

Safe Routes to School National Partnership Consensus Statement

We believe it is time for a change.

The Problem

In the last 30 years we have seen a loss of mobility among our nation's children that has severely impacted their personal health and their ability to explore their neighborhoods, even by walking or biking to school.

Consider these facts:

- Within the span of a single generation, the number of children walking and bicycling to school has dramatically declined. In 1969, approximately 50% of children walked or biked to school, and 87% of children living within one mile of school did. Today, fewer than 15% of schoolchildren walk or bike to school. (CDC)
- There are more than three times as many overweight children today as there were 25 years ago. (CDC, NHANES III)
- As much as 20 to 30% of morning rush hour traffic can be parents driving children to schools. (Data from local communities)

These problems are all related to the fact that many communities lack basic infrastructure—sidewalks, bike lanes, trails, pathways, and crosswalks—and are no longer designed to encourage or allow children to walk and bicycle safely. Concerns about traffic, crime, and other obstacles keep children strapped in the back seat of cars, which further adds to the traffic on the road and pollution in the air.

The Solution

Communities around the country are organizing Safe Routes to School programs, which have a common goal to make it safe, convenient, and fun for children to walk and bicycle to and from school like their parents did. While each program is unique, the programs have common objectives to:

- Encourage students, families, and school staff to be physically active by walking and bicycling more often.
- Make streets, sidewalks, pathways, trails, and crosswalks safe, convenient, and attractive for walking and bicycling to school.
- Ensure that streets around schools have an adequate number of safe places to cross and that there is safe and convenient access into the school building from adjacent sidewalks.
- Keep driving speeds slow near schools, on school routes, and at school crossings.
- Enforce all traffic laws near schools, on school routes, and in other areas of high pedestrian and bicycle activity.
- Locate schools within walking and bicycling distance of as many students as possible, not along busy streets on the edges of neighborhoods.
- Reduce the amount of traffic around schools.
- Use trails, pathways, and non-motorized corridors as travel routes to schools.
- Provide secure bicycle parking at schools.
- Teach traffic safety skills routinely in school.

Every community is unique, so every Safe Routes to School program must respond differently. Successful programs include some combination or all of the following approaches to improve conditions for safe walking and bicycling:

- **Encouragement** – Using events and activities to promote walking and bicycling.
- **Education** – Teaching children about the broad range of transportation choices, instructing them in important lifelong safety skills, and launching driver safety campaigns.
- **Engineering** – Creating operational and physical improvements to the infrastructure surrounding schools, reducing speeds, and establishing safer crosswalks and pathways.
- **Enforcement** – Partnering with local law enforcement to ensure drivers obey traffic laws, and initiating community enforcement such as crossing guard programs.
- **Evaluation** – Monitoring and researching outcomes and trends through the collection of data.

The Partnership

The Safe Routes to School National Partnership is comprised of multiple constituencies at the local, state, and national levels. It includes:

- Parents
- Students
- Educators
- Government officials
- Business leaders
- Community groups
- Advocates for bicycling and walking
- Law enforcement officers
- Transportation, urban planning, engineering, and health professionals
- Health, conservation, and safety advocates

The Safe Routes to School National Partnership works to support the development and implementation of programs by:

- Setting goals for successful implementation.
- Sharing information with all interested parties.
- Working to secure funding resources for Safe Routes to Schools programs.
- Providing policy input to implementing agencies.
- Providing training and resource materials to assist communities in starting a Safe Routes to School program.
- Illustrating the cost effectiveness of Safe Routes to School programs.
- Providing a unified voice for Safe Routes to School.

Through forming the Safe Routes to School National Partnership, we call on you to join us in giving children back the sense of freedom and responsibility that comes from walking or bicycling to and from school. Together, we can again provide children with the opportunity to know their neighborhoods, enjoy fresh air and arrive at school alert, refreshed and ready to start the day. As partners in the Safe Routes to Schools National Partnership, we are transforming children's lives and their communities.