

# Learn it. Do it. Live it!

## SRTS TALKING POINTS



Talking points are an important tool used to give a consistent message about Safe Routes to School programs and activities. Talking points can be particularly useful for conversations and meetings with key stakeholders, such as parents and local officials, as well as interviews with the media.

The following information can help communicate important topics and concepts:

- What is Safe Routes to School?
- Key points regarding school travel trends, bicycle and pedestrian safety, physical activity and concern for the environment
- History of Safe Routes to School
- History of Walk to School Day
- Quick Facts and Figures: The History of Walk to School Day and Bike to School Day

### DEFINING AND DEVELOPING SAFE ROUTES TO SCHOOL

#### *What are Safe Routes to School Programs?*

Safe Routes to School (SRTS) programs are sustained efforts by parents, schools, community leaders and local, state, and federal governments to improve the health and well-being of children by enabling and encouraging them to walk and bicycle to school.

SRTS programs examine conditions around schools and conduct projects and activities that improve safety and reduce traffic and air pollution in the vicinity of schools. As a result, these programs make bicycling and walking to school a safer and more appealing transportation choice, thus encouraging a healthy and active lifestyle from an early age.

#### *Why is a program like Safe Routes to School needed?*

Many communities struggle with a lack of safe places to walk and bicycle, congested roads, poor air quality, and few available options for physical activity for children. When appropriate and safe, walking and bicycling to school is an experience that can help children develop a sense of independence and confidence in their abilities.

In addition to improving safety for children, Safe Routes to School programs can benefit a community's quality of life by

reducing traffic congestion and motor vehicle emissions, while increasing the opportunity to be more physically active and to connect with neighbors. As a result, programs can improve safety for all pedestrians and bicyclists in the community.

#### *How does a school start a Safe Routes to School Program?*

Each school starts a Safe Routes program with different circumstances. For example, some schools have great places for walking and bicycling, but few students that take advantage of them. Other communities have children who walk and bicycle to school in unsafe conditions or along poorly maintained routes. Some communities do not have children walking or bicycling to school at all. Each circumstance presents an opportunity to improve the walking and bicycling conditions for students traveling to school. Also, anyone can initiate a SRTS Program, including principals, teachers, parents or students. In either case, it is important that all of those groups get involved in the effort!

Successful Safe Routes programs involve the whole community. Parents, children, neighborhood groups, schools, law enforcement officers, community leaders and transportation and public health professionals can help identify the issues and develop solutions.

While each situation is unique, the basic steps to starting a Safe Routes to School program :

1. Bring together the right people: Identify people who want to make walking and bicycling to school safe and appealing for children. Sharing concerns, interests and knowledge among a variety of community members with diverse expertise can enable groups to tackle many different issues.
2. Hold a kick-off meeting: The kick-off meeting has two main goals - to create a vision and generate next steps.
3. Gather information and identify issues: Collecting information can help determine needed program elements and provide a means to measure the impact of the program later.



4. Identify solutions: Solutions to issues identified by the group will include a combination of education, encouragement, engineering and enforcement strategies.
5. Make a plan: The SRTS plan does not need to be lengthy but should include education, encouragement, engineering and enforcement strategies, a time schedule, a map of the area covered by the plan and an explanation of how the program will be evaluated.
6. Get the plan and people moving: There are things that can be done right away without major funding, so some parts of the SRTS plan can start while waiting on other parts.
7. Evaluate, adjust and keep going: After the program begins, careful monitoring will identify which strategies work well and which are not going as planned.

**What types of activities are typically a part of Safe Routes to School programs?**

Successful Safe Routes programs may include policy development, planning and implementation of strategies such as improvements to streets and sidewalks, education and encouragement of children and parents, and increased enforcement of traffic laws. Programs can include:

- Walkability and bikeability audits of the safety of streets around schools
- Strategies to improve sidewalk conditions near schools
- Use of traffic calming devices to slow traffic and give pedestrians priority
- Educating children on walking and bicycling safely, and challenging them to walk or bicycle often
- Implementing Walking School Buses, in which one or two parents or volunteers escort a group of children on the walk to school
- Increasing traffic enforcement around schools
- School official, law enforcement, engineer and transportation planner cooperation.

**TRENDS IN SCHOOL TRAVEL**

**How many kids walk or bicycle to school?**  
Fewer children walk or bicycle to school than did so a generation ago:



- In 1969, 48 percent of students between the ages of 5 and 14 walked or bicycled to or from school.
- In 2009, 13 percent of students between the ages of 5 and 14 walked or bicycled to or from school.
- In 1969, 89 percent of students in grades K through eight who lived within one mile of school usually walked or bicycled to school.<sup>1</sup>
- In 2009, only 35 percent of students in grades K through eight who lived within one mile of school usually walked or bicycled to school even once a week.<sup>2</sup>

This is an opportunity lost. Walking or bicycling to school gives children time for physical activity and a sense of responsibility and independence; allows them to enjoy being outside; and provides them with time to socialize with their parents and friends and to get to know their neighborhoods.

**Why have we seen a decrease in children walking and bicycling to school?**

The circumstances that have led to a decline in walking and bicycling to school did not happen overnight and have created a self-perpetuating cycle. As motor vehicle traffic increases, parents become convinced that it is unsafe for their children to walk or bicycle to school. As concerns about walking and bicycling safety elevate, many parents choose to drive their child to school. When parents drive their child to school they add even more traffic to the road and sustain the cycle. Understanding the many reasons why so many children do not walk or bicycle to school is the first step in interrupting the cycle.

Many factors contribute to the reduction in children walking and bicycling to school. The National Center for Safe Routes to School reviewed over 100,000 parent surveys collected from schools around the United States. The surveys identified barriers that prevent parents from allowing their children to walk or bicycle to school.

Parents cited one or more of the following eight barriers most often.<sup>3</sup>

Barrier	Percent of parents identifying with the barrier
Distance to school	62 %
Traffic speed	55 %
Traffic volume	55%
Intersection and crossing safety	47%
Weather	44 %
Crime danger	38 %
Sidewalks (Lack of)	33 %
Time	24 %

### ***How have the size and location of schools affected the distance to school?***

Over the past few decades, many school districts have moved away from smaller, centrally located schools and have instead built schools on the edge of communities where land costs are lower and acreage has been more available. As a result, the number of students who live within one mile of school has decreased over the past 40 years. In 1969, 40 percent of students lived within one mile of school. From 1995 to 2009 - just fifteen years - the percent of students living within one mile fell from 25 percent to 22 percent.<sup>2</sup>

### ***How can Safe Routes to School affect traffic surrounding the school?***

School travel by private family vehicle for students in grades K through 12 accounted for 10 to 14 percent of all automobile trips made during the morning peak period (7:00 am to 9:00 am) in 2009 and two to three percent of the total annual trips made by family vehicle in the U.S.<sup>3</sup> If more children walked or bicycled to school, it would reduce the number of cars near the school at pick-up and drop-off times making it safer for walkers and bicyclists and reducing traffic congestion.

## **PEDESTRIAN AND BICYCLIST SAFETY**

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Walking and bicycling need to be safe transportation options, which means creating safe environments and teaching safety skills to walkers, bicyclists and drivers.

### ***What do safe walking and bicycling environments include?***

- Neighborhood schools that are within walking and bicycling distance from homes
- Sidewalks or bicycle-paths that connect homes with schools
- Child-friendly opportunities to cross streets (such as the presence of adult crossing guards, raised medians or traffic and pedestrian signals)
- Slow vehicle speeds and yielding to pedestrians and bicyclists, accomplished through roadway safety measures (traffic calming) and/or police enforcement
- Pathways that are accessible for students of all abilities

### ***Driver behaviors, like speeding and distracted driving, are key elements in safety. Attentive drivers traveling at slower speeds can save lives.***

- Speeding reduces a driver's peripheral vision, increases the distance needed to stop and increases the severity of injury to a pedestrian in a crash.
- A car traveling 40 mph requires 300 feet, or an entire football field, to stop. At 30 mph a car needs 200 feet to stop and at 20 mph requires only 100 feet.<sup>4</sup>
- Higher speeds exponentially increase the chances that a driver will hit a pedestrian crossing or along the roadway and that the injuries sustained will be life changing (brain injury, physical impairment) or life ending.
- Distracted driving draws a driver's vision from the road, hands off the steering wheel or mind off of the act of driving. Examples include talking or texting on the phone and eating while driving.
- Distracted driving increases the braking distance needed to safely avoid pedestrians and bicyclists. Multi-tasking while driving also slows cognitive ability, processing and reaction time.<sup>5</sup>

### ***Safety education includes working with:***

- Children - to provide them with basic safety education, such as how to cross streets, obey crossing guards and be visible to drivers.
- Parents - to create awareness of the need for pedestrian and bicyclist safety education, and the importance of practicing safety skills with their children.
- Drivers - to alert all drivers to the presence of walkers and bicyclists and the need to slow down.
- Law enforcement - to enhance pedestrian and bicyclist safety with school zone enforcement.
- Local officials - to identify changes needed to improve walking and bicycling conditions around schools.

### ***Teaching children walking and bicycling safety skills can help create lifelong traffic skills.***

- Short periods of skills-based training can significantly improve child pedestrian behavior.<sup>6</sup>
- Safety education activities should be scheduled for times when all students can participate.



## PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

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There are many potential benefits of physical activity for youth including:<sup>7,8,9,10</sup>

- Improved cardiorespiratory endurance, muscular fitness and bone health Weight control
- Improved mental health
- Improved focus and academic performance
- Reducing blood pressure
- Reduction in the risk of diabetes and some kinds of cancer
- Raising HDL (“good”) cholesterol

The walk to school can provide opportunities for physical activity, as well as time outdoors and near nature. Exposure to nature and free outdoor play can have additional health benefits including stress reduction, relief of ADHD symptoms in children and increased cognitive and motor functioning.<sup>11,12,13,14</sup>

## ENVIRONMENT AND AIR QUALITY

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The daily walk to school offers children an opportunity to spend time in the natural environment. However, private vehicle emissions contribute to local air pollution and global climate change, both of which threaten human and environmental health.

Air pollutants can be especially harmful to children because their respiratory systems are still developing.

- Air pollution has negative effects on lung development in children and can reduce lung function, increase respiratory infection, and aggravate asthma symptoms.<sup>15</sup>
- Childhood asthma rates more than doubled from 1980 to the mid-1990s and they remain at historically high rates today. Presently, asthma is one of the most prevalent chronic childhood diseases and is a major cause of childhood disability.<sup>16</sup>
- At least 13 million school days are missed annually due to asthma.<sup>17</sup>

Schools placed in neighborhoods near residential areas with a good street and sidewalk network have more students arriving by bicycle and on foot. Air quality is measurably better at such locations.<sup>18</sup>

In addition to local air pollution, the transportation sector is responsible for one third of all carbon dioxide emissions in the US.<sup>19</sup> Passenger cars, trucks, motorcycles, and SUVs together account for 62 percent of transportation-related greenhouse gas emissions.<sup>20</sup>

Walking and bicycling to school provide opportunities for children and families to reduce their carbon usage and emissions, and contribute to the health of the environment.

- If a family chooses to walk to school (rather than drive a personal vehicle) they can reduce their carbon use by .164 metric tons annually. If half of the students at an average size elementary school choose to walk to school their impact could be a savings of over 39 tons of greenhouse gas emissions a year.<sup>21</sup> This is the equivalent of the carbon-removing abilities of 1000 trees.<sup>22</sup>
- Leaving the car at home just two days a week will reduce greenhouse gas emissions by an average of 1,600 pounds per year.<sup>23</sup>

## HISTORY OF SAFE ROUTES

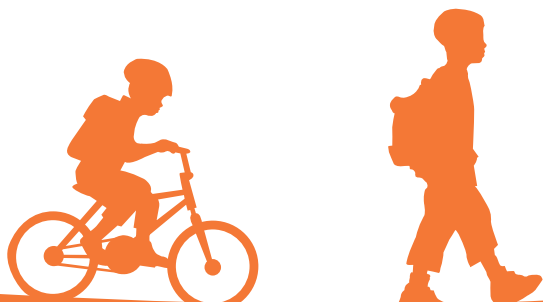
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### *How did the Safe Routes to School concept start?*

The term “Safe Routes to School” was first used in Denmark in the late 1970s as part of a very successful initiative to reduce the number of children killed while walking and bicycling to school. Safe Routes to School spread internationally, with programs throughout Europe and in Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and the United States.

The first modern Safe Routes to School program in the U.S. began in 1997 in the Bronx, NY. In 1998, Congress funded two pilot SRTS programs through the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA). NHTSA issued \$50,000 each for Safe Routes to School pilot programs in Marin County, California and Arlington, Massachusetts. Within a year after the launch of the pilot programs, many other grassroots Safe Routes to School efforts began throughout the United States.

As word spread in the pedestrian and bicyclist community of success with the NHTSA pilot programs, interest in a broader program grew. In July 2005, Congress passed federal legislation that established a national Safe Routes to School program. The program, which was signed into law in August 2005, has dedicated over \$1.1 billion towards SRTS from 2005 to 2012. These funds have been distributed to states based on student enrollment, with no state receiving less than \$1 million per year. SRTS funds must be used for both infrastructure projects and non-infrastructure activities.



## HISTORY OF WALK TO SCHOOL DAY

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Organized by the Partnership for a Walkable America, Walk to School Day in the USA began in 1997 as a one-day event aimed at building awareness for the need for walkable communities. In 2000, the event became international when the UK and Canada (both of which had already been promoting walking to school) and the U.S. joined together for the first International Walk to School Day. Growing interest in participation all over the world led the International Walk to School Committee to shift its promotion to International Walk to School Month for the entire month of October.

In the USA and Canada, International Walk to School Day galvanizes visibility for walking and bicycling to school. Over time, this event has been part of a movement for year-round safe routes to school and a celebration – with record breaking participation - each October. Today, thousands of schools across America and in more than 40 countries worldwide celebrate walking to school every October.

The success of Walk to School Day, as well as continued interest in bicycling to school, created a desire for a national event focused on bicycling to school. This goal became reality in 2012, with the first National Bike to School Day taking place on May 9, in coordination with the League of American Bicyclists' National Bike Month.

Although Walk to School Day is focused more on walking and Bike to School Day is focused more on bicycling, both days welcome and encourage all forms of active transportation to school.

There are many reasons to celebrate—*safer* and more accessible streets, *healthier habits*, and *cleaner air* to name just a few. Join in! **Register your event.**

## QUICK FACTS AND FIGURES: THE HISTORY OF WALK TO SCHOOL DAY AND BIKE TO SCHOOL DAY

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- The Partnership for a Walkable America sponsored the first National Walk Our Children to School Day in Chicago in 1997, modeled after the United Kingdom's walk to school events, and communities around the United States have been celebrating Walk to School Day ever since.
- The event was established as "International" in 2000, when Canada and the U.K. joined with the U.S. to celebrate.

Around the globe, International Walk to School Month brings together more than 40 countries in recognition of the common interest in walking to school.

- In August 2005, federal legislation established a National Safe Routes to School Program that provided \$612 million towards Safe Routes to School from 2005 to 2010. SRTS programs continue to operate in all 50 states and Washington, D.C. As of September 30, 2012, due to continuing congressional extensions, the total amount of funding apportioned to states will be more than \$1.1 billion.
- More than 12,500 schools in all 50 states and the District of Columbia have been awarded federal funds for Safe Routes to School activities.
- More than half of Walk to School events are part of ongoing activities to promote walking and bicycling throughout the year.
- In 2006, world-wide interest led the International Walk to School Committee to establish International Walk to School Month – countries choose a day, week or use the entire month of October to promote walking to school.
- Participation in Walk to School Day 2011 reached a record high, with more than 4,000 events registered from all fifty states and the District of Columbia. Many more communities held events but did not register.
- The first-ever National Bike to School Day will take place on May 9, 2012, as part of National Bike Month. Local events across the U.S. encouraged children to safely bicycle or walk to school. Many communities and schools have been holding spring walk and bicycle to school events for years. National Bike to School Day provides an opportunity for schools across the country to join together and to build on the energy of National Bike Month.

### Quick Facts on Virginia Participation in Walk to School Day and Bike to School Day

- Virginia has participated in International Walk to School Day every year since registration opened in 2004 - 182 schools registered in 2013.
- Virginia International Walk to School Day events are special because most are bringing community stakeholders together as featured event participants.
- Virginia has maintained strong participation since the first National Bike To School Day with 40 events registered in 2004 and 121 schools registered in 2014.

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