SAFE Routes to SCHOOL
VIRGINIA

Equitable and Inclusive SRTS Events

This resource provides tips to help you make Safe Routes to School events equitable and inclusive. Although it focuses on equity and inclusion as they relate to walk and bike to school events, most tips apply equally well to other types of events.

What are equity and inclusion?

The terms "equity" and "inclusion" are defined in many ways, but equity is typically associated with outcomes and inclusion is typically associated with processes. For our purposes:

- **An equitable event** is an event that everyone fully participates in and enjoys, regardless of income, race, ethnicity, disability status, gender, sexual orientation, the community they live in, where they live relative to the school, and/or other perceived or actual differences.
- **An inclusive event** is an event where people from diverse groups are involved in planning and implementation, helping ensure the event meets diverse needs and feels welcoming to all.

Figure 1: Students participate in Walk to School Day at William Perry Elementary School in Waynesboro, VA.

Why are equity and inclusion important to SRTS?

People of color, people with lower incomes, and people with disabilities often rely more heavily on walking, bicycling, and transit for travel to work, school, and other daily destinations. At the same time, they often live in under-resourced neighborhoods, face greater safety and accessibility challenges, and have higher rates of diseases, such as diabetes and asthma, that are influenced by opportunities for physical activity, motor vehicle emissions, and other travel conditions.
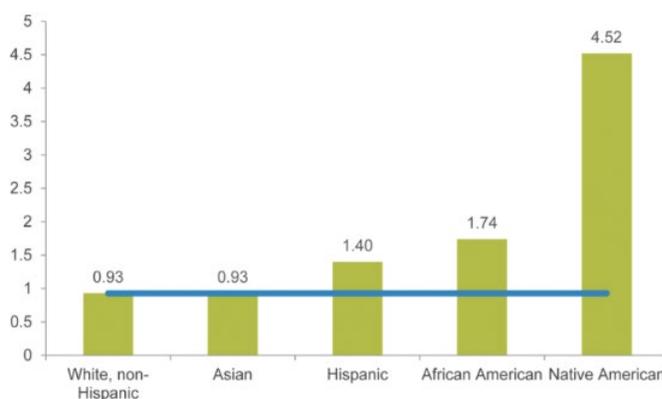

Figure 2: Annual pedestrian fatalities per 100,000 people by race/ethnicity 2005-2014. Blue line indicates fatality rate for White, non-Hispanic. (Source: Smart Growth America)

Safe Routes to School programs can help address these inequities and are more successful when they do. For this reason, the Virginia SRTS Program has incorporated equity as foundational principle. It's also why equity and inclusion should be present in all aspects of Safe Routes to School programming, including SRTS events.

Equity and Inclusion Tips

Laying the Foundation

SRTS events that are equitable and inclusive usually draw on relationships, knowledge, and trust that are built up over time. Here are some ideas for how you can lay this foundation:

- *Establish a SRTS Steering Committee* that includes people of color, people with disabilities, and people from other historically underserved groups.
- *Develop partnerships* with organizations that are led by and serve historically underserved populations.
- *Consult with caregivers and administrators,* e.g., by asking for input on school travel needs at a school PTA/PTO or staff meeting.
- *Conduct walk audits, arrival and dismissal observations, and caregiver surveys.* These activities collect information on what members of the school community want and need, as opposed to relying on assumptions. See the Virginia SRTS Program's Resource Library for guidance.
- *Review demographic and socioeconomic data* to understand the characteristics of your school community and how these characteristics intersect with transportation needs. School divisions often post demographic and socioeconomic information on their websites.

Figure 3: Equity is a foundational principle in the Virginia SRTS Program framework.

Figure 4: Group discussing dismissal and walk audit observations at Barack Obama Elementary School in Richmond.

www.virginiadot.org/saferoutes

Planning the Event

There are several steps involved in planning a SRTS event, including determining event basics, identifying potential barriers to inclusion, developing and delivering outreach messaging, determining the route, and other steps. Here are some ideas for incorporating equity and inclusion into these steps.

Determining Event Basics

- *Establish an event planning committee* that includes representatives of historically underserved groups.
- *Establish equity-related event goals.* For example, a goal might be to focus attention on pedestrian infrastructure needs near a school where a high number of students are already walking, not necessarily by choice but because their families don't have access to cars.
- *Consider the impact of the event type on equity and inclusion.* If the event is a bike to school event, do all students have bikes? Do they know how to ride them? Do they have helmets? Do they live close enough to ride? Is their route safe and comfortable? Are adults available to help supervise?
- *Consider the impact of the event timing on equity and inclusion.* Work with the school to determine when an event might best fit into their schedule. Think about barriers students and caregivers may face related to timing. For example, caregivers who work may not be able to participate at certain times of day.
- *Consider event themes that celebrate people who worked to advance civil rights.* Examples include Barbara Johns, who on April 23, 1951, led a walkout at Moton High School in Farmville, VA to protest separate and unequal school conditions, and Ruby Bridges, who on November 14, 1960, became the first Black student to integrate her elementary school in New Orleans, LA. (Click here to find out more about Barbara Johns. Click here to find out more about Ruby Bridges Walk to School Day.) There are many other great examples, including leaders in the Latino civil rights and disability rights movements.

Figure 5: Barbara Johns in a high school graduation photo from 1952. (Photo Credit: Moton Museum)

Identifying Potential Barriers to Inclusion

There may be several potential barriers to participation in the school community. It is important to identify these barriers and work to address them. Examples include:

Figure 6: Student rides a tricycle during a biking event.

- *Student abilities and disabilities.* Are there students with disabilities, students who are less physically fit, or students who don't know how to ride a bike? Consult with caregivers, teachers, and special education professionals to understand the range of abilities and how to provide accessible options.
- *Language barriers*. Are there families in the school community who speak languages other than English at home? Consult with school administrators about the most common non-English languages in your school community and translation services that might be available through the school division.
- *Equipment/supply barriers*. Will all students have the equipment they need to participate? If not, think of ways equipment can be provided at no cost to participants. Consider applying for a QuickStart Mini-grant to help pay for helmets, ponchos, umbrellas, warm socks, and other supplies. In the case of a biking event, consider purchasing balance bikes, tricycles, and/or adaptive bikes to enable children who don't know how to ride a bicycle and children with disabilities to participate.
- *Distance to school*. Will students who live far from school or who take the bus be able to participate? If not, think of ways the event can be modified to accommodate them, such as setting up "park and walk" sites with adult volunteers and asking bus drivers to drop students there, or conducting the event on the school campus.
- *Caregiver concerns about safety.* Caregivers in some neighborhoods may have heightened concerns about traffic safety, personal security, or bullying. Conversations with caregivers, school administrators, school counselors, community members and others can help shed light on these concerns and how they might be alleviated. Click here for more on how to address personal security to concerns.
- *Childcare barriers.* Is it possible that some caregivers may not be able to participate in an event because they are caring for younger children? Consider including children of all ages, providing childcare or activities for younger children as part the event.

Learn it. Do it. Live it!

Developing and Delivering Outreach Messaging

- *Use plain, inclusive language*. Avoid jargon and language that may be interpreted as excluding certain types of people, e.g., "caregiver" is more inclusive than "parent," because it recognizes that people other than parents may be the primary caregiver for a child.
- *Have materials translated* into languages other than English.
- *Use inclusive imagery* that reflects the diversity of the school community and surroundings.
- *Use multiple communication channels* to get the word out. Research the communication channels most likely to be used by members of historically underserved groups. This may include printed materials, such as backpack flyers, email, social media, messaging apps like WhatsApp, or other communications channels.
- *Leverage people and organizations* that can help you connect with historically underserved groups. Examples include school parent liaisons, who are often bilingual, organizations like Communities in Schools, which are embedded in schools and can help with outreach to caregivers and students, and other community and social service organizations.

Determining the Route

- *Make sure walking and biking routes are accessible* to people with disabilities. Consider previewing the route with a person who has a disability or use a stroller or other wheeled device to increase your awareness of potential barriers.
- *Think about how convenient the route might be* for students coming from historically underserved neighborhoods.

Implementing the Event

- *Make sure you have enough volunteers* to assist students with disabilities and others who may need extra support.
- *Consider providing childcare or activities for younger children* during the event, especially if caregiver participation is desired or younger children who might not be able to participate in the event are expected to be present .

Figure 7: Student in a wheelchair participates in walking event.

Evaluating the Event

- *Note which students participate and which students don't.* Did students participate with or without caregivers? Are there any common themes that might explain who participated and who didn't?
- *Survey event participants.* Ask them: How did you hear about this event? How easy was it to get to the event location? How could this event be better next time? Do you know anyone who wanted to attend but couldn't due to travel or time constraints?
- *Conduct a post-event debrief with volunteers.* Ask them: What went well? What were the challenges? Was everyone able to participate?

Need additional advice on how to make SRTS events equitable and inclusive?
Contact us at Info@VirginiaSRTS.org.