

# Safe Routes to School



## Objective

- *Create safe environments and encourage students to bike and walk to school to increase student levels of physical activity.*



## Key Messages

**Walking and biking to school increases physical activity which contributes to improved health outcomes.**

- While experts recommend that youth participate in at least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity every day, opportunities for physical activity during the school day are limited in most schools. National studies indicate that daily PE is offered in just 4% of elementary schools, 8% of middle schools and only 2% of high schools. <sup>2</sup>

- One third of children and adolescents are overweight or obese, due in part to a gradual decrease in physical activity and an increase in sedentary behaviors like watching television, playing video and computer games, and driving instead of walking. <sup>4</sup>
- Obese youth are more likely to have risk factors for cardiovascular disease, such as high cholesterol or high blood pressure, and are more likely to be overweight or obese as adults. Overweight and obese adults have a higher risk of developing chronic diseases including heart disease, type 2 diabetes, stroke and cancer. <sup>5</sup>
- Studies show that walking to school is associated with higher levels of physical activity throughout the day. The benefits of physical activity include improvements in weight, blood pressure, bone, muscle, and joint health and maintenance, and a reduction in the risk of type 2 diabetes. <sup>6,7</sup>

**Evidence suggests that active transport such as biking and walking to school improves academic performance. <sup>8</sup>**

- Physical activity improves psychological well-being and academic performance. Regular physical activity also helps improve concentration and self-esteem, and reduces stress and anxiety.
- Adding physical activity to the school day in 5-10 minute increments increases daily in-school physical activity and improves on-task behavior during academic instruction. <sup>9</sup>

**Safer environments--including routes to school--should protect child safety.**

- The most common hazards encountered when biking or walking to school include: <sup>10</sup>
  - Crosswalks in poor condition or not present.
  - Curb ramps outside of crosswalk or not present.
  - Speed limits of 35 mph or higher in the vicinity of an elementary or middle school.
  - Drivers who fail to stop or make an illegal turn.
- These hazards can be overcome with Safe Routes to School Programs and appropriate planning and construction that take into account pedestrian safety.
- Pedestrian safety can be improved through Safe Routes to School Programs and planning and construction.





## Key Strategies

- **Develop a Safe Routes to School Comprehensive Plan to address the 5 E's:** Engineering, Encouragement, Enforcement, Education, and Evaluation.
- **Start a Safe Routes to School program by adopting at least one strategy to encourage walking or biking to school.** Strategies include:
  - **Regular Walk to School Day** – Choose one day a week or month to promote a Walk and Bike to School Day.
  - **Designate a remote drop-off site** at a local park or other safe community site for students on busses so all students can participate. Provide adult supervision through staff participation or parent volunteers for the drop-off site and the walk to school.
  - **Walking School Bus** – Best achieved through a group of parents who regularly walk with their children to school. A formal system could include several stops at designated times along the route to pick up other children. An informal system could include parents stopping at a few houses to collect other neighborhood kids for the walk. Depending upon parent availability, it can be daily or weekly. A similar system can also be set up with bike riders, known as a bike train.
  - **School Patrol Program** – Have safe street crossing points near the school, either on the city street or on driveways on the school grounds. Consider having students cross at one or two designated locations rather than at multiple locations.
- **Work with local government officials** to discuss improvements, such as sidewalks or trails along the street or reducing the speed limit in the area surrounding the school.
- **Work with the local police department** for assistance in enforcement of school speed zones and stopping for pedestrians in crosswalks. Having the occasional presence of a squad car and officer on the street in front of the school helps to reinforce positive driving behavior.
- **Incorporate walking and bicycle safety curriculum into the school year.**
- **Expand the school's walking or running program to give credit for walking or biking to school.** Establish a designated distance or number of laps to simplify the program.
- **Educate and encourage parents to participate in walking and biking to school** with their children when possible.
- **Involve the wellness committee, parents and student groups** in walking and biking promotional efforts.



## Sample Policy Language

“The school district will work with school staff, parents, and local public works and police personnel to implement a “Safe Routes to School” program in support of walking/biking to school.”

“The school district will encourage parents and students to walk and bike to school where safe routes are available and assist parents in organizing adult supervised groups. Parent and student groups may also consider assessing walking and biking access to their school and apply for funding to improve this access.”

“The school district will assess and, if necessary and to the extent possible, make needed improvements to make it safer and easier for students to walk and bike to school. When appropriate, the district will work together with local public works, public safety, and police departments in those efforts.”

“The school district will explore the availability of federal “Safe Routes to School” funds, administered by the Minnesota Department of Transportation, to finance such improvements. The school district will encourage students to use public transportation when available and appropriate for travel to school, and will work with the local transit agency to provide transit passes for students.”



## Success Stories

### Red Pine Elementary School, ISD 196, Eagan Safe Routes to School

Red Pine created and implemented a comprehensive Safe Routes to School Plan after observing the high level of motor vehicle traffic in and around the school parking lot and very few walkers and bikers. Actions included posting a Safe Routes Map on the school website, creating alternate drop-off sites, celebrating Walk/ Bike to School Days, promoting the use of Walking School Buses, having student leaders create lawn signage to encourage biking and walking, and involvement of the Health and Wellness Committee. One result of this Safe Routes to School program has been reduced traffic in the lot at the beginning and end of the school day – down from over 120 vehicles to 40-50 per day. The number of bikers and walkers to Red Pine tripled from an average of 40 per day to over 120.



## Resources for Implementation

- **Safe Routes to School: A Strategy of the Active Schools Minnesota Initiative:**  
<http://education.state.mn.us/MDE/StuSuc/Nutr/PhyActiv/053422>
- **National Center for Safe Routes to School:** <http://www.saferoutesinfo.org/>
- **Minnesota Department of Transportation, Safe Routes to School Program** MnDOT has a variety of resources — including grant funding for infrastructure, planning, and non-infrastructure projects—to assist MN school districts with starting and implementing SRTS programs. Some highlighted resources include:
  - Safe Routes to School Handbook: <http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/oshii/docs/SRTShandbook.pdf>
  - Elementary Traffic Safety Ed. Guide: <http://www.dot.state.mn.us/saferoutes/pdf/toolkit/elementary-srts-curriculum.pdf>
  - Student Arrival & Departure Talley Sheet: [http://www.saferoutesinfo.org/sites/default/files/resources/SRTS\\_Two\\_Day\\_Tally.pdf](http://www.saferoutesinfo.org/sites/default/files/resources/SRTS_Two_Day_Tally.pdf)
- **Walk! Bike! Fun! A classroom-based traffic safety curriculum:**  
<http://www.dot.state.mn.us/saferoutes/pdf/toolkit/walk-bike-fun-curriculum.pdf>
- **iWalk, The Official Site of International Walk to School Day:** <http://www.iwalktoschool.org/>
- **Active transportation Alliance:** opportunities for children to engage in healthy and safe physical activities and to learn how to make transportation choices that are both environmentally sustainable and economically smart:  
<http://www.activetrans.org/education/teachers/elementary>
- **Walking with a Purpose (neighborhood walkability assessment):**  
[http://www.idph.state.ia.us/iowansfitforlife/common/pdf/walking\\_with\\_purpose.pdf](http://www.idph.state.ia.us/iowansfitforlife/common/pdf/walking_with_purpose.pdf)
- **Waivers and Releases: Managing Liability Risk for Youth Recreational Activities in Minnesota:**  
<http://publichealthlawcenter.org/sites/default/files/resources/ship-fs-WaiversReleases-2011.pdf>

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*Smart Choices is a partnership of the Dakota County Public Health Department and school districts in Dakota County committed to making the healthy choice the easy choice by creating opportunities for healthy eating and physical activity before, during and after school.*

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