

Safe Routes to School

Approaches to Support Children Walking and Bicycling to School

The Safe Routes to School (SRTS) movement assists communities in increasing walking and bicycling for children and their families, while making it safer to get physical activity on foot or bicycle. By walking or bicycling to school, children can easily incorporate physical activity into their day and arrive at school focused and ready to learn. Walking and bicycling to school also build community cohesion and help reduce air pollution and traffic congestion around schools and neighborhoods.

Students, families, residents, individual schools and districts, towns, cities, counties, and regional leaders all have a role to play in making it easier and safer for children to walk and bicycle to school. Here are 13 ways to make Safe Routes to School a permanent part of communities.





SCHOOL

Arrival and Dismissal



Schools experience their own version of rush hour at the start and end of the school day, with the convergence of children on foot, on bicycle, and in cars and buses. Thoughtful school arrival and dismissal procedures can help make this process safer. Schools can stagger pick-up/drop-off times or allow early dismissal for children who bicycle or walk, giving students time to get clear of traffic and congestion. Another important approach involves physical separation of motor vehicles from children bicycling and walking; by ensuring that school approaches and entries are as separate as possible for motor vehicles, bicycles, and children walking, arrival and departure will be safer for students to navigate. In addition, ensuring that cars do not idle can improve air quality and help reduce traffic around schools.

Remote Drop-Off



“Remote drop-offs” designate a park, church, library, business, or other public space not far from school where students can be dropped off or picked up by bus or car. This way, students walk a short distance to school instead of being driven or picked up right out front, reducing traffic congestion near schools while encouraging physical activity for students. For students who must travel long distances to school, remote drop-offs help incorporate walking into the day.



SCHOOL DISTRICT

Bike Parking



Schools often have parking for cars, but bicycle storage is generally in short supply – and storage for other human-powered transportation, like skateboards and scooters, is frequently completely overlooked. When bicycle racks do exist, they are often inadequate, in poor condition, and located in low-visibility areas on campus, making bicycles easy targets for theft. School districts can make bicycle parking and security a priority at every school, and they can support access and storage for other means of active transportation.

Safe Routes to School Policies



District policies can range from simple statements of support for Safe Routes to School, to specifying that school transportation and facilities departments include active transportation efforts as part of their work and in school travel plans. The prospect of students walking or bicycling to school often leaves families concerned about real and perceived safety issues. Districts can address these concerns by setting up “walking school buses” or “bicycle trains,” which encourage groups of students to walk or bicycle to school while being escorted by adult leaders. These programs can be part of an organized school-wide effort with trained safety leaders, or they can consist of informal groups of children and parents who meet up to walk or bicycle together. School districts can direct schools to perform walk audits to assess traffic and safety conditions so as to identify and mitigate any problems.

School Wellness Policies



All school districts that participate in the National School Lunch Program are required to have school wellness policies that include goals and guidelines to promote students' health. School wellness policies can support Safe Routes to School by including on-going walking and bicycling programs (such as walking school buses or bicycle trains), integrating pedestrian and bicycle safety education into school curriculum, providing safe routes for bicycles through campus, and providing ample bicycle storage. As districts revise their school wellness policies to comply with new requirements, it is important to include Safe Routes to School.

Shared Use

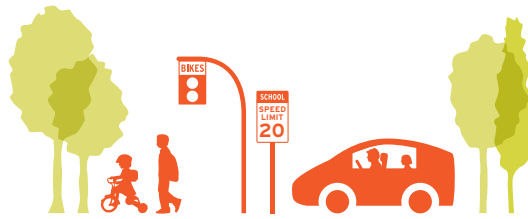


Shared use of school properties provides another great way to increase children's physical activity levels. Schools often keep facilities like gyms, fields, and playgrounds locked outside of school hours out of concern about security, liability, and additional costs. Communities can address these issues through shared use (also known as "joint use") agreements, which establish guidelines and terms that make it possible for public agencies and nonprofits to share the costs and responsibilities of opening up school grounds to the community. Shared use agreements can cover everything from scheduling and staffing to handling facility maintenance.

Smart School Siting



When schools are located close to where families live, students can not only walk and bicycle to school but they can also use school playgrounds and facilities outside of school hours. However, schools are often built on the outskirts of communities, too far from students' homes for walking or bicycling to be practical. School consolidation and closures are also factors in the growing distance between home and school, particularly in rural areas. School districts can create smart school siting guidelines to provide a process for deciding where schools should be located, ensuring that data and long-term costs are part of the equation – and making the most of opportunities for walkability while helping to ensure that neighborhood schools serve diverse student bodies.



TOWN/CITY/COUNTY

Crossing Guards



Adult school crossing guards and student safety patrols can improve safety conditions and make families more comfortable with the idea of their children walking or bicycling to school. In fact, parents frequently say that having adult crossing guards at busy intersections is key to whether they allow their children to walk or bicycle to school. Adult crossing guard programs are often run by local police departments or city agencies; other times they are run by school districts. The most effective school crossing guard programs provide a system for hiring, training, locating, supervising, and properly equipping adult school crossing guards and student safety patrols, while having a dedicated funding stream identified for program sustainability.

Safe School Zones



Towns, cities, and counties can combine a variety of approaches to create safer zones around schools for children traveling on foot or bicycle, particularly during peak times for walking and bicycling to school. For example, local decisionmakers and transportation departments can work together to reduce the speed limit around schools and install traffic calming measures such as trees, bulb-outs, and speed bumps. They also can add pedestrian countdown clocks, create high-visibility crosswalks, and provide separated bike paths. In addition, they can prioritize traffic enforcement in school zones during arrival and dismissal times.

Complete Streets



Many streets are designed primarily for cars, with few features specifically aimed at supporting people walking and bicycling. "Complete streets" approaches change how streets in a community are designed, allowing people of all ages and abilities to get around safely and easily on foot, bicycle, or public transportation. Complete streets

Learn More About CA4Health

CA4Health is the Public Health Institute's 5-year Community Transformation Grant, funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, that is focused on reducing the burden of chronic disease in California counties with populations under 500,000. CA4Health partners with some of the state's leading technical assistance providers and content experts to provide local county partners with tools, training and guidance to make their communities healthier.

CA4Health's four strategic directions are reducing consumption of sugary beverages, increasing availability of smoke-free housing, creating safe routes to schools, and providing people with chronic disease with skills and resources to better manage their health.

Made possible by CA4Health, a project of the Public Health Institute, with funding from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

ChangeLab Solutions is a nonprofit organization that provides legal information on matters relating to public health. The legal information in this document does not constitute legal advice or legal representation. For legal advice, readers should consult a lawyer in their state.

© 2013 ChangeLab Solutions

include features such as high-visibility crosswalks, accessible transit stops, pedestrian and bicycle signals, median islands, wide sidewalks, bicycle lanes, pedestrian-scale lighting, benches, and shade trees. Because complete streets features are required when streets are newly built or reconstructed, their cost is incorporated into budgeted transportation projects.

General Plans



Every town and county in California is required by state law to have a general plan, a document that lays out the future of a community's development. A general plan contains both broad goals (for example, to increase opportunities for children's physical activity) as well as specific steps to implement those goals. General plans provide a good opportunity for towns or counties to state their commitment to working with school districts to support Safe Routes to School. General plans can include language prioritizing safety and roadway improvements around schools, implementing traffic calming measures near schools, defining complete streets approaches, and more.

Bicycle/Pedestrian/SRTS/Trail Plans



To take a coordinated approach to supporting walking and bicycling, communities are finding it helpful to create documents known as bicycle, pedestrian, multimodal, or trail plans. Creating these types of plans involves a dedicated planning process in which communities can carefully evaluate their overall walking and bicycling needs, identify which policies will help address those needs, tailor the proposals to local conditions, and provide a plan for implementation and enforcement. These plans can vary considerably, but they typically include

specific goals (i.e. to install a certain number of miles of bike pathways or double the percentage of walking trips), maps showing where trails and walking and bicycling routes and infrastructure are needed, funding strategies, and a process for evaluating the effectiveness of the changes. Safe Routes to School goals and the needs of children who are walking and bicycling should be integrated into these plans. These plans can stand alone, or they can be incorporated into a broader transportation plan or comprehensive plan.



REGIONAL

Transportation Planning



To improve street safety for children and their families, communities can work to influence how transportation funds are allocated. Regional transportation agencies (Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) and Regional Transportation Planning Agencies) develop long-range regional transportation plans (RTPs) that provide a big-picture vision for transportation goals, needs, options, and direction for a community. RTPs should include a commitment to active transportation and improvements for safe walking and bicycling in school zones. Regional transportation agencies also engage regularly in shorter-term regional transportation improvement program processes, which set investment priorities for transportation projects and programs. These priorities form the basis of the actual allocation of money for specific transportation projects, and should include specific school zone and school route projects.

To learn more about these approaches, visit www.changelabsolutions.org & www.CA4Health.org.

See the ChangeLab Solutions Safe Routes to School resource page for research and analysis supporting these strategies. www.changelabsolutions.org/publications/SRTS-resources