



North Carolinians want choices in how they travel for work, errands, school and recreation. Communities in North Carolina are part of a growing nationwide trend to increase safe walking and bicycling as options for how students and their families get to school. NCDOT’s Safe Routes to School program works to make walking and bicycling to school safer and encourage more students and families to use those modes where possible. Through a joint partnership between NCDOT Safe Routes to School program and NC Division of Public Health, the Active Routes to School project reflects the importance of physical activity for children and the opportunity to build it into the daily trip to school. Active Routes to School Regional Coordinators help to implement Safe Routes to School strategies through local health departments across North Carolina.

Many schools are too far for students to walk from home or the route to school isn’t safe right now. These schools can still be part of Safe Routes to School through strategies like pedestrian safety education, walk at school programs and remote meeting locations.

About Safe Routes to School

Community-based Safe Routes to School programs work to make walking and bicycling to school safer and encourage more students and families to use those modes.

In addition to improving safety for children, Safe Routes to School programs can benefit a community’s quality of life by reducing traffic congestion and fuel consumption while increasing opportunities to be more physically active and connect with neighbors. As a result, SRTS programs can improve safety for all pedestrians and bicyclists in the community.

Many communities struggle with a lack of safe places to walk and bicycle, congested roads, poor air quality, and few available options for physical activity for children.

- Fewer children walk or bicycle to school than did so a generation ago:
 - In 1969, 48 percent of students between the ages of 5 and 14 walked or bicycled to or from school.ⁱ
 - In 2009, 13 percent of students between the ages of 5 and 14 walked or bicycled to or from school.ⁱ
 - In 1969, 89 percent of students in grades K through eight who lived within one mile of school usually walked or bicycled to school.ⁱⁱ
 - In 2009, only 35 percent of students in grades K through eight who lived within one mile of school usually walked or bicycled to school even once a week.ⁱ

- Fifteen percent of North Carolina children ages 5-17 live within one mile of their school and 34% live within two miles, however, only 4% walk or ride a bicycle to school at least once a week.ⁱⁱⁱ
- Parents driving their children to school make up 10-14% of morning rush hour traffic.ⁱ

When appropriate and safe, walking and bicycling to school is an experience that can help children develop a sense of independence and confidence in their abilities.

The Federal Safe Routes to School program was established in 2006 and provided funding to all State Departments of Transportation. More recent legislation did not include funds specifically for Safe Routes to School, though projects to improve walking and bicycling safety are still eligible under the Transportation Alternatives Program.

Safe Routes to School programs use the five “E’s”:

- **Education:** Education activities target parents, neighbors and other drivers in the community to remind them about safe driving near walkers and bicyclists. Parents serve as role models for their children and play an important part in teaching them pedestrian and bicycle safety. Education activities also [teach students how to walk and bike safely](#) and the benefits of doing so.
- **Encouragement:** Encouragement strategies generate excitement about walking and bicycling safely to school. Special events like International Walk to School Day and ongoing activities like walking school buses and bike trains can often be started relatively easily with little cost and a focus on fun.
- **Enforcement:** Enforcement activities can help to change unsafe behaviors of drivers, bicyclists and pedestrians. The role of the police officers often goes beyond enforcement and can be included in all strategies of the SRTS program.
- **Engineering:** Engineering addresses the built environment with tools that can be used to create safe places to walk or bike and can also influence the way people behave. Infrastructure changes may not only improve safety for children, but they also may encourage more walking and bicycling by the general public.
- **Evaluation:** Evaluation is used to determine if the aims of the strategies are being met and to assure that resources are directed toward efforts that show the greatest likelihood of success. Also, evaluation can identify needed adjustments to the program while it is underway.

For more information about each of these strategies, visit the National Center for Safe Routes to School’s [Safe Routes to School Guide](#).

How to Start a Safe Routes to School Program

Each school and community starts their SRTS program with different circumstances. For example, some schools have great places for walking and bicycling but few students that take advantage of them. Other communities have children who walk and bicycle to school in unsafe conditions or along poorly maintained routes. Some communities do not have children walking or bicycling to school at all. Each situation presents an opportunity to improve the walking and bicycling conditions for students traveling to school.

Successful Safe Routes to School programs involve the whole community. Parents, children, neighborhood groups, schools, law enforcement officers, community leaders and transportation and public health professionals can help identify the issues and develop solutions.

While each situation is unique, the basic steps to starting a Safe Routes to School program include:

- 1. Bring together the right people:** Identify people who want to make walking and bicycling to school safe and appealing for children. Sharing concerns, interests and knowledge among a variety of community members with diverse expertise can enable groups to tackle many different issues.
- 2. Hold a kick-off meeting:** The kick-off meeting has two main goals - to create a vision and generate next steps.
- 3. Gather information and identify issues:** Collecting information can help to identify needed program elements and provide a means to measure the impact of the program later.
- 4. Identify solutions:** Solutions to issues identified by the group will include a combination of education, encouragement, engineering and enforcement strategies.
- 5. Make a plan:** The SRTS plan does not need to be lengthy but should include education, encouragement, engineering and enforcement strategies, a time schedule, a map of the area covered by the plan and an explanation of how the program will be evaluated.
- 6. Get the plan and people moving:** There are things that can be done right away without major funding, so some parts of the SRTS plan can begin while waiting on other parts.
- 7. Evaluate, adjust and keep going:** After the program begins, careful monitoring will identify which strategies work well and which are not going as planned.
- 8. Two tips to jumpstart your efforts:**
- 9.** Contact your [Regional Active Routes to School Coordinator](#) to see how they can help.
- 10.** Many communities find celebrating [Walk to School Day or Bike to School Day](#) is a great way to build enthusiasm and bring visibility to safety concerns or other barriers.

Learn more about starting a [Safe Routes to School program](#).

Evidence for Safe Routes to School

- [Trends in Walking and Bicycling to School from 2007 to 2012.](#)

A study using 525,000 K-8 parent surveys revealed an increase in walking to school from 12.4 percent in 2007 to 15.7percent in 2012 in communities where walking to school was slightly more feasible than average. Surveys came from schools with ranging amounts of SRTS activity, from those seeking SRTS funds to get started to those actively conducting SRTS programs.

- [Impact of the Safe Routes to School program on walking and biking: Eugene, Oregon study](#)

The study found education combined with other SRTS interventions was associated with increases in walking and biking of 5–20 percentage points

- [Getting Results: Communities that have reduced traffic using Safe Routes to School](#)
- [Getting Results: Communities that have reduced speeding and distracted driving using Safe Routes to School](#)
- [The Association Between School-Based Physical Activity, Including Physical Education, and Academic Performance](#)

Get Help

- Locate your [Regional Active Routes to School Coordinator](#)
- The NCDOT SRTS office recommends working with your municipality or directly with your NCDOT Division office and MPO/RPO to be included in a list of SRTS-related infrastructure priorities. They can help you in developing a plan for addressing your concerns and discussing funding possibilities.
- Contact the North Carolina Safe Routes to School Coordinator:

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Resources

[Let's Go NC! Pedestrian and Bicycle Safety Skills K – 5 Curriculum](#)

[How to Plan a Walk to School Day Event](#)

[Walk and Bike to School Day](#)

[National Center for Safe Routes to School](#)

[Watch for Me NC Pedestrian and Bicycle Safety Campaign](#)

[SRTS: Improving Health, Safety and Transportation Ready-to-use PowerPoint Presentation](#)

ⁱ The National Center for Safe Routes to School. (2011). How Children Get to School: School Travel Patterns from 1969 to 2009. Available at http://saferoutesinfo.org/sites/default/files/resources/NHTS_school_travel_report_2011_0.pdf.

ⁱⁱ U.S. Department of Transportation. (1972). Nationwide Personal Transportation Survey, Transportation Characteristics of School Children. Available at <http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/ohim/1969/q.pdf>.

ⁱⁱⁱ North Carolina State Center for Health Statistics. (2011). Child Health Assessment and Monitoring Program (CHAMP). Available at <http://www.schs.state.nc.us/schs/champ/2011/topics.html>.