

SRTS CASE STUDY: Carson City, Nevada

Grassroots Effort Leads to Two SRTS Pilot Programs



Background

In 2006, Muscle Powered, a local walking and bicycling advocacy group in Carson City, Nev., initiated a project to pilot a Walk to School program at two elementary schools using a \$12,000 grant from the Nevada Office of Traffic Safety. To involve the school district and city staff in the Walk to School program, Muscle Powered invited the staff to a kick-off meeting. With their input, Mark Twain Elementary School and Seeliger Elementary School in Carson City were selected to be the pilot sites. These neighborhood schools were selected because sidewalks, good crossings and crossing guards already were in place, and both schools involve students in bicycle and pedestrian skills training.

Details

With the grant money, a part-time coordinator was hired to organize Safe Routes to School (SRTS) Committees at both Seeliger and Mark Twain Elementary. The coordinator, Muscle Powered members, and the SRTS committees conducted walking assessments near the school during pick-up and drop-off periods. These assessments examined how the physical environment and behaviors of motorists, pedestrians and bicyclists positively or negatively impacted walking and bicycling to school. The assessments revealed several safety issues such as trash cans obstructing the sidewalks' accessibility, drivers not yielding to pedestrians in cross walks and disorganized student drop-off. Information from the assessments was compiled into an Existing Conditions report.

The SRTS committee members and community partners such as a city engineer and a law enforcement officer, attended one of two half-day workshops that used curriculum from the SRTS National Course module, "Why Safe Routes Matter." The workshops provided the participants with an opportunity to further their understanding of the elements of a SRTS program. During the workshops, results of the assessments and lists of potential strategies for addressing the problem areas were shared with the SRTS committee. Using the lists of potential strategies and drawing on information received in workshops, the committee members selected and prioritized the issues they wanted to address.

Both schools selected encouragement events as priorities. Muscle Powered volunteers helped Mark Twain and Seeliger Elementary during one-day Walk 'n' Roll to School events. A travel count conducted on a day before each school's Walk 'n' Roll to School event showed that 17 percent of Seeliger's students and 22 percent of Mark Twain's students commuted to school by foot or by bicycle. On the actual day of the event, those figures increased to 42 percent for Seeliger and 60 percent for Mark Twain. As a result of the events' success, both schools initiated ongoing Walking Wednesday programs. Students at Seeliger Elementary walked to school on designated Wednesday mornings, while Mark Twain Elementary students walked for 30 minutes during their lunch period.

Results

The objective of the project was to increase the number of students commuting to school by walking or bicycling on Walk 'n' Roll Day by 20 percent. The results exceeded expectations. Mark Twain Elementary saw a 38 percent increase in the number of students walking to school the day of the event, and Seeliger Elementary saw a 25 percent increase. At Seeliger, many students continued to walk to school on Wednesdays once the

Grassroots Effort Leads to Two SRTS Pilot Programs

Walking Wednesday program began. At Mark Twain Elementary, a large number of students participate in the Walking Wednesday strolls during lunch. Students say they enjoy Walking Wednesdays because of the prizes, the fresh air and their opportunity to listen to the birds sing.

While developing SRTS events, the school staff learned several lessons on how to improve future SRTS efforts. The staff discovered that campaigns are a good way to raise community awareness, and they should happen before implementing SRTS activities. Also, at meetings they should use media and presentations to reach their target audiences. The Existing Conditions Report was a useful tool in identifying safety issues, however, it is necessary to create a mechanism for addressing the issue once it is brought to the committee's attention. Finally, the staff learned to get support from the city and regional transportation commission, since they ultimately are responsible for making infrastructure changes, and to allow adequate time for implementing simple infrastructure improvements.

Contact

Name: Sue Newberry

Email: suenewb@nvcbell.net



For more resources and information on Safe Routes to School, please visit the National Center for Safe Routes to School Web site at www.saferoutesinfo.org.