

SAFE ROUTES TO SCHOOLS DIALOGUE JUNE 16-25, 2008

This online dialogue connected local and school officials and staff from throughout California to share information and resources about how cities, counties, and schools can plan safe walking and biking routes to school for students.

Question:

Any tips for pursuing [Safe Routes to School Grants](#)?

Answer:



Brooke Driesse

Visit the Department of Transportation website for application guidelines. California Cycle 8 call for projects expected to be announced before the end of 2008.

www.dot.ca.gov/hq/LocalPrograms/saferoutes/saferoutes.htm

Question:

Any tips for advancing complete streets?

Answer:

I recently "attended" an online webinar by Dan Burden of Walkable Communities Inc. and he suggested some "tools" that can be implemented to make streets around schools safer for pedestrians and bicyclists:



Greg Keiden, ILG

1. Try to narrow roads around schools by expanding medians and bike lanes to bring down car speeds to 15-20 m.p.h. 24 hours a day.

2. Roundabouts can be an effective way to slow down traffic and increase pedestrian safety around schools.

3. 2 crossing guards are needed for multi-lane roads. It is very important to have an attentive adult near the school during arrival and departure times.

For more information check out Dan's website: www.walkable.org

Question:

How have you engaged children and youth in planning for safe walking and biking?

Answer:

Yvonne Garrett, Director of Community Services in the City of La Mesa, says that the city has worked with high school youth in a project called CX3 which stands for Communities for Excellence in Nutrition, Physical Activity and Obesity Prevention. This

initiative was originally piloted by Nutrition Network. In San Diego County, this effort was collaboration by the City and the County as well as Helix High School. The goal of the students was to analyze a neighborhood for access to healthy foods, review advertising in the targeted area and measure walkability. As part of their advocacy in this area the students lobbied for sidewalks at Helix High School. Their efforts resulted in a Safe Routes to School grant for sidewalks, lighting and landscaping for the area high school that had poor pedestrian access. If you are interested in more information please contact me at ygarrett@ci.la-mesa.ca.us or click on this links [La Mesa Walkability Audit](#) and [Recommended Community Enhancements](#).

Answer:

An idea to consider is that not only the parent or PTA can become involved, but also the students themselves. One program that I participated in was the school Safety Patrol. This would be a physical presence where older students would help those walking near school.

Another idea would be to create a program where students would meet at a designated area and then walk to the school together.

Prioritizing accommodations for physically active transportation, including pedestrian, bicycle and transit accommodations contributes to creating neighborhoods and communities that promote physical activity. Many current practices, policies and laws prioritize motor vehicle access resulting in overly wide, overly fast motor vehicle traffic, along with inconvenient and dangerous conditions for walking, bicycling or reaching transit stops. -Lindel Price, WALKSacramento

Question:

How is your community negotiating school siting? Are there requirement in your general plan? How do your cities and schools collaborate on school siting?



Brook Driesse

California Safe
Routes to Schools
Network

Answer I am the Organizer for the California Safe Routes to School State Network. The Safe Routes to School State Network Project was created to leverage SRTS resources by creating stakeholder networks in 9 states and the District of Columbia. Our Network meets on a monthly basis via teleconference and put together an action plan for us to focus our efforts in California on SRTS related issues. Our #2 priority is school siting. Since only about 35% of students in the United States live within two miles of their school, this is an extremely important issue as we are encouraging parents/children to walk and bicycle to school.

One thing we are working on at the state level is influencing the school siting process at the CA Department of Education. We sent a sign on letter to the School Facilities Planning staff in early 2008 with recommendations to language in the main regulations they use when planning schools.

We plan to continue this process as they update their documents with more specific language recommendations.

Question:

Most change processes involve with an assessment of current conditions. One technique is engaging youth and other residents in walking and biking on the routes students would use going to and from school. Who has done this? What was most helpful in the process? How did you leverage the audits to increase community and policy-maker awareness? www.walkinginfo.org/problems/audits.cfm provides a good starting point.

Answer:



Caroline Cicero,
Fall Prevention Institute

For Fall Prevention Awareness Week in California (starts 9/21/08), we are planning some 'Intergenerational Walkability Audits', in which school children, neighbors, service providers and older adults join together to assess neighborhoods' walkability and sidewalk safety. We take a lifespan approach that holds that communities that are safer for children and older adults are better for everyone. We will be evaluating sidewalks based on their maintenance and also crosswalks and other community features, such as respite islands and benches that add to "streets for life."

Answer:

An idea to consider is that not only the parent or PTA can become involved, but also the students themselves. One program that I participated in was the school Safety Patrol. This would be a physical presence where students would help those walking near school. Maybe create a program where students would meet at a designated area and then walk to the school together. -Jeff Porcar, ILG

Answer:

Another idea is the "walking school bus" or bicycle train. A parent or community volunteer leads a group of students on an established route to and from school. See <http://www.walkingschoolbus.org/> for more details. -Francesca Wright, CCSP

Question:

What are the unique challenges of unincorporated areas?

Answer:

Susan Elizabeth from Tulare County is working with CCROPP. She said there are around 240 unincorporated communities in the central valley that don't have the "city" partner available. She said schools are their local institutional partners. In Pixley, they've got a group of moms bringing in dance and a weekly farmers market.

RESOURCES:

Articles

-Fall Prevention Center of Excellence is a nonprofit dedicated to fall prevention for older people who are at risk of falling. They promote a lifespan approach to walkability and offer ideas of how to partner with senior organizations to audit and advocate for complete streets. www.stopfalls.org

-New Data for a New Era: A Summary of the SMARTRAQ Findings

-Linking Land Use, Transportation, Air Quality and Health in the Atlanta Region, January 2007. The SMARTRAQ project began in 1998 when the Atlanta region's transportation plan was forecast to violate emissions standards under the federal Clean Air Act. Barred from using federal road money until a complying plan could be approved, the Atlanta region's spread-out growth patterns were making it increasingly clear that addressing traffic congestion, choke points, and mobility would need a broader understanding of land use, transportation and air quality relationships. Around the same time, public health officials and urban planners alike were beginning to speculate about a possible connection between auto-dependent land use patterns and skyrocketing obesity rates. Thus, SMARTRAQ emerged as a multidisciplinary collaboration including federal and state transportation, environmental and health agencies, a local foundation and other non-profit organizations, and university researchers. SMARTRAQ therefore integrates policy issues pertaining to both the Clean Air Act and the obesity epidemic. www.act-trans.ubc.ca/smartraq/files/smartraq_summary.pdf

Organizations

America Walks links communities interested in safe routes with mentors. America Walks is a national coalition of local advocacy groups dedicated to promoting walkable

communities. Connect your local bike/walk advocates to this program for ongoing support, ideas, and resources. One of this dialogue's panelists, Anne Geraghty is the regional director for California. www.americawalks.org

The California Department of Transportation administers both the state and federal safe routes to schools grants.

www.dot.ca.gov/hq/LocalPrograms/saferoutes/saferoutes.htm

The National Association of Counties has a Healthy Counties Database where you can search for model policies, programs and initiatives that counties nationwide have enacted to promote wellness and help prevent childhood obesity. No need to reinvent the wheel. Find out what peer local government leaders have done to enable and encourage nutritious diets, physical activity, and healthy built and social environments.

www.naco.org/Template.cfm?Section=New_Technical_Assistance&Template=/cffiles/healthycounties/search.cfm

The Pedestrian and Bicycle Information Center (PBIC) is a national clearinghouse for information about health and safety, engineering, advocacy, education, enforcement, access, and mobility for pedestrians (including transit users) and bicyclists. The PBIC serves anyone interested in pedestrian and bicycle issues, including planners, engineers, private citizens, advocates, educators, police enforcement, and the health community. They offer walkability audit tools, including information about how to establish a walking school bus program. www.walkingschoolbus.org , www.walkinginfo.org

Pennsylvania Advocates for Nutrition and Activity produced a safe routes to school tool kit available at www.panaonline.org/programs/khz/actionkits/hrak/intro.php

Planning for Healthy Places, a project of the Public Health Law Program has developed a number of tools, including a talking points [flyer](#) on Safe Routes to School.

www.healthyplanning.org

Safe Routes to School National Partnership The Safe Routes to School National Partnership is a network of more than 300 nonprofit organizations, government agencies, schools, and professionals working together to advance the Safe Routes to School (SRTS) movement in the United States. SRTS can provide a variety of important benefits to children and their communities, including increasing physical activity, reducing traffic congestion, improving air quality, and enhancing neighborhood safety. Here you'll find many resources, including a [liability fact sheet](#). www.saferoutespartnership.org/

Walkable Communities is a nonprofit organization which promotes walkability as the cornerstone of a successful, vibrant community. www.Walkable.org

Appendices

1. City of La Mesa Community Wellness Program – Health is Wealth
2. Healthy Measure A - Safe Access to Schools Marin County, CA
3. “School Siting Location Affects the Potential to Walk or Bike” Safe Routes to School Network

Appendix 1

La Mesa Community Wellness Program

“Health is Wealth”

Our nation is facing a growing health crisis. This health concern is the obesity of our citizens. As a nationwide problem, it also becomes a community problem. Obesity leads to complications of cardiovascular disease, cancer and diabetes. The La Mesa Wellness Task Force is a coalition of community members dedicated to promoting and supporting wellness opportunities in the City of La Mesa. The Wellness Task Force is made up of representatives from the City, area school districts, hospitals, non-profit organizations, and community volunteers. The coalition has accomplished a number of tasks in its one-year history. The Task Force provided support for the development of the Grossmont Union High School District Wellness Policy, creation and funding for “Walk La Mesa,” a nutrition education program at Kids Care Fest and has contributed support to the San Diego County Childhood Obesity Action Plan. Now, the Task Force is requesting support from the La Mesa City Council for the “La Mesa Community Wellness Program.” This document highlights ways the City of La Mesa can create a thriving and healthy community. The La Mesa Wellness Task Force appreciates the opportunity to collaborate with the City on ways to promote active living.

La Mesa Community Wellness Program

The La Mesa Wellness Task Force respectfully asks that the La Mesa City Council support and encourage:

1. Developing design strategies that support an active lifestyle.

1. Promotion of a pedestrian friendly walkable community. A walkable community is defined as a place where residents of all ages feel that it is safe, convenient, efficient, and pleasurable to walk. Realizing that funding is an issue we recommend a priority list of project improvements as outlined below and as proposed in the Walkability Study dated February 2006. The following areas of the City are considered priorities for upgrades to ensure walkability. Streets and corridors:

- Within one-quarter mile of elementary schools
- within one-quarter mile of a senior center or residential complex for seniors
- within one-quarter mile of retail that is pedestrian orientated

- within one-third mile of a middle school
 - within one half mile of a trolley station or bus routes
 - within one-quarter mile of parks/recreational centers
 - within one-half mile of a high school
 - § within one-quarter mile of the downtown civic center
1. Secure funding for the following targeted school locations according to the Walkability Study dated February 2006 that require improved suggested school routes:
 - Lemon Avenue school
 - University Avenue from Yale to Parks (serving Helix Charter High School)
 - La Mesa Dale Elementary and La Mesa Middle School
 - El Paso and Jackson Drive (near Murray Manor School)
 3. Support the La Mesa-Spring Valley School District's efforts to improve students' ability to safely walk/bicycle to and from school by providing planning and law enforcement staff to serve on advisory school-based safety committees serving La Mesa children.
 4. Revitalize La Mesa's urban community by incorporating pedestrian-friendly design principles in all new developments such as wide sidewalks, street-facing windows, well- marked crosswalks, short block or mid-block alleys and paths, medians in streets, landscaped streets and landscaped parking separating sidewalks from the curb/street in addition to adequate lighting.
 5. Create a thorough "way finding" signage system in the town center to encourage pedestrian walking in the downtown area.
 6. Support the completion of the La Mesa Arts Alliance's "La Mesa Walking Art Trail Utility Box Project" as a way to encourage walking and to view La Mesa's public art in the downtown.
2. **Expansion of park green spaces by improving the quality, access to and, possibly increasing park acreage in La Mesa.**
 1. Fund and develop a master plan for the park system. This master plan will outline and prioritize a list of upgrades to existing park systems and target underserved neighborhoods for future parks. Special attention will be paid to small urban parks in newly revitalized neighborhoods or parks in underserved areas of the City.
 2. Work with regional transportation providers to ensure parks and recreation centers are accessible by public transit.

3. **Promoting varied recreational opportunities for citizens of all ages.**
 1. The City's Department of Community Services will sponsor and promote opportunities for children and their families to engage in physical activities. The Department will focus on the following:
 - Direct and focus wellness programs to areas of the City and to specific populations that have the greatest need to improve health
 - Programs for underserved areas of La Mesa
 - Programs that teach life-long participation in physical fitness
 - Programs that utilize community partners with specific expertise
 - Creation of more family oriented special events targeting physical fitness
 - Intergenerational opportunities
 - Programs that are both fee based and free
 - Programs that are both non-competitive and competitive
 2. The City will collaborate with community partners to promote opportunities for fitness and health education, including the La Mesa Wellness Task Force, the County's Childhood Obesity Action Plan and other non-profit partners.
 3. Include space in each La Mesa FOCUS dedicated to wellness and fitness for La Mesa residents as an ongoing educational opportunity.
 4. Feature in the community calendar "a park a month" or a map/listing of La Mesa parks to educate residents about places for leisure activities.
 5. Utilize existing programs as a way to provide education on healthy lifestyles i.e.: Kids Watch, Small Friends, Summer Day Camps, and Teen Scene.
4. **Publicizing awareness of low and no cost health insurance programs by supporting the League of Cities, "Cities for Healthy Kids Program."**
 1. Provide outreach information about qualifying for and ways to sign up for low or no cost health insurance.
 2. Collaborate with the La Mesa-Spring Valley School District and other community partners to inform residents about low and no cost health insurance programs.
 3. Utilize existing special events to further provide outreach to the community about low or no cost health insurance.
5. **Healthy snack choices.**
 1. Encourage all City owned facilities to eliminate carbonated beverages and unhealthy snacks in vending machines.
 2. Food provided at City-sponsored special events is recommended to meet the healthier food options.

3. Snacks and lunches provided in recreational programs are recommended to meet healthy food choices.
 4. The Athletic Council in collaboration with the athletic leagues are recommended to offer healthy choice alternatives in their snack bars at City owned fields.
6. **Encouraging wellness opportunities for City employees.**
1. Promote the opportunity to use the municipal pool at no charge to City employees.
 2. Develop a wellness section for employees on the employee intranet.
 3. Encourage healthy food and snack options at City meetings/events.
7. **Creating accommodations for breastfeeding.**
1. Protect a mother's right to breastfeed in public by developing reasonable accommodations in new facilities for private breastfeeding in publicly owned facilities
8. **Support efforts to educate the public regarding the existence of smoke-free parks in La Mesa.**
9. **Evaluating La Mesa's Wellness program**
1. Direct appropriate departments to include applicable action items in the City's Targets for Action.
 2. Gather outside information and data on the community's current health to help determine program focus areas.
 3. Recommend the Community Services Commission request a bi-annual report on the progress of the wellness effort. Measurement of the results will be tied to the applicable City Targets for Action.
 4. Report to the City Council annually as to progress on the wellness effort.
10. **Coordinating the wellness effort on a regional, state and national level.**
1. The City's program is recommended to work in concert with other regional, state, and national efforts.

Approved July 2006

Appendix 2

Healthy Measure A - Safe Access to Schools Marin County, CA

Population: 247,289 (2000 Census)

Area: 520 (sq mi)

Density: 475 (people/sq mi)

Best Practice Type: Policy

Year Enacted: 2000

Description:

In 2004, Marin County Voters passed Measure A, enacting a half-cent sales tax to address transportation congestion issues. The Measure included four specific strategies, one of which, Safe Access to Schools, was intended to reduce automobile-related school trips, responsible for more than 20% of peak period congestion. The strategy addressed this issue on three fronts; an aggressive educational program, known as Safe Routes to School (SR2S), a program of capital improvements called “Safe Pathways,” and a dramatically expanded school crossing guard program extending to all areas of the county. All three efforts are directed at improving the safety of the school trip, because survey data shows that parents are deterred from alternative mode use by fears for their children’s safety.

The SR2S program uses contests, competitions, events, assemblies and other devices to encourage bicycling, walking and carpooling to school. Many of these are student and parent-planned in conjunction with school officials who organize and serve on school task forces. Dramatic increases in the use of alternative modes have been achieved as a result of these initiatives and more change is expected in the future.

\$1.7 million was recently awarded to cities and towns as part of the Safe Pathways process. These dollars will finance sidewalk and bike path improvements, new crosswalks and other improvements suggested by the task forces and endorsed by local public works departments. The Safe Pathways program will continue throughout the 20-year life of Measure A, awarding over \$500,000 per year in improvement funding. Finally, more than 60 additional crossing guards have been deployed at some of the most urgently needed locations in Marin. This program will also be maintained for the life of the tax.

Lead County Department/Sponsoring Official: Transportation Authority of Marin

Funding Sources: Marin County Measure A and State and Federal Safe Routes to School funds.

Contact: Eric Schatmeier, Planning Manager, (415) 226-0824, eschatmeier@tam.ca.gov

Resources: [Marin County Transportation Sales Tax Plan](#)

Appendix 3:

 The logo for the Safe Routes to School National Partnership. It features a blue square with a yellow house-shaped border. Inside the house, there is a yellow silhouette of a person walking and a person riding a bicycle. Below the house, the text "SAFE ROUTES to School" is written in white, with "SAFE ROUTES" in a smaller font above "to School". At the bottom, "NATIONAL PARTNERSHIP" is written in a very small font.	<p>School Siting</p> <p>location affects the potential to walk or bike</p>
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Background

State and local-level decisions regarding school siting, construction, and design have significant impacts on whether homes are located within walking and cycling distance of schools.

Trends indicate that the average school size has grown and that new schools have been increasingly located on large sites away from the families in the neighborhoods that they serve. The National Center for Education Statistics notes that the number of schools in the United States decreased from 262,000 in 1930 to 91,000 today, while student population over the same time has risen from 28 million to 53.5 million. The student population continues to grow; the U.S. Department of Education estimates that by 2030, it will reach 60 million.

In many states and local communities there is a policy bias in favor of constructing new schools rather than renovating or expanding existing ones. Guidelines, recommendations and standards that encourage or require building large schools on new campuses are embedded in a variety of regulations and laws. Some states will only provide state funding for schools that follow such guidelines. In addition, many states have school construction funding formulas that favor new construction over renovation. Such formulas typically establish a limit on what a district may spend to renovate rather than build new, usually a specific percentage of the cost of new construction. The National Trust for Historic Preservation urges states to eliminate these funding policies, because they penalize communities for maintaining and modernizing old schools, even when doing so costs less than building new.

Another set of policies that favors construction of large new schools are "minimum acreage standards." In an effort to get a clearer picture of the role minimum acreage standards play in school locations, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency asked the Council of Educational Facility Planners International to research state minimum acreage requirements in 2003 while CEFPI was updating its facilities guide. Recognizing that a

"one size fits all" approach is dated and can work counter to a variety of goals, the new "Guide" encourages communities to analyze their needs in order to make appropriate siting decisions. For a complete listing of state policies governing school site size, see http://www.cefpi.org/pdf/state_guidelines.pdf. As is evidenced by the report, 27 states still have policies that require local communities to build schools on sites that require a certain number of acres, depending on the type of school (elementary, middle or high school) and the number of students it will serve.

According to data from the National Household Travel Survey, in 1969 approximately 50% of elementary school students lived within two miles of their school; by 2001, only about 33% lived within this distance. To achieve the Safe Routes to School goal of getting more children to walk and bicycle to school safely, we must address school siting policies at state and local levels.

Good Policies

Ideally, schools are centers for the community and are located within walking and bicycling distance of the students who the schools serve. To help achieve this goal, minimum acreage requirements for schools have been eliminated in South Carolina, Rhode Island, and Maine since 2003. In addition, an increasing number of states are instituting policies that encourage joint use of school facilities and/or increased coordination between school districts and local governments on school facilities and land use planning.

In some cases, legislation is needed to change state-level school siting and use policies. In other circumstances, changes can be made to policy guidelines through a State Superintendent's office, a State Department of Education, or other policy body.

Examples

The State of Oregon has an excellent school siting handbook which can serve as a model for other states: <http://www.oregon.gov/LCD/TGM/docs/schoolsitinghandbook.pdf>

In 2002 the Maine State Board of Education and State Planning Office released a report entitled "Making Schools Important to Neighborhoods Again." This report led to changes in state policy whereby minimum acreage standards for schools were eliminated. <http://www.maine.gov/spo/landuse/docs/schoolrpt.pdf>

This Pennsylvania resource on renovating versus replacing schools will be of interest to anyone fighting to save a neighborhood school. <http://www.saveourlandsaveourtowns.org/neighborhoodschools.html>

Resources

The National Trust for Historic Preservation's report "Why Johnny Can't Walk to School" helped to spark national attention to the issue of school siting.

http://www.nationaltrust.org/issues/downloads/schools_why_johnny.pdf

The EPA report "Travel and Environmental Implications of School Siting," released by the EPA on October 8, 2003, was the first study to empirically examine the relationship between school locations, the built environment around schools, how kids get to school, and the impact on air emissions of those travel choices.

http://www.epa.gov/smartgrowth/school_travel.htm

Smart Growth America features several resources on building smart schools including school siting: <http://smartgrowthamerica.org/children.html>. They also feature a Smart Schools Initiative: <http://www.smart-schools.org/>

The California Sustainable Schools project of the Division of the State Architect lists several resources related to school siting:

<http://www.sustainableschools.dgs.ca.gov/SustainableSchools/sustainabledesign/siting/siting.html>

A 2005 doctoral dissertation from Noreen C. McDonald titled "Children's Travel: Patterns and Influences" has a lot of information and reference analysis regarding school siting and travel implications: <http://www.uctc.net/papers/diss118.pdf>