

SRTS CASE STUDY:

Machesney Park, IL

Collaboration key to community's SRTS program

SafeRoutes

National Center for Safe Routes to School



CASE STUDY

Working together, the Village of Machesney Park, IL, and the Harlem School District received funding for a two-fold approach to make the routes to school safer for children.

Children's health is the impetus for the Safe Routes to School (SRTS) program in the 23,000-person Village, according to Karen Lemmons, the community development director for Machesney Park. The benefits of the program extend to making the schools and environment safer.

The Illinois Department of Transportation awarded the Village and the school district a \$4,000 SRTS non-infrastructure grant for speed feedback signs along high traffic areas near Olson Park Elementary school and four other elementary schools. The Village staff plan to purchase five to six speed feedback signs and to rotate them in school zones where speeding is a problem. The Village and school district received another \$1,429 non-infrastructure grant for incentive and motivation programs to encourage children to walk and bicycle to school.

"It's a great program," Lemmons said of federal SRTS funding.

The driver feedback signs look like speed limit signs and blink the speed that a person is driving, Lemmons said. The signs first will be used at Olson Elementary, which is located on busy Alpine Road, and has about 400 students in first through sixth grade. The total elementary school population for the school district is 4,200 students. The signs will be a visible reminder to drivers that the speed limit is 25 miles per hour or less, Lemmons said.

Officials anticipate patterning some of the incentive programs after existing school programs, and Olson Park already has some programs in place. Several years ago, the school raised funds to extend a path behind the school to create a quarter-mile recreation path. The school then created a Mileage Club to encourage children to walk and become more aware of healthy lifestyles. The Mileage Club offers incentives for students to participate in the club and track their mileage. In fact, one child logged 100 miles in one year. Teachers incorporate the quarter-mile path length into mathematical lessons, according to a Village press release.

Students in the Mileage Club receive medals and rewards at the annual school's recognition ceremony, Lemmons said. Another possible incentive will be a girl's and a boy's bicycle for winning participants, said Scott Horsch, grant writer for the Harlem School District. At Olson Park, approximately 20 percent of students walk or bicycle to the neighborhood school, and Horsch said that officials hope the total will increase by about 10 percent.

The Village and school district began working on the grant application in 2006 and submitted it one year later. They received notice of their award in May 2008. During the year-long planning process, officials considered the needs of all five elementary schools in the Village limits. They developed a committee, comprised of Village staff, school district members, principals, teachers, students, parents and community representatives. At each school, teachers handed out surveys, and the forms also were available on Village and school Web sites.



Village residents gather at Olson Park Elementary School for the public announcement of the Safe Routes to School grant.

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Respondents cited many reasons for not walking and bicycling to school, Lemmons said, such as inadequate sidewalks, busy roads, speeding traffic and congestion. And for some students, the distance to and from school was too far.

The planning efforts resulted in a school travel plan unique to each school that identifies specific needs, such as sidewalks or median enhancements and staging areas. One of the schools is located on a four-lane road with a median.

In the future, the Village and school district will ask for funding for infrastructure needs, Lemmons said, and a priority will be Ralston Elementary, which is located on Ralston Road. There are no sidewalks leading up to Ralston Elementary School, Horsch said, and students who live across the street from the school must be bused because the school and the neighborhood homes are separated by a two-lane highway. The installation of new sidewalks would allow students to cross the street at the traffic light installed in 2007 and would provide a safe walking path to the school.

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