ***Community Roots Charter School & PS 67, Brooklyn***

91 percent of students are eligible for free or reduced lunch  
74 percent of students are black, 21 percent are Latino

A program called "Paint the Pavement" was produced in conjunction with the Myrtle Avenue Restoration Project, the local Business Improvement District. The project involved students at Community Roots Charter and PS 67 along with more than 40 New York Cares volunteers and residents from nearby Ingersoll Public Housing Unit. Residents and students worked together to paint a mural on the street next to the school to create a more visible crossing between Ingersoll Public Housing Unit and





*Due in part to the letters from students, the New York City Department Of Transportation has recently announced that it will triple the number of 20 mile per hour speed zones across the city. These changes will slow drivers at 90 schools, many in low-income communities with a high percentage of students receiving free or reduced lunch.*

the two schools. The schools have seen an improvement in safe driving behaviors and a greater sense of community on the street. In spring 2010, the schools continued the painting project further down the street on their own, as part of a community celebration.

**PS 75, Manhattan**

53 percent of students are eligible for free or reduced lunch  
49 percent of students are Latino, 30 percent are black

PS 75 is located near a major entrance and exit ramp for the Henry Hudson Parkway, which runs along the west side of Manhattan. A child was injured in a serious car crash there in the fall of 2008. Working with StreetsEducation, students at PS 75 studied traffic dangers at that intersection and the impact of traffic pollution on air quality and asthma. Students studied the speeds of cars and the behavior of drivers, such as watching to see if drivers would yield to students in the crosswalk before turning. They also watched the volume of traffic. Students also studied air quality by collecting particulate matter, using peak flow readers to determine their lung capacity and learning about how traffic is a major trigger for asthma in high-traffic areas. Students wrote letters to Commissioner Sadik-Khan with their requests for improvements, including making streets safer, improving air quality and providing better transit options.

**Mott Hall II, Manhattan**

More than two-thirds of students are eligible for free or reduced lunch  
47 percent of students are Latino, 29 percent are black

StreetsEducation led these middle school students through a Community Service Photo Simulation Project of the streets surrounding school. A photo simulation is a photo-realistic rendering of a new design placed over an actual picture of a location and can be used to show how a street could be made safer, more beautiful, more usable and 'greener.' By using these "photosims", the students created a digital rendering of the street that imagined safer streets for their community. Students drew their improvements on tracing paper over actual printouts of photos that they took. They then collaborated with a graphic designer who turned these drawings into digital renderings. All four of the student groups working on this project wanted more bike lanes, bus lanes and beautification measures in the area.



The students also wrote letters to the commissioner asking for speed reductions in the immediate area around their school, improved signage and better pedestrian



visibility. They also presented the results of their work to the Columbus-Amsterdam Business Improvement District to gain support for their ideas.

As a result of projects at these three schools and others across New York City, more than 200 students have written letters to New York City Transportation Commissioner Sadik-Khan. One student letter reads, “Dear Commissioner Sadik-Khan, we need better signs around our schools because cars are going too fast, thank you.”

Transportation Commissioner Janette Sadik-Khan remarks, “StreetsEducation transforms our streets into classrooms so that even the littlest New Yorkers can make a big difference in their neighborhood. StreetsEducation is a creative way for communities to get involved in making their streets safer, greener and more attractive.”

Due in part to the letters from students, the New York City Department of Transportation has recently announced that it will triple the number of 20 mile per hour speed zones across the city. These changes will slow drivers at 90 schools, many in low-income communities with a high percentage of students receiving free or reduced lunch.



## Additional Resources

### More information on highlighted success stories:

- The Reggie McKenzie Foundation:  
<http://www.reggiemckenzie.com/>
- Michigan Cities of Promise:  
<http://www.citiesofpromise.org/index.aspx>
- Michigan Fitness Foundation:  
<http://www.michiganfitness.org/>
- StreetsEducation:  
<http://www.livablestreets.com/about/>



# Policy Recommendations

As this guide illustrates, many low-income communities are seeing success through Safe Routes to School. However, a number of policy changes at the national, state and local levels could improve equity, access and sustainability for low-income communities.

- Nationally, current evaluation tools and parent surveys focus more heavily on assessing whether more students are walking and bicycling as a result of Safe Routes to School interventions. These shifts are not always possible in low-income communities where large numbers of children are already walking and bicycling. Instead, these communities must be able to easily measure improvements in traffic and physical safety. Simple evaluation tools must be designed to allow communities to demonstrate a tangible impact on safety.
- State Departments of Transportation (DOTs) should track the economic and geographic distribution of applications and awards for their Safe Routes to School programs. If low-income schools are under-represented, state DOTs should provide planning assistance, outreach and grant-writing assistance, such as those outlined on pages 13 and 38. In one example, the New Jersey DOT (NJDOT) assessed its first round of Safe Routes to School grants and realized that low-income schools were significantly under-represented. As a result, NJDOT started an Urban Demonstration Project in six low-income schools in Newark, Trenton and Camden. NJDOT worked directly with schools and neighborhood partners, developed the needs assessments and travel plans and constructed infrastructure improvements. These experiences will inform NJDOT's efforts to ensure that Safe Routes to School benefits schools in all types of communities.
- City and county governments should also be proactive about building solutions for low-income communities into their budgets, policies and programs. Cities and counties must include the community's input into their planning and projects to ensure that the needs of the community are addressed. This can include working with school districts to ensure that schools are located near the students they serve and that schools have good bicycle and pedestrian access. Governments can prioritize sidewalk improvements around low-income schools, create complete streets policies, ensure that crossing guards are deployed where they are most needed, dedicate community policing resources



to patrol schools struggling with personal safety challenges and support the hiring of parent liaisons at schools. The city of Springfield, Missouri provides a good example. The city uses funds generated from a quarter-cent capital improvement sales tax to construct sidewalks around schools. Already, 50 miles of sidewalks have been built over the past twenty years, and the city continues to make progress on its goal of providing sidewalks within a half-mile radius of all schools in the district. The city also applies for Safe Routes to School grants and foundation funds to support other safety improvements.



- School districts should also ensure that they pass policies supporting walking and bicycling at all schools, and that low-income schools have the additional support and resources necessary to apply for Safe Routes to School grants. The Miami-Dade County school board mandates that all students in the school system receive pedestrian education through the WalkSafe™ program. As part of the program, the WalkSafe™ organization also collects incident reports from elementary schools to identify traffic and built environment dangers. Through teaching children pedestrian safety and making needed infrastructure improvements around schools, there has been a 43 percent decrease in the total number of children ages 0-14 hit by cars in Miami-Dade County since 2001.



# Conclusion

The promising practices identified in this guide clearly demonstrate that low-income communities can implement successful Safe Routes to School programs that make it safer for children walking and bicycling and get more children physically active. However, it is clear that these success stories are more easily achieved when state and local governments, foundations and nonprofit organizations collaborate and provide assistance.

Low-income communities are often burdened with challenges ranging from personal safety and community readiness to a lack of professional resources, limited parental involvement and an inadequate built environment. But the local stories in this resource guide show how these challenges can be overcome to successfully encourage and support safe bicycling and walking to school.

Stories highlighted in this resource guide showcased parents and school leaders collaborating with local businesses, city police departments and parent volunteers to create safe streets and parks for children. Simple marketing campaigns increased community awareness of the health benefits of walking and bicycling, and urban grassroots initiatives diversified bicycling. Local nonprofit organizations and schools worked together to help parents realize their potential as advocates and leaders in the community, successfully engaging them in Safe Routes to School efforts. City and nonprofit organizations partnered with schools and neighborhood associations to pool resources and effectively apply for and use federal Safe Routes to School grant funding to address community needs. And cities and counties worked to improve the built environment to make bicycling and walking to school easier and safer for students.



The Safe Routes to School National Partnership hopes that these promising practices and success stories are only the beginning. Because they focus on the health and safety of children, Safe Routes to School initiatives have the power to bring a wide range of partners together. When all of these elements come together, low-income communities have the potential to transform themselves into communities where parents and children are able to safely walk and bicycle to and from school and be more physically active. Safe Routes to School can also help communities find solutions to traffic congestion, safety concerns and poor air quality to create more vibrant, healthy and livable communities.

## Appendix: Glossary of Terms and Acronyms

**Bicycle Rodeo** – a clinic that helps teach children the importance of riding a bicycle safely and what skills and precautions they need to develop to ride safely.

**Bicycle Train** – a variation on the walking school bus in which adults supervise children riding their bicycle to school.

**Built Environment** – the human-made surroundings that provide the setting for human activity ranging in scale from personal shelter to neighborhoods to the large-scale civic surroundings.

**Charrette** – a collaborative session in which a group of designers craft a solution to a design problem. Charrettes serve as a way of quickly generating a design solution while integrating the aptitudes and interests of a diverse group of people. In urban planning, the charrette has become a technique for achieving community involvement by consulting with all stakeholders including municipal officers, developers and residents.

**Complete Streets** – these policies ensure that the needs of all users—including pedestrians, bicyclists, public transportation riders and drivers—are considered in all transportation projects.

**Earn-a-bike** – a general term used for programming in which individuals fix up used bicycles donated by the community and, in turn, earn a bicycle. Earn-a-bike participants usually learn mechanical and problem-solving skills and often receive mentoring from staff or volunteers and peers.

**Health Impact Assessment (HIA)** – a combination of procedures, methods and tools by which a policy, program or project may be judged as to its potential effects on the health of a population, and the distribution of those effects within the population.

**National Center for Safe Routes to School** – an organization that assists communities in enabling and encouraging children to safely walk and bicycle to school. The Center strives to equip Safe Routes to School programs with the knowledge and technical information to implement safe and successful strategies.

<http://www.saferoutesinfo.org>

**Parent Teacher Association or Organization (PTA or PTO)** – a formal organization composed of parents, teachers and staff that is intended to facilitate parental participation in a public or private school.





**SAFETEA-LU Federal Transportation Bill** – a funding and authorization bill that governs United States federal surface transportation spending from 2005 to 2010. The \$286.4 billion measure contains a host of provisions and earmarks intended to improve and maintain the surface transportation infrastructure in the United States, including the interstate highway system, transit systems around the country, bicycling and pedestrian facilities (including Safe Routes to School) and freight rail operations.

**Safe Routes to School National Partnership** – a fast-growing network of nearly 500 organizations, government agencies and professional groups working to set goals, share best practices, secure funding and provide educational materials to agencies that implement Safe Routes to School programs. The Safe Routes to School National Partnership’s mission is to serve a diverse national community of organizations that advocates for and promotes the practice of safe bicycling and walking to and from schools throughout the United States.

<http://www.saferoutespartnership.org>

**Safe Routes to School State Network Project** – a project sponsored by the Safe Routes to School National Partnership specifically working to remove policy barriers to walking and bicycling to schools by implementing complete streets, changing statewide school siting and other policies and by implementing legislation that would result in funding or policy changes.

<http://www.saferoutespartnership.org/state/network>

**School Travel Plan** – a school travel plan creates safer routes for pedestrian and bicycle travel by identifying problem areas and proposing solutions. It serves as a basis for funding and is a way for a community to organize their plans for Safe Routes to School programs and projects.

**Social Marketing** – the systematic application of marketing, along with other concepts and techniques, to achieve specific behavioral goals for a social good.



**State Department of Transportation (DOT)** – the agency in each state that institutes and coordinates transportation programs and funding.

**Walking Audit (walkabout)** – a review of walking conditions along specified streets conducted with a diverse group of community members, which can include: city planners, city council members, city chamber of commerce members, local residents, emergency responders, police, developers, business owners and other interested parties. Audits can last from one hour to an entire day and can involve walking, bicycling and bus travel.

**Walking Wednesdays** – a regular event, often held weekly or monthly, held to encourage large numbers of children to walk and bicycle to school safely.

**Walking School Bus** – a group of children walking to school with one or more adults; it can be as informal as two families taking turns walking their children to school to a more structured approach consisting of multiple designated routes with meeting points, a timetable and route map, sign-up sheets and a regularly rotated schedule of trained volunteers.

**Walk to School Day (WSTSD)** – an annual, national event in which school children are encouraged to walk, bicycle, scooter, skateboard, wheelchair or skate safely to school. It is held annually on the first Wednesday of the first full week each October, as part of International Walk to School Week. For more information, go to <http://www.iwalktoschool.org>.





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