

Promising Results from the Interim Evaluation of the **Active Routes to School Project**

More elementary and middle school students and parents may be walking and biking due to the Active Routes to School Project. The *Active Routes to School Evaluation Summary: Fall 2015 Results* provides the outcomes to date from the project evaluation. The evaluation examines student travel behavior, parents' perception of walking and biking to school, and school's readiness to adopt walking and biking. The summary report is available at communityclinicalconnections.com/ActiveRoutes.

Results from the summary report indicate that:

1. The more parents considered walking and bicycling to school as fun for their child, the more likely they and their children were to walk and bike in general.
2. By engaging schools where it is theoretically feasible to walk or bike with educational experiences, promotional events and positive messaging, the Active Routes to School Project Coordinators and their partners are inspiring students to walk and bike more outside of school (i.e., after school hours during the week and on the weekend).
3. School variables, such as customs related to school travel and the infrastructure that supports or hinders walking and bicycling, likely impacts students' walking and biking participation.

Avenues to Support and Encourage Greater Participation in Walking and Bicycling

1. Highlighting the fun in walking and bicycling
2. Encouraging parents to walk and bicycle more
3. Encouraging students to discuss transportation options with their families
4. Engaging traditionally disadvantaged communities
5. Creating a welcoming community climate for safe walking and bicycling to and from (or at) school



Active Routes to School is a NC Safe Routes to School Project supported by a partnership between the NC Department of Transportation and the NC Division of Public Health.

Through this project there are 10 Active Routes to School Project Coordinators working across North Carolina to make it easier for elementary and middle school students to safely walk and bike to school. The project coordinators work with partners in their communities to increase the number of:

- One-time awareness events about the importance of Safe Routes to School.
- Ongoing programs that encourage walking and biking to or at school.
- Trainings on how to implement Safe Routes to School-related activities.
- Policies that support walking and biking to or at school.
- Safety features near schools.

In addition to working directly with schools, the project coordinators work within communities to identify opportunities for shared use of facilities and Complete Streets to improve access to physical activity.



PedBikeImages.org/Chris Metka



PedBikeImages.org/Dan Burden



The results from the interim report indicate that there are some promising practices that can support safe walking and bicycling to school, after school and on the weekends. These strategies can create a welcoming community climate for safe walking and bicycling between home and school.

Make walking and bicycling fun.

- Support events that highlight the fun of walking and bicycling between home and school.
- Capture photos and videos of smiling families and school staff to communicate the community-building benefits of active school travel to school administrators and other decision-makers.

Engage parents in walking and bicycling to school.

- Encourage parents to get involved in Safe Routes to School programming.
- Recruit parents to lead walking school buses from homes or remote drop-off locations.

- Invite walking and bicycling parents to socialize with other parents and school staff during drop-off and pick-up transition times, thereby creating a sense of community while encouraging parents to remain engaged in walking or bicycling to school.
- Invite parents as special guests to participate in on-campus walking programs.

Discuss transportation options.

Encourage students to discuss transportation options with their families. This could be accomplished through homework assignments and service learning projects.

Advance schools' readiness to support walking and bicycling to school.

Engage traditionally disadvantaged communities, as they seem to be enhancing their readiness to support safe and active school travel. These communities also stand to gain more than other communities to enhance children's safety as they walk or bike to and from school, as well as outside of school and on the weekends.

Encourage walking and bicycling to and from school.

- Use prominent banners that promote safe walking and bicycling to school and elsewhere.
- Place bike racks in visible locations at school and around town.
- Develop school policies that include safe walking and bicycling.
- Use consistent school-parent communications that feature walking and bicycling as viable transportation options.

Improve infrastructure so more adults and children have the opportunity to walk and bike separated from traffic.

Nationally, parent survey results cite lack of sidewalks and safe places to cross as barriers to walking or biking between home and school. Changes to the built environment that make walking and biking safer and more appealing can significantly increase use of these travel modes. A large-scale study of 801 schools—about half that participated in Safe Routes to School and half that did not—showed how schools that implemented pedestrian and bicycle engineering improvements saw an immediate 18 percent increase in walking and bicycling to school.

Reference: McDonald, N. C., Steiner, R. L., Lee, C., Rhoulac Smith, T., Zhu, X., & Yang, Y. (2014). Impact of the safe routes to school program on walking and bicycling. *Journal of the American Planning Association*, 80(2), 153-167. doi:10.1080/01944363.2014.956654.



A North Carolina Safe Routes to School Project