

Chapter 8. Safe Routes to School

The Safe Routes to School program is a national and international movement to enable and encourage elementary and middle school children to walk and bicycle to school. Through the use of the "5 Es", engineering, education, enforcement, encouragement and evaluation, programs and projects can be developed to create a safe, appealing environment for walking and biking to school that will encourage a healthy and active lifestyle from an early age. Safe Routes to School will also enrich the quality of our children's lives and benefit communities by implementing projects and activities that will reduce traffic congestion, improve air quality, and enhance neighborhood safety. Safe Routes to School is seen as one vital step toward reducing the alarming nationwide trend of child obesity and inactivity.



Figure 31: Idle Free Zones,
Forsyth County Environmental
Affairs

The goal of the Safe Routes to School Program is to reverse the decline in the numbers of children walking and biking to school, and the rise in obesity and physical inactivity. In 1969, approximately 50% of children walked or biked to school, and 87% of the children living within one mile of their school arrived under their own power. Today, fewer than 15% of schoolchildren walk or bike to school. As a result, kids today are less active, less independent, and less healthy. In addition, as much as 20 to 30% of morning traffic is generated by parents driving their children to school. The health implications are well documented. For example, over the last 25 years, air pollution has been linked to a 74% increase in asthma rates among children ages 5-14, and a 160% increase in children up to age 4.

The Safe Routes to School Program provides an avenue to increase the activity levels of children as well as to create stronger communities that have good bicycle and pedestrian environments. A Safe Routes to School Workshop is a great way to kick-off a Safe Routes to School Program to improve the health of children and the community by making walking and bicycling to school safer, easier, and more enjoyable. A workshop helps communities develop programs based on their unique situations while

providing basic strategies and useful resources to consider as they develop an action plan to overcome barriers identified.

The workshop is one day long and held during the week. The outcome of the workshop is a SRTS Action Plan that addresses engineering, educational, encouragement and enforcement activities geared toward the needs of the school.

An outline of the North Carolina grant program and funding information is shown below. Keep in mind that in order to qualify for funding, a workshop instructed by facilitators trained by the National Center of Safe Routes to School is required. Federal-aid funds are provided to State DOTs over five Federal fiscal years (FY 05-09).

North Carolina funds:

\$1.00 million (FY05), \$2.33 million (FY06), \$3.13 million (FY07), \$3.88 million (FY08), \$4.85 million (FY09).

State usage:

70 to 90 percent of the grant must be used for infrastructure projects, and 10 to 30 percent for non-infrastructure projects.

No local funding match required: 100% federally funded

- Grant applications must address the infrastructure (engineering) and non-infrastructure (education, enforcement and encouragement) aspects based on the SRTS Action Plan developed in the local workshops.
- Eligible recipients include state, local and regional agencies, and non-profit organizations.
- Jurisdictional levels for the grant are school level, school system or region-wide, and state-wide
- Primary beneficiaries must be K-8th grade students



- Infrastructure projects must be within two miles of a school and on public property or private land with legal public-access easements
- Funding is through a reimbursable grant process - not a cash up front process
- Competitive grant program administered by North Carolina Department of Transportation
- Award recipients must comply with federal and state funding requirements

8.1 Activities for Schools

Walking School Bus

The walking school bus addresses the needs of students and the concerns of parents. One or more adults, depending on the size of the group, accompany a group of students who pick up other students along a planned route, similar to the traditional school bus. They walk as a group on their commute to and from school.

Adults can take turns walking with students by having assigned days of duty. Children can be picked up at their homes or at "staging areas" where they "catch the bus". The staging areas should also have adult supervision. The bus participants can have fun with the idea by wearing a specific color, use a wagon for the backpacks, or hold a rope linking them all together. Adults can utilize the opportunity to teach pedestrian safety skills to students while walking to school as well.

Bike Trains

Bike trains are similar to the walking school bus except that students ride their bikes to school in groups. These are usually utilized when older students are involved.

A bike safety workshop (sometimes called a bike rodeo) should be offered to teach students important safety habits, including the importance of wearing a bike helmet.

Bike racks should be available to students to secure their bikes while at school. Bike trains need more adults to supervise bicyclists and adults should be good role models.

Walking Wednesdays

Another way to promote walking to school is to begin a "Walking Wednesday" program. Designate a weekly or monthly Wednesday as "Walking Wednesday". Encourage students to walk to school with their friends, family, caregivers, or as part of a walking school bus. To further encourage children to walk, use this program to reward individuals or classes that have the greatest percentage of students participating.

Alternative Drop Off

In situations where students are outside the walkable limits ($\frac{1}{2}$ mile from the school), and are bused or are driven, finding an alternative drop-off location for walking to school is an option. This way these students can also participate in Walk to School Day. Buses and private vehicles can stop a few blocks away from the school in a parking lot that has facilities such as sidewalks connecting to the school. Students are greeted by adult volunteers who walk with the children the remaining way to school. Recruit volunteers before Walk to School Day and provide them with directions to the alternative drop-off.

In looking for an alternative drop-off lot, make sure that there is enough space for buses and other vehicles to stop, safely drop-off students and park so parents and community members can leave their vehicles and walk with students. Examples of alternative drop-off locations are shopping centers, community centers, parks, and places of worship.

Be sure to invite your school district transportation director and bus drivers to walk with students!

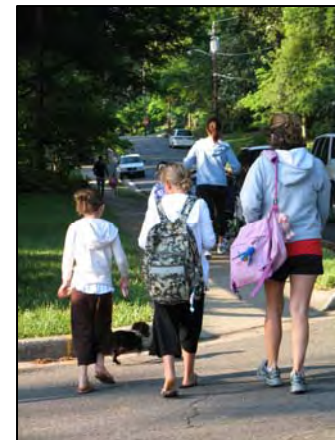


Figure 32: Sherwood Forest Elementary School Walking Program

8.2 North Carolina School Crossing Guard Training Program



Figure 33: Crossing Guard at Sherwood Forest Elementary School

As traffic continues to increase on North Carolina's streets and highways, concern has grown over the safety of our children as they walk to and from school. At the same time, health agencies, alarmed at the increase in obesity and inactivity among children, are encouraging parents and communities to get their children walking and biking to school. In response, the Division of Bicycle and Pedestrian Transportation funded a study on pedestrian issues, including school zone safety, and decided to establish a consistent training program for law enforcement officers responsible for school crossing guards. According to the office of the North Carolina Attorney General, school crossing guards may be considered traffic control officers when proper training is provided as specified in North Carolina General Statutes 20-114.1

In 1998, the Division of Bicycle and Pedestrian Transportation (DBPT) developed a program to train local law enforcement officers who are responsible for training school crossing guards in their respective jurisdictions. Funded by the Governor's Highway Safety Program, this initiative arose from the need to reduce crashes in school zones.

Once the course was developed, DBPT sponsored two pilot workshops in Winston-Salem and Fayetteville. Participants in those workshops provided feedback and suggestions that were then incorporated into the course, which was last updated in 1999.

With the revised course in place, DBPT sponsored training workshops for school officials and law enforcement offices responsible for training crossing guards in various locations across the state.

The objectives of this course are twofold:

1. To protect North Carolina school children by standardizing instruction and procedures for crossing guards so that motorists across the state will know what to expect as they travel through school zones across the state.
2. To teach children proper pedestrian skills so they will cross safely at other times and locations.

The one-day course includes a morning session devoted to understanding laws about pedestrians and school crossing guards and examining the Instructor's Manual, which contains everything a person will need to conduct a training course for guards themselves. The afternoon session involves actual practice crossing students at a simulated intersection.