



December 3, 2020



## Coordinator's Corner

While this year has been challenging, Virginia's Safe Routes to School programs have continued to encourage young people to get outside, get active, and stay safe.

As the weather gets colder and the busy holiday season approaches, physical activity is still a great way to improve your health and take time for yourself.

In this newsletter, we'll hear from Linda Mock, SRTS coordinator in Galax, about how local schools worked with the community to get a new sidewalk built. Next, we'll recap Walking Month, and reveal the results of two surveys about how people are walking and biking in Virginia during the pandemic. Our local Safe Routes to School coordinators held a virtual training this fall, and we'll hear about what they learned. Finally, our regular Focus on Funding column will look at grant opportunities in the new year.

If you have any questions or would like to learn more about the topics included here, please don't hesitate to reach out! You can call the Virginia SRTS Hotline at 1-855-601-7787 or send us an email at [info@virginiarts.org](mailto:info@virginiarts.org).

Regards,

*Katherine Graham*

Kathy Graham  
Virginia SRTS Coordinator



### IN THIS ISSUE

- Coordinator's Corner
- Calendar
- Friends and Faces: Linda Mock
- Walk to School Day by the Numbers"
- Get Ready for Crossing Guard Appreciation Day!
- Parents Say They Want Kids to Walk and Bike More
- How Commute Habits May Change After COVID
- Fall Training Recap
- Focus On Funding

### CALENDAR

#### FEBRUARY

- 4: Quick Start Mini-grant due date
- 4: Walkabout Mini-grant due date
- 10: Crossing Guard Appreciation Day

#### MARCH

- 4: QuickStart Mini-grant due date

#### APRIL

- 1: QuickStart Mini-grant due date
- 22: Earth Day

## ***Friends and Faces: Linda Mock***

Located in southwestern Virginia, Galax is known for a few things, including mountains, furniture-making, and bluegrass music. It's also home to one of Virginia's longest-running Safe Routes to School programs. We spoke to coordinator Linda Mock about how she got involved and a recent ribbon-cutting for a new sidewalk.

### ***Linda, can you tell us a little about yourself?***

I am probably the oldest coordinator at age 70, but the students I teach keep me young. My adult life was never about physical shape, although my early years in television news reporting and volunteer firefighting conditioned me for this job. Other professions wound me through real estate, economic development, and elected county official.

### ***How did you first hear about Safe Routes to School?***

I read an ad in the newspaper for a Safe Routes to School coordinator for the City of Galax and, after reading the requirements, I was excited to apply and thrilled to snag the job. I began in November 2013 when the program was still in its infancy.

### ***You recently did a ribbon cutting for a new sidewalk near Galax Elementary School. Could you tell us how that sidewalk happened?***

As with any pedestrian safety quagmire, we assessed the area around the three nearby schools and determined that the age, below-grade condition and vehicles parking on that sidewalk dissuaded students from walking along the sidewalk adjacent to Galax Elementary School.



*Linda Mock (center) teaching students how to walk safely in 2019.*

The City of Galax applied for and received a VDOT Transportation Alternatives Program grant. The 80%/20% grant included replacement sidewalk, improvements to stormwater drainage, and some retaining wall improvements.

This sidewalk project completed the circle connecting three schools located within a block of each other. Sidewalk projects along four other city streets ringing the campuses were completed in 2015 and were the result of a School Zone Plan and funding through VDOT. We know students now have a safer sidewalk at the school to utilize.

### ***What were the biggest challenges in getting that sidewalk built?***

Biggest challenge is funding. We appreciate the chasm that the VDOT funding fills, providing 80% of the money needed to build this project. For a city as small as ours, grants are always a welcome relief.

*(continued on next page)*

(continued from previous page)

**Galax is the smallest division in Virginia SRTS. Do you have any advice for small or rural divisions who want to start their own program?**

Do not ever compare, but instead coordinate and create. When I began the task of safety instruction, I listed to other coordinators, learned from them, then created the activities and fun events unique to our program. Our Bike Library concept has been mimicked in other states and our City was honored with a national award in 2016. Dream big!

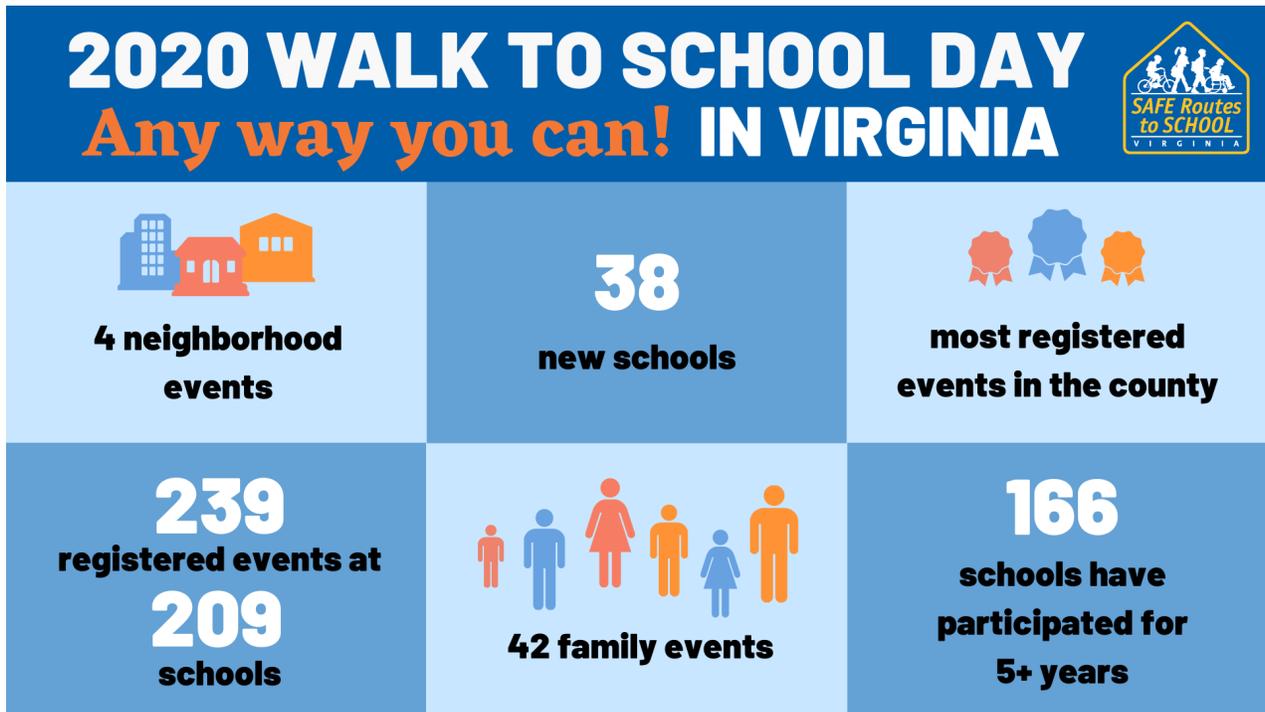
**Where are your favorite places to walk and bike in Virginia?**

The New River Trail State Park in Galax's backyard is clearly my favorite. It is a regional tourism destination and perfect to ride with your bike clubs and family.

**Walk to School Day by the Numbers**

Walk to School Day looked different this year, but students and families around Virginia still found opportunities to get physically active while staying safe. This year, anyone could register a Walk to School Day event during the month of October, and in Virginia, four neighborhoods and 42 individual families held their own events. Thirty-eight schools participated for the first time this year as well. Altogether, 239 events were held in Virginia, the most of any state in the nation!

While we don't know what the next year will bring, we look forward to Bike to School Day and Walk to School Day in 2021!



Walk to School Day Infographic

## Get Ready for Crossing Guard Appreciation Day!

In 2021, we will continue to celebrate our amazing crossing guards with local celebrations on or around February 10, but there will not be a state-level Most Outstanding Crossing Guard Award.

Since 2014, communities across Virginia have honored their hardworking crossing guards by celebrating Crossing Guard Appreciation Day (CGAD) the second Wednesday in February.

Crossing guards are key parts of a SRTS program because they provide additional adult supervision of children walking to and from school, helping ensure student safety. Crossing guards also model proper pedestrian behaviors and encourage students to make use of crosswalks and signals.



*An appreciation breakfast for crossing guards Bruce and Tina Morrison, who work at Greenfield Elementary School in Chesterfield County.*

Locally, SRTS Coordinators and school families have hosted appreciation breakfasts, handed out goody bags with hats, gloves and other winter essentials, made thank you cards, and reached out to local media outlets to show their appreciation for their crossing guards. We encourage communities to adapt these types of celebrations to fit local public health guidance in February 2021. Find graphics to use on social media and thank you card templates that can be printed at home on our [Crossing Guard Appreciation Day page](#).

Over the past six years, community members have submitted 1,066 glowing nominations for the statewide Most Outstanding Crossing Guard Award. VDOT has recognized 54 crossing guards with this honor; you can read about the past winners on the [Most Outstanding Crossing Guard Archives page](#).

With many school divisions learning virtually, some crossing guards reassigned to other duties, and everyone already going above and beyond in 2020 to establish new routines for daily life, the VA SRTS Program made the decision not to host the Most Outstanding Crossing Guard Awards this year. We look forward to bringing back the award in the future, and until then, seeing all the creative ways Virginia communities celebrate their crossing guards in February 2021.

Use the hashtags #CGAD2021 and #crossingguardappreciation on social media so we can follow along or email your photos and stories to [info@virginiasrts.org](mailto:info@virginiasrts.org).

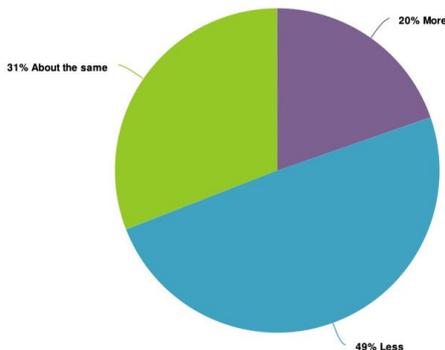
## Parents Say They Want Kids to Walk and Bike More

The results of the Fall 2020 Parent and Caregiver Survey are in! We received over 3,100 responses from parents and caregivers across Virginia. Thanks to all who participated, including our 10 cash card winners!

The survey results show an overall decrease in physical activity during the pandemic, but an increase in bicycling. They also suggest that many parents would support their children walking and bicycling to school if certain changes could be made.

Almost half of parents (49%) reported that their children were getting less physical activity than before the pandemic, compared to only 20% who reported that their children were getting more. In addition, almost two-thirds of parents (65%) estimated that their children were getting 60 minutes or less of moderate to vigorous physical activity, with 31% estimating 0-30 minutes, suggesting that many children are not meeting the US Surgeon General's minimum physical activity guideline of 60 minutes or more of physical activity per day.

5. Since schools closed in March 2020, has your child been engaging in physical activity more, less, or about the same as before schools closed?



How much physical activity parents say their children are getting now compared to before schools closed.

## More bicycling (with room to grow)

Almost half of parents (49%) reported that their children were riding bicycles more during the pandemic, compared to 17% who reported that their children were riding bicycles less. However, a substantial minority of parents reported that their children either did not have a bicycle (14%) or did not know how to ride one (13%). In addition, when asked what would have to change for their child to ride more during virtual learning, over half said more paths and separated bike lanes.

## Clues for how to encourage more walking and bicycling

Half of parents whose children live within 1 mile of school said they would like walking or bicycling to be their child's primary mode of transportation to school after the pandemic ended, compared to 29% who said their child walked or bicycled to school in fall 2019 and 35% who expected their child would walk or bicycle when schools reopened.

The difference between preference and expectation may reflect concerns about walking and biking conditions. When parents whose children lived within 1 mile of school were asked to pick the most needed changes that would result in their child walking more often to school, they identified safer crossings at intersections (52%), more sidewalks and paths (47%), more adult supervision (40%), and slower motor vehicle speeds (38%). The top changes for bicycling were similar--safer crossings at intersections (48%), more paths and separated bike lanes (43%), slower motor vehicle speeds (39%), and more adult supervision (35%).

Interested in seeing the full summary report? [Click here.](#)

## How Commute Habits May Change After COVID

Results from the Virginia Commuter Survey suggest that commute patterns may not fully return to the pre-COVID norm, with possible implications for active transportation, including walking and bicycling to school.

The survey, which was conducted by VDOT in partnership with the Department of Rail and Public Transportation, aims to capture changes in commuting patterns and preferences associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. The goal is to adequately plan for short- and long-term changes in how people travel to work in Virginia.

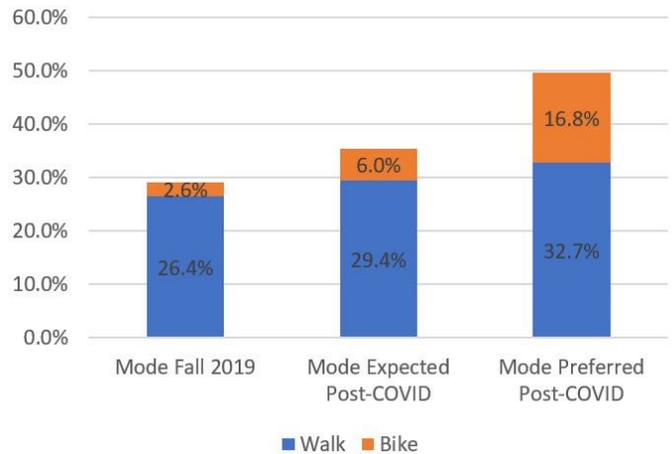
The survey was conducted in two rounds, with the first round occurring in June and July and the second occurring in October. There is a summary of the responses below, and more details on Working from Home, Safety Preferences, and Commute Modes are available online. Similar dashboards should soon be available for the second round.

Key findings from the October round include:

- 81% of respondents would prefer to work from home at least 1 day per week post-COVID (up from 25% pre-COVID).

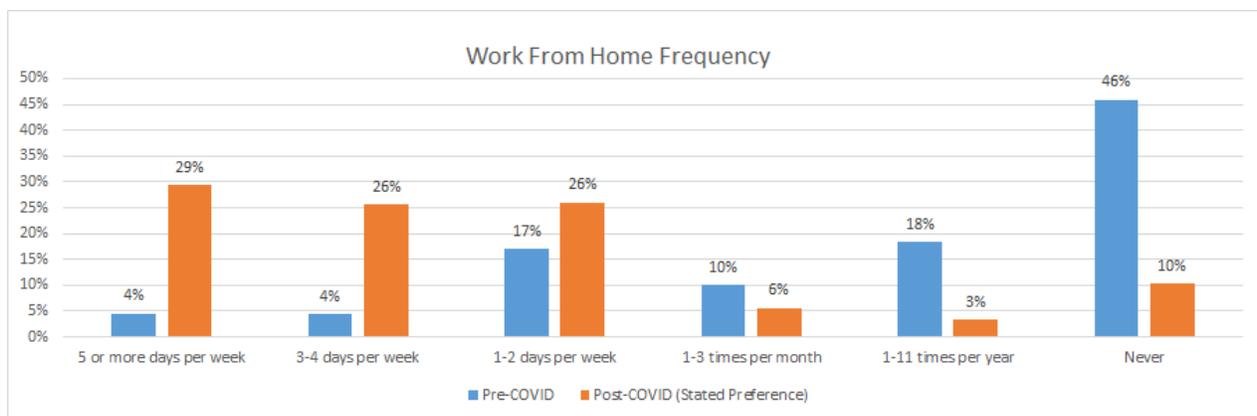
## Fall 2019 Mode to School v. Expected and Preferred Modes Post-COVID

Children living within 1-mile of school



How parents say their children traveled to school in 2019 and how they plan to travel after COVID.

- 29% of respondents would prefer to work from home 5 days per week (up from 4% pre-COVID).
- 14% of respondents said they were planning to work from home as their "primary" commute mode even when conditions are safe to return to work.
- 7% of survey respondents reported using non-SOV modes to commute to work (down from 13% in the summer)
- 30% of people who currently commute by bicycle commuted by another mode pre-pandemic.



How often people say they're working from home now, and how much they plan to after COVID.

## Fall Training Recap

Every year, local Safe Routes to School coordinators participate in training sessions lead by our four Local Technical Assistance Coordinators. In October, we held four virtual sessions on everything from holding socially distanced events to how to do social media for SRTS. This year, each training webinar was recorded for future reference. You can watch the recordings of each training by clicking the links below:

- [Digital communication, including crafting messages for social media and Graphic Design 101](#)
- [How to do socially distanced Safe Routes to School events to get students active while staying safe](#)
- [Why the Safe Routes Partnership is replacing “Enforcement” with “Engagement” in the 6 E’s](#)
- [How to write Program Planning Grants](#)

## Focus On Funding

“Focus on Funding” is a column with the latest funding opportunities and new funding resources and offers advice on how to win at the SRTS funding game. Here’s a list of upcoming grant opportunities at the state and national levels.

### [Safe Routes Partnership Safe Routes to Parks Grants](#)

- \$12,500
- Applications due December 18
- Funding for an “action plan” to connect schools and parks
- Applicants must be nonprofit organizations under Section 501(c)(3)

### [Inclusive Planning in Tribal Communities Grants](#)

- \$2,500
- Funding to do planning for people with disabilities in tribal communities
- Details will be announced during [December 9 webinar](#)

### [Virginia SRTS Program Walkabout Mini-grants](#)

- \$6,000-\$7,000 technical assistance grants
- Applications due February 4, 2021
- School area walking and bicycling infrastructure assessment and report

### [Virginia SRTS Program QuickStart Mini-grants](#)

- \$1,000
- Applications due February 4, March 4, and April 1
- Small-scale SRTS activities
- Can be used for masks and other supplies to enable safe walking and bicycling to school during the COVID-19 pandemic

### [Virginia SRTS Program Non-Infrastructure Grants](#)

- \$5,000-\$100,000
- Applications due March
- Multi-school SRTS non-infrastructure activities and SRTS coordinator
- Requires submittal of Activities & Programs Plan (APP)

See our [Learn It. Do it. Live it! on Funding SRTS Projects](#) for time-tested tips for funding SRTS projects, a menu of common funding sources, and links to other valuable funding resources.