

SRTS CASE STUDY: Columbia, South Carolina

A Comprehensive SRTS Program at Rosewood Elementary



Background

Rosewood Elementary School in Columbia, SC, has approximately 400 students in kindergarten through fifth grade. In 2006, a Rosewood Elementary teacher, who also is a parent, noticed on her morning walks to school with her daughter that cars were driving too fast in front of the school. Almost weekly the teacher witnessed cars running the red light at one of the school's main intersections. Wanting to slow down traffic, the teacher sent out a request for ideas to parents and school faculty members. The teacher was told about the Safe Routes to School (SRTS) movement, and with help from a SRTS planning committee, she worked to develop and implement SRTS activities at Rosewood Elementary.

Details

In October 2007, Rosewood Elementary received a \$200,000 grant from the South Carolina Department of Transportation (SCDOT). Recognizing the need to work collaboratively to decide how to spend the funds effectively, a committee was established of parents, teachers, members from the school administration and the school nurse. Together, the committee has been designing and implementing a comprehensive SRTS program encompassing each of the five E's: education, encouragement, engineering, enforcement and evaluation.

The committee sends fliers with safety information to the students' homes and makes informative announcements over the school's public address system to help educate students and parents on safety. There are preliminary plans to hold bicycle workshops in fall 2008 to teach students about bicycle safety procedures and equipment. The committee also is incorporating bicycle and pedestrian safety information into the classroom activities.

To promote and encourage walking, Rosewood Elementary organized an International Walk to School Day on Oct. 3, 2007. The majority of the school's students participated in a parade, which began at a designated location several blocks away from the school and ended at Rosewood Elementary. The children who rode the bus to school and could not meet at the designated location instead participated in games at the school. As the parade neared the school, they joined the parade of classmates, teachers, parents, the principal and the local mascots.

Currently, Rosewood Elementary students participate in Walking Fridays. Every Friday, parent-led walking school buses walk the children to school from two different locations. The location to the north of the school has been successful with seven to eight children regularly participating. The location to the south of the school has had two regular participants. To better understand why participation in the second walking school bus was low, the committee conducted a mapping activity. From the activity, they identified an alternate school route that passes by more students' homes, which makes it easier for students to walk. The committee plans to implement the new route later this spring and anticipates more students will walk as a result.

The committee acknowledges that there are certain engineering issues to be addressed to increase the safety of the children who walk to school. One issue is the school's layout, which contributes to the traffic congestion at pick-up and drop-off times. The committee is researching ways that will improve the flow of traffic during these times, including collaborating with a traffic engineer to create a construction plan for sidewalk improvements, crosswalks striping and school zone signage.

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As for enforcement, in 2006, law enforcement officers increased their patrolling of the streets surrounding the school after parents informed them of their concerns regarding speeding cars. Since this time, law enforcement officers have become a regular presence around the school during morning arrival and afternoon dismissal to enforce school zone speed limits.

The school plans to survey the parents and students to gather their opinions on the SRTS program throughout the various stages of implementation. In addition, parents will be asked about the barriers of walking to school and how these barriers should be addressed. Teachers also will contribute to the evaluation efforts by conducting in-class tallies to measure the different modes in which the students travel to and from school.

Results

Rosewood Elementary has succeeded in its early SRTS efforts, even garnering local television media attention with a news story about its SRTS program in January 2008. Based upon parent reports, the increased patrolling of the streets surrounding Rosewood Elementary has slowed traffic. Parents report that while driving, they are more aware of oncoming bicyclists and pedestrians. Pieces of the SRTS program, such as Walking Fridays, already are implemented and the students' excitement to walk to school has increased. The committee will submit its final plan to the SCDOT in the next few months with the goal of implementing other pieces of their SRTS program in fall 2008.

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SafeRoutes
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