



JUNE 2011



Coordinator's Corner

June is a month of transitions: the end of the school year brings the beginning of summertime activities such as vacations, summer camps, and for some - summer school.

This issue of the VDOT SRTS Newsletter includes articles on other transitions. We've included an update on our strategic planning process, which is aimed at laying out a vision for the SRTS program for the next five years. We've also provided more information on our transition to Fondant, the online grant application and tracking system. Finally, we have some suggestions for projects that can be done over the summer to prepare school walking and biking routes for students who will be traveling to and from school next fall.



Enjoy!

-Rob Williams

VDOT Safe Routes to School Coordinator

A Conversation with Debbie Kilpatrick of the Virginia PTA

Debbie Kilpatrick has been active with PTAs in Virginia at elementary, middle and high school levels for more than 12 years. She joined the Virginia PTA Board of Managers in 2006 as the Northern Virginia District PTA Director. Three years later, she was elected as the Virginia PTA Education Chair, a position she still holds. Debbie keeps her hands in local PTA and school affairs as President of the Centreville High School PTSA President in Clifton and as a Fairfax County Public Schools Substitute Teacher.

Newsletter Editor: *What is the VA PTA's interest in SRTS?*

Debbie's Response: The VA PTA is a natural friend of SRTS. Our mission is to promote the health and safety of Virginia's children, and to ensure they receive a good education - all consistent with the goals of the SRTS. We are also very committed to fostering community around schools. I see

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CALENDAR

*Dates specific to VDOT SRTS Program are indicated with **

JULY

10-13: Health for Success Training (Farmville, VA), sponsored by the Virginia Department of Education (register by June 1). Download brochure for more details.

SEPTEMBER

30: **New Date!** SRTS mini-grant applications due to Prevention Connections (www.preventionconnections.org)

OCTOBER

5: International Walk to School Day

Let us know about SRTS events in your community!

Click here to send your information so we can include it in our calendar.

more community spirit at schools which have neighborhoods where students can walk or bicycle to school - and where parents are more connected.

Newsletter Editor: *How does SRTS information get to the VA PTAs membership and local PTAs?*



Debbie's Response: Promoting SRTS is part of my responsibilities as Education Committee Chair. I participate in SRTS advocacy and outreach activities through the State Network and work with VDOT's SRTS Coordinator as needed. The VA PTA has a great set of communications and outreach tools to share information about SRTS with its membership. For example, our home page at www.VAPTA.org and Grants landing page highlight VDOT SRTS grant opportunities and those offered by Prevention Connections. We also advertise SRTS grant opportunities in our bi-weekly electronic newsletter, the VOICE.

Newsletter Editor: *What are some of the ways the Virginia PTA and VDOT can work together to support local SRTS programs get started and stay active?*

Debbie's Response: We will continue to identify issues or opportunities for local PTAs to work with VDOT on SRTS programs. For example, during the 2011 Legislation Program, the VA PTA membership adopted several items related to SRTS. Most important is a policy position to support local school divisions' efforts to implement SRTS programs that encourage and enable students walking and bicycling to and from school where feasible. VA PTA also took legislative action in support of state funding for school districts to implement the Bike Smart Virginia Schools program into curriculum, and to endorse the four goals of the Let's Move initiative.

Contact Debbie at education@vapta.org, www.vapta.org

VDOT's New Grant Application

Like any grant program, the VDOT Safe Routes to School program always looks for ways to reduce administrative costs to make more money available for projects directly benefiting schools. Customer service is our top priority, whether we work with non-profit organizations, parents, educators, or municipal staff and local politicians. We've found something to help with both these goals in Foundant Technology's Online Grant Management System.

Having seen the system in action for Prevention Connection's SRTS mini-grant, it was clear that the VDOT program could benefit by taking the grant application and management process online. Since deciding to use Fondant several months ago, we purchased the system, got training on how to use it, created the on-application for SRTS Infrastructure program, and rolled it out for the current round of applications.

Early feedback is that the look and feel of the new system is good - especially the electronic submissions feature. However, most benefits will be realized further into the granting process with the centralized system where reviewers, local administrators and VDOT staff can access project information.

Once you get your logon information and are ready to complete a grant application, the next step is to upload an approved travel plan. With the travel plan in the system as part of your grant application, VDOT can review and score it online. In the end, application review and award notification takes less time! After a grant is awarded, invoices and reporting templates and other necessary documentation are available online, providing grantees a place to view the status of their project 24/7.

While we continue to look for ways to incorporate Foundant into the processes already in place within VDOT's SRTS program, we would love to hear what you think about the new system. Drop Rob an email at robertj.williams@vdot.virginia.gov.

Looking Back, Looking Ahead

As we plan for the next 5 years of our SRTS program through a strategic planning process, it is helpful to take a look back at VDOT's SRTS program since it began after the legislation establishing the federal program was passed. Since 2007, VDOT has provided 75 grants totaling almost \$10 million to support projects and programs that improve the safety of bicycling and walking to school.

More information on grants awarded in each of these years is available on our website at: www.vdot.virginia.gov/programs/srsm_school_travel_plans_and_grants.

With five years of experience under our belt, we're ready to assess progress and look for ways to improve the program through a strategic planning process. Our March Newsletter asked readers to participate in this process through an on-line survey. Over 150 Virginians responded to the survey including a healthy mix of parents, local and state governmental staff, school system representatives, and advocates. We learned what you like about the program and ways we can improve it. Based on your input and that from key stakeholders, we are now identifying specific ways to improve the program in the areas of outreach and education, and the grant application, award and implementation processes.

Overall, respondents appreciate the value SRTS programs bring to a community, including encouraging students to walk or bike to school. Aspects of the program that respondents felt were successful included:

- Funding for staff people who to help implement, advise, and expand local SRTS programs.
- Assistance in activities needed to get an awarded infrastructure project started and explaining reporting measures needed during the project.

Common recommendations for improving VDOT's SRTS program included:

- Increase education and outreach activities and materials for parents and school officials.
- Provide assistance with SRTS grant applications.
- Help gain general acceptance for walking and biking to school as a safe and realistic option.

More information on the Strategic Plan will be available in the fall of 2011.

Summertime SRTS Projects

Summer is a great time to take stock of walking and bicycling conditions along routes to your school and on campus, with an eye on getting things ready for the start of school in the fall. Check sidewalks, signs, crosswalks and on-road bikeways to see if they are worn out, damaged, obscured by vegetation, or missing. Then, figure out who is responsible for maintaining those facilities. One place to start is your local public works department. They can often fast track maintenance projects along school walking routes. If repairs are needed on school property, talk with the Principal about how best to advocate for these improvements with the school district. It may be possible to take care of some projects through SeeClickFix, www.seeclickfix.com, (an online system that some communities use to enable citizens to report maintenance problems) to register your needs with them. Check with your local public works or citizens assistance office to see what your community uses to report maintenance needs.

Attention to these details can make a big difference with school starts next fall!



Raindrop Challenge Fun Run

More than 500 pairs of little feet hit the trails of a local park on May 3, 2011 for Patrick Henry Elementary School's Raindrop Challenge Fun Run. The event, held next to the school at J. Frank Wilson Park, was funded by a Prevention Raindrop_Run_RunnerConnections Safe Routes to School grant. Patrick Henry participates in International Walk to School Day each fall, and organizers wanted to continue encouraging kids to get active and walk to school. "Having the park nearby posed a perfect opportunity," Principal Terry Wiita said. "After running the trails, hopefully students will spend more time using this resource and doing fun outdoor activities outside of school."



Patrick Henry Elementary School held its first student race, the "Turkey Trot," in November 2010. The event was such a hit that organizers started planning the Raindrop Challenge Fun Run for the spring, partnering with the Martinsville Parks & Recreation and Activate Martinsville-Henry County, an agency that was also awarded SRTS non-infrastructure funding by VDOT in 2010. As a part of their Prevention Connections mini-grant, the school held a T-shirt design contest. Third-grader Natalie Talbot won for her drawing of raindrops jogging against a blue background.



Contact Kim Barto, Community Outreach Coordinator and Grants Coordinator for the Martinsville City Public Schools for more information about the event.

Prevention Connections Mini Grants Still Available

It's not too late for your school to apply for a mini grant from Prevention Connections to fund a SRTS event. Prevention Connections recently announced a second round of mini-grants for SRTS events. Over two dozen schools in Virginia have each received \$2,000 grants through this program.

Second round applications are being received through September 30, 2011. Contact Ashley Johnson for more information about the Prevention Connection mini-grant program, or click here to apply: www.preventionconnections.org/funding.

See Virginia on Your Bike this Summer!

Virginia is a great place to ride a bike - offering a variety of scenic and historic areas, miles of rural roads, fantastic trails for family rides, and tracks through woods and up mountains. VDOT offers a lot of information to help you include bicycling as part of your vacation this summer. Go to Virginia Bike Information (www.vdot.virginia.gov/programs/bk-info) to download a copy of the 2010 Virginia Bicycling Guide and to learn about great places to see on your bike.

National Center for SRTS Webinars

Looking for some techniques to enhance your school's SRTS program? Click here (www.saferoutesinfo.org/events-and-training/SRTS-webinars) to learn about upcoming and past webinars hosted by the National center for SRTS. You'll find webinars such as How to Start a Walking School Bus from the Grass Roots Up, Going High Tech with SRTS, Ways to Improve Law Enforcement in SRTS, and the most recent webinar - Great Ways to Include Bicycling in Your SRTS Program. All webinars can be downloaded and viewed at a time that works best for you. Consider using these webinars to keep the momentum going on your SRTS program during the summer.