

Chapter 5—Education

5.5 Education & Encouragement of a Safe Routes School Program



Introduction

The Safe Routes to School (SRTS) program gives community leaders, schools, and parents the opportunity to improve safety around schools and encourage more children, including ones with disabilities, to walk and bike to school safely. By increasing the number of students walking and biking to school, the program helps to reduce traffic congestion around schools and improve health and the environment; in return communities become more livable for everyone ([The National Center for Safe Routes to School](#)).

There are five areas that are covered by a successful Safe Routes to School program. The five E's include: Engineering, Education, Enforcement, Encouragement, and Evaluation. This section will focus on education and encouragement.

Education

Related to SRTS, education activities are an important element to raise awareness of the benefits and goals of the program. Education activities are closely linked to encouragement strategies (see below). The main goal of an SRTS education component is to teach pedestrians and bicyclists traffic safety skills. Education programs can have long-lasting effects on the community as they not only teach children how to walk and bike safely but also inform parents and other drivers how to drive more safely around pedestrians and bicyclists. In order to come up with the right educational strategy, it is important to work as the SRTS committee (made up of teachers, parents, and community leaders) in determining who needs to be educated, when the education should start and what information needs to be shared and how to share it.

SRTS education strategies typically focus on the following:

- Teaching traffic safety skills
- Creating safety awareness
- Fostering life-long safety habits
- Including parents, neighbors, and other drivers

Examples of education programs are:

- Bike Rodeos
- Bike Education Classes
- Walk-a-thons
- Safety Stations set up at schools or bike rodeos that focus on topics such as Pedestrian Safety, Bike Safety, 911 Emergency, or Railroad Safety



▲ Bike Rodeo in Pickerington, Ohio
(Photo: Pickerington SRTS Committee)

- Elementary kids learn how to safely bike on the road at a bike rodeo.



▲ Bike Education Gahanna, Ohio
(Photo: Gahanna SRTS Committee)

- Elementary kids learn the rules of the road at a station at a bike rodeo.

Encouragement

As part of the SRTS program, encouragement strategies focus on the benefits of walking and biking to school. Encouragement strategies are necessary in order to create excitement and interest in walking and biking. Encouragement can include special events, walking and biking clubs, poster contests, or activities that show parents and kids that walking and biking is a lot of fun.

Encouragement and education are closely related. In fact, while encouraging parents and kids to walk and bike, you can educate them on the safety and benefits of walking and biking. Encouragement builds interest in the SRTS program and the excitement will create the support that is needed for long-term projects, such as reconstruction or new construction of a sidewalk.

Encouragement activities should be chosen based on the number of kids that are able to walk and bike from home to school. However, children who live too far or have unsafe routes to school should also be considered. Encouragement activities should be easy to start and require little or no funding. Anyone in the community can organize an event and all children should be involved, including children with disabilities. When planning an activity it should show quick success and generate excitement for other strategies that may require more resources.

Examples of Encouragement Incentives and Activities include:

- Reward Program/Incentives (golden shoe, little feet, stickers)
- Walking School Bus
- MORPC Walk to School Toolkit

MORPC promotes and coordinates Walk to School efforts around the region. MORPC partners with agencies, including schools, health departments, service departments, police agencies, and parent associations, among others, to provide toolkits and other resources to the community to help with their walk to school initiatives. The goal is to bring communities together, to build partnerships among different agencies, and to work toward a safer and more livable region. More information about MORPC's efforts can be found on its website at <http://www.morpc.org/walktoschool>.

► Par Excellence Award in Newark, Ohio (Photo: Par Excellence SRTS Committee)

- The Golden Shoe was awarded to the class with the most walkers/bikers.



► Walking School Bus in Worthington, Ohio (Photo: Jeff Stephens)

- Children in Worthington create signs to carry with them as they walk or bike to school.



▲ Walking School Bus in Gahanna, Ohio (Photo: MORPC)

- Kids walk and ride their bikes along a trail leading to their school on International Walk to School Day

Sources

Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission (MORPC). Walk to School.

www.morpc.org/walktoschool (retrieved February 7, 2011)

National Center for Safe Routes to School. Encouragement.

www.saferoutesinfo.org (retrieved February 1, 2011)

Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT). Safe Routes to School.

www.dot.state.oh.us/saferoutes (retrieved February 3, 2011)