

SRTS CASE STUDY: Putney, Vermont

Encouraging Healthy Living



Background

Putney Central School is a kindergarten through eighth grade school in Putney, Vermont, a rural area with a town population of approximately 2,600 residents. Most of the students who attend Putney Central live a good distance from the school, and the combination of distance, unsafe drivers and lack of sidewalks prevent children from walking or bicycling there.

Details

Five years ago, health and fitness became important aspects of the Putney Central School Health Committee, which coincided with supervisory union-wide implementation of the Center for Disease Control and Prevention Coordinated School Health Programs. These programs recognize the need for health message continuity, so they target students, faculty and the community. The school's students and staff were involved in several unique activities, including forest walks, a healthy snack program and an organic gardening activity. At the local health club, Putney Central staff also participated in healthy living exercises, such as staff yoga classes and circuit training. Having a school-based health program in place made it easy to add a Safe Routes to School program.

Before Putney Central implemented a SRTS program, it already had strategies to encourage walking and bicycling. A trained educator came to teach students about bicycle safety, and the school participated in Walk to School Days for five years. For each of the fall 2005 and 2006 school years, Putney Central received \$1,500 from the Vermont Transportation Agency for non-infrastructure related projects. These funds were used for community meetings, surveys and children's safety devices, such as reflectors for backpacks.

The community held meetings to gather input regarding the new SRTS program. The meetings indicated that many parents enjoyed driving their children to school, as it allowed them to accompany their children inside and provided them with an opportunity to meet other parents and teachers. To accommodate parent needs while still encouraging children to walk or bicycle to school, Family Walk to School Days will be introduced in the fall 2007 school year. For six weeks at both the beginning and end of the year, there will be a weekly walk for parents and their children. Since many of the students live far away, the school arranged for the parents to park their cars at the beginning of the walk, which is in the town center, one mile south from the school. The community meetings also revealed that the safety of the buses and the pick-up and drop-off area concerned parents. They believed the cars were moving in too many directions within the drop-off area and presented a danger for children to arrive to school safely.

Results

The Walk to School Days have been so successful that in addition to including the program in the fall, the event now will feature a coffee hour for participating parents. To address the concerns of pedestrian safety in the pick-up and drop-off area, the school temporarily rearranged the car and bus drop-off points to decrease traffic for children crossing the street in front of the school. This rearrangement produced favorable results and will become a permanent change at the start of the fall 2007 school year.

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Putney Central also is in the process of applying for federal SRTS grant money for infrastructure improvements. If received, the funds will be channeled to improve crosswalks, create better signage as to alert drivers to pedestrian areas and build sidewalks from the town center to the school.

Contact

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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.