SAFE ROUTES TO SCHOOL PROGRAMS IN RURAL CALIFORNIA

A Guide for Communities and Partners

September 2015

California Safe Routes to School Technical Assistance Resource Center, a Program of California Active Communities, a joint Unit of the University of California, San Francisco and the California Department of Public Health, funded by the Federal Highway Administration through a Safe Routes to School Non-infrastructure award from the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This document was created by the California Safe Routes to School Technical Assistance Resource Center, a program of California Active Communities, a joint Unit of the University of California, San Francisco and the California Department of Public Health and funded by the Federal Highway Administration through a Safe Routes to School Non-infrastructure award from the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans).

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The California Safe Routes to School Technical Assistance Resource Center would like to acknowledge contributions and input provided by local health department leaders, non-profit organizations, schools, and advocates working to promote SRTS efforts in rural counties throughout California.

For more information, visit the California Safe Routes to School Technical Assistance Resource Center at www.casaferoutestoschool.org.

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Resources and tools are referred to throughout this document and can be found on the Safe Routes to School Technical Assistance Resource Center's website.

INTRODUCTION

Safe Routes to School (SRTS) is an international movement to increase the number of children who safely walk and bicycle to and from school by promoting active transportation, teaching children and families pedestrian and bicycle safety skills, enforcing rules of the road, and identifying infrastructure changes that improve safety and access for pedestrians and bicyclists in the built environment. SRTS programs can reduce pedestrian and bicycle injuries and fatalities, increase physical activity of children and their families, improve the air quality around schools, decrease traffic congestion near schools, strengthen community cohesion, and address certain forms of violence. SRTS programs apply a holistic approach to assist communities in providing safe and accessible routes to and from school and other neighborhood destinations. SRTS are critical to rebuilding and expanding safe, active transportation choices not only for school-age youth, but for people of all ages and abilities in the community. Although every SRTS program looks different, successful SRTS programs traditionally include all elements of the SRTS "Five E's": Engineering, Education, Encouragement, Enforcement, and Evaluation activities.

California has a long tradition of successful SRTS programs. In 1998, the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) secured funding from the California Office of Traffic Safety to support a SRTS project in Marin County, which established the model for national SRTS efforts. Since then, SRTS has grown dramatically in urban, suburban and rural areas in California and across the nation. SRTS efforts are supported by state and federal transportation funding to facilitate safe opportunities for children to walk and bicycle to school. In California, the primary source of funding for SRTS is the Active Transportation Program (ATP), administered by the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans), which specifically provides a percentage of the program monies to rural and disadvantaged communities.

Cultivating SRTS opportunities and active transportation cultural shifts in any community takes time, innovation, collaboration and persistence. This Guide explores strategies for advancing safe walking and bicycling to and from school in rural California and provides resources to help communities collaborate for success. From launching a SRTS program, to conducting community planning for SRTS projects, to learning how other rural California communities have maintained successful SRTS programs, this Guide can inform at all levels of SRTS programs and projects.

While some rural California communities are beginning to see the benefits of SRTS programs, many continue to struggle with common barriers to safely walking and bicycling to and from school including long travel distances, high traffic volumes and speeds, unsafe intersections and crossings, and the fear of crime and violence. This Guide provides an overview of some of these barriers and presents strategies and tools

to address common challenges and begin a successful SRTS program in a rural community. As acknowledged throughout this Guide, there is a wide range of rural community types; the county highlights in this Guide represent a few of the different rural communities in California. Active transportation work continues to develop across the state and these examples portray some of the work being undertaken – and successes achieved – in a sampling of the state's rural communities.

Section One of this Guide provides an overview of walking and bicycling from a national perspective to rural-specific observations including a map notating the expanse of rural communities in California. Rural challenges and opportunities are presented through four core themes: the physical environment, political considerations, school capacity and rural perspectives.

Section Two of this Guide shares some specific actions communities can take to build and strengthen the likelihood of success of SRTS efforts. Forming a rural SRTS task force is highlighted. This section also addresses the need for parent participation and introduces strategies for recruiting, training and retaining volunteers including incentives that may aid in SRTS efforts. Finally, the integration of remote drop-off or "Park and Walk" locations as a way of creatively increasing student physical activity before school is described.

Section Three concludes the overview and background of *Safe Routes to School Programs in Rural California: A Guide for Communities and Partners*.

Section Four of this Guide provides two tools for exploring infrastructure needs around rural schools. The first tool addresses use of a walkability audit for the purpose of observing and evaluating the safety and accessibility issues around a school. It includes how a walkability audit works, key people to include as well as ideas for sharing results. A walkability audit guide is introduced, which can be used to collect information about a community's environment.

The second tool addresses prioritizing SRTS rural projects. This prioritization tool offers insights on three categories of criteria to assess: school capacity, school internal need and school external need. Each category is detailed with descriptions of indicators and follow-up steps for completing an inventory and a scoring process. Resources to assist in the SRTS project prioritization are forms included within the tool: a SRTS Prioritization Metrics Tool, a School SRTS Inventory Survey, and a SRTS Prioritization Metrics Spatial Component Instructions.

Every community is unique in its SRTS program process and timeline. The layout of this Guide is designed in a manner that best serves a community's needs. A community may begin with a section of this Guide that is immediately relevant to its needs, or choose to read through this Guide in its entirety to support community efforts in initiating or continuing SRTS work, inspire brainstorming, or provide clarification on different strategies. Improvements usually happen in stages and often with a range of partners. Patience, communication and follow through are critical to a community's SRTS success.

The examples in this Guide, *Safe Routes to School Programs in Rural California: A Guide for Communities and Partners*, may serve as a starting point to establish and grow SRTS programs. For further assistance in implementing SRTS efforts in a community, please contact the SRTS Technical Assistance Resource Center (TARC) for additional resources, case studies and assistance at casaferoutestoschool.org.

BACKGROUND:
Walking and Bicycling in Rural California

Today, walking and bicycling – or "active transportation" – are acknowledged as an opportunity for children and their families to stay active and healthy. However, cultural, environmental, demographic, and economic changes in the United States over the past few decades have made safe walking and bicycling to school less accessible for many children and their families.

Rural communities are home to some of our most vulnerable children—many who may already be walking and bicycling to school in unsafe conditions. In rural and urban areas alike, children from low income families are more likely than their higher income counterparts to walk and bicycle to school, and rural areas often have a large low-income population compared to urban areas.[i,ii] Nationally, the majority of fatal vehicular crashes occur in rural areas, and pedestrian fatality rates are higher in rural areas because of higher driving speeds.[iii,iv]

Across the country, rural children and adolescents have higher rates of obesity than their urban counterparts.[v] In California, teens in rural counties are more likely to be overweight than teens in urban areas. Half of all counties in the Central Valley have a lower proportion of teens with normal weight than the state.[vi] Maintaining health in these communities is critical as rural areas often have fewer treatment options and reduced access to health care.

Additionally, rural residents have higher rates of age-adjusted mortality, disability, and chronic disease than their urban counterparts. These health risks are further compounded by the low socioeconomic status, high incidence of both smoking and obesity, and low levels of physical activity prevalent in rural communities.[vii]

By determining the needs and challenges of students walking and bicycling to and from school in rural regions, communities can identify resource gaps as well as strategies to support active transportation projects that improve the health and safety of all children and their families living in rural areas.

Research indicates that the built environment – the design of the communities we live in – impacts our health, and that communities should be designed to accommodate safe mobility of people of all ages and abilities. SRTS programs are an integral mechanism for rural communities to embark on community design efforts.

An important community design decision that affects children's health and safety is the placement of schools. School location has had a dramatic impact on how children get to and from school. In the 1960's, most schools were located in the center of communities and nearly 41 percent of students lived within walking distance to school. Of those students living within walking distance, 88 percent walked or bicycled to school. Beginning in the 1970's, schools began to be built on the outskirts of communities to take

advantage of more available acreage and cheaper land prices and to meet the needs of growing suburbs.

By 2009, the percentage of kindergarten through 8th grade students that lived within one mile of their school declined to 31 percent. Of those students, only 35 percent walked or bicycled to and from school.[viii] By 2009, 50.5 percent of California students aged 5 to 18 lived close enough to walk or bicycle to school, however, only 43 percent of students in this age range did.[ix]

More parents driving their children to and from school, not only decreases children's physical activity levels, but creates more traffic congestion around schools, increasing air pollution in school zones and contributing to dangerous traffic conditions that further discourage parents from allowing their children to walk or bicycle.

Unfortunately, due to the inherent design of rural communities, rural residents tend to have fewer safe options for active transportation. In rural areas, street facilities for walking and bicycling, such as sidewalks and bicycle lanes are often missing, inadequate or unsafe. Residents in rural areas have less active transportation options to access recreation centers, parks, and community centers. This often results in a car dependent community.

Nevertheless, and contrary to popular belief, walking and bicycling are a significant means of transportation in many rural communities. Although terrain, infrastructure, and land use patterns can be very different in rural areas than in urban ones, recent data from the U.S. Department of Transportation found that the share of work trips made by bicycle in small towns is nearly double that of urban centers.[x] Travel behavior varies depending on whether residents live in agricultural areas, tourist destinations, or on the fringe of urban areas. In the larger rural core areas, the proportion of residents making trips by walking and bicycling (9.57 percent) is close to that of the national rate (11.66 percent).[xi]

Imagine the possibilities.

The children in a family in a small rural town walk to the corner of their street to meet a group of friends to walk to school together. A mom leading the group waves goodbye to other parents headed off to work. The group stops in a church parking lot where a school bus is unloading other students who live far or up the mountainous, rural road. The students find their favorite teacher waiting for them, and together they walk the rest of the way to school.

Along the route to school students sing songs, skip, or wave their arms in the air. They smile; they laugh; they feel happy and have a sense of community.

After about ten minutes the students arrive at the intersection where the school crossing guard is waiting to safely guide them across the street. They walk safely across the intersection and on to the school campus. The students wave goodbye to their friends and make their way into their classrooms, calm and ready to learn.

This is what is possible and beginning to happen in rural communities across California.

WHAT IS RURAL?

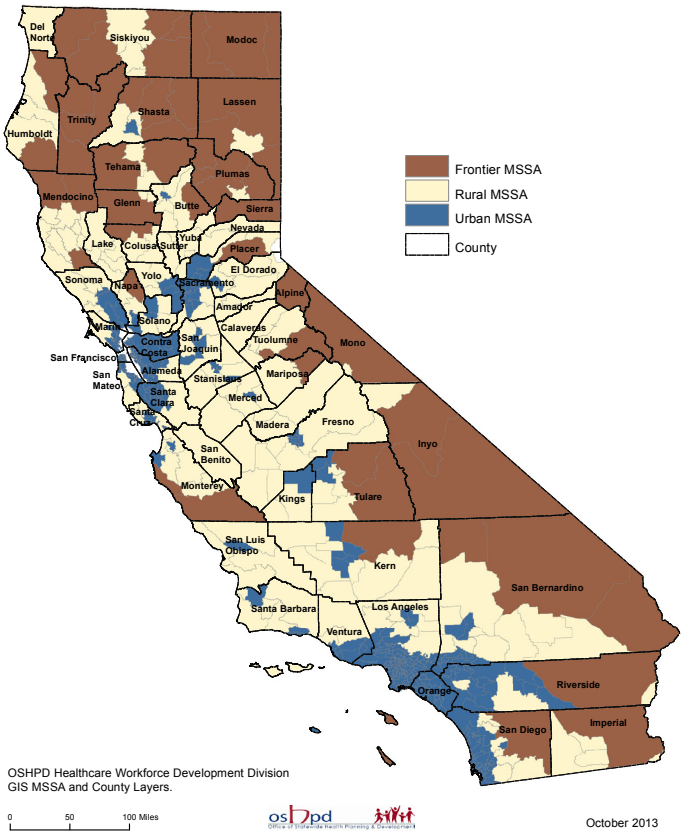
The term "rural" may bring to mind agricultural plains, winding mountainous roads, small town main streets, or small cities surrounded by scattered communities. Each of these landscapes exists in California, and all of them are considered rural. Unique rural conditions must be addressed in order to engage rural communities in SRTS efforts, remove barriers to safe walking and bicycling, and help parents and children feel more comfortable with recognizing walking and bicycling as a means of transportation to and from school and other neighborhood destinations.

Different agencies define rural in different ways. For the Active Transportation Program (ATP), the California Transportation Commission defines urban and rural areas based upon their relative share of the state population. "Small Urban" areas are those with populations of 5,001 to 200,000 people, and rural areas are those with populations of 5,000 or less.[xii] As defined by the U.S. Census Bureau, rural communities are non-urbanized areas of land that have a low population density of less than 50,000 people or are outside of areas with at least 2,500 and less than 50,000 people.[xiii]

The California State Office of Rural Health (CalSORH) considers 44 of California's 58 counties as rural, with 14 percent of the State's population residing in rural areas. Using U.S. Census total population, socioeconomic and demographic data, CalSORH delineates sub-city and sub-county geographical units as Medical Service Study Areas (MSSAs) that illustrate the State's population distribution. As indicated in the following map, much of California's land is considered rural: 80 percent of 156,000 square miles.[xiv]

As previously mentioned, rural residents are using active transportation to reach community destinations. The unique landscapes, land-use development, weather, norms, and political perspectives all influence whether active transportation and SRTS are supported and promoted in rural areas.

California Medical Service Study Areas (MSSA)
Frontier, Rural and Urban Defined Areas



- Urban MSSA: Population range 75,000 to 125,000
- Rural MSSA: Population density of less than 250 persons per square mile. No population center exceeds 50,000
- Frontier MSSA: Population density of less than 11 persons per square mile

SRTS IN CALIFORNIA'S RURAL COMMUNITIES:
A Review of Challenges and Opportunities

Introduction

To better realize the unique challenges and opportunities for walking and bicycling to school in California's rural areas, interviews were conducted with SRTS coordinators and advocates and examples collected from rural parts of California's Central Valley, the Sierra Region, Southern California, and North Coast. These stories revealed a diversity of issues, each as distinct as the geographical area represented. Included in this Guide as "County Highlights," the examples illustrate the challenges to implementing active transportation in rural communities, but also demonstrate a host of innovative opportunities.

Challenges and Opportunities

Rural communities often face similar challenges around walking and bicycling to those in urban areas, such as: topography, weather, and crime, gangs, or other violence. However, the diversity of additional challenges in rural areas is not always obvious and can further limit walking and bicycling opportunities. For example, many students in rural areas live long distances from their school, and there are often no sidewalks, regional transportation, or bicycle lanes along rural roads. Interviews with representatives from rural SRTS programs identified many barriers to walking and bicycling to school, including the physical environment, political considerations, school capacity, and select rural perspectives to undertake a SRTS program. With proper planning and oversight, rural communities around the state are moving forward in successfully overcoming these obstacles.

Common challenges preventing walking and bicycling:

- Residences are typically more dispersed in rural areas making it necessary to travel longer distances between home and destinations.
- Minimal or non-existent pedestrian and bicycle facilities make walking and bicycling dangerous, particularly along narrow, winding rural roads or roads with traffic moving at high speed.
- Difficult topography and uninviting walking environments tend to dissuade parents from allowing their children to walk or bicycle.
- Unfenced and unleashed dogs pose a threat to walking for students and families.
- Many rural students are bused to school, picked up from home or at bus stops on highly traveled roads or on state highways.
- Small and/or single school districts have less funding available for safety enhancements and programs such as school crossing guards. Teachers and administrators often serve in multiple positions resulting in overworked staff with little time or energy to invest in walking and bicycling education programs.
- Urban centers have higher tax bases to attract more funding for infrastructure improvements than rural communities, which are typically located in unincorporated areas with much smaller budgets.
- Residents of rural areas may embrace a culture of driving and a strong desire to preserve rural community characteristics, including limiting infrastructure such as sidewalks.
- Some rural communities have a conservative decision making body that is hesitant to embrace change.

Physical Environment

Challenges

The physical environment of rural areas contributes to unique barriers that prevent parents from allowing their children to walk or bicycle to school. Many rural schools are located on heavily traveled state highways, posing significant dangers to children walking and bicycling to and from school. For some of California's rural cities and communities, state highways serve as the town's main arterial and contribute to dangerous conditions resulting from the high speed and volume of through traffic. Inclement weather does not discriminate between urban and rural communities. However, heavy rain coupled with narrow, winding, dangerous roads and wet, muddy walking paths instead of sidewalks or bicycle lanes are not safe or inviting for pedestrians or bicyclists of any age. Also, heavy rain or snow in rural communities can lead to extremely severe environmental episodes such as flooding, mud slides, or snow-bound conditions, which may isolate residents from any mode of transportation.

Unincorporated areas often face the additional burden of competing with town centers for infrastructure funding. Jurisdictions have more representation to move infrastructure projects forward, whereas unincorporated areas with smaller populations tend to have fewer local elected officials representing residents. In addition, political representatives may not live in the area(s) of concern, making it more challenging for smaller communities to receive funding for streetscape improvements. Furthermore, some county regulations assign the burden of sidewalk improvements to property owners. If no new residential, commercial, or industrial developments have been constructed, counties are not necessarily required to install sidewalks.

COUNTY HIGHLIGHT - HUMBOLDT

Maple Creek School, located in Korbel, California is a rural unincorporated area only reachable by a two-lane road. While the road is not heavily traveled, only a narrow shoulder separates pedestrians from cars that tend to speed on this curvy, rural route.

The school Principal is hesitant to encourage students to walk to school due to hazards including speeding traffic, limited visibility on winding roadways, and the presence of wildlife such as black bears and mountain lions. These unique conditions found in rural communities don't always have a common solution and often present opportunities for innovation and collaborative planning.

Opportunities

SRTS programs throughout California and the nation have developed creative ways to address barriers unique to rural communities. Rural communities tend to have a high percentage of students who ride the bus to and from school due to the farther distances families live from schools. During Walk to School events, in which schools encourage safe walking and bicycling, remote drop-off or "Park and Walk" locations can be established as meeting places for children to convene and then walk to school supervised by adult chaperones. This allows students living too far from school to participate in walk activities. Some school districts have worked with their transportation managers to arrange for students who ride the bus to exit the bus at the remote drop-off location so they can walk the rest of the way to school with their friends. Parents are also encouraged to walk to school with their children from the remote drop-off location, allowing them time to visit with their children while helping them feel more comfortable with the idea of their children walking and bicycling to school.

Establishing on-campus activities such as walking around the track before school, during recess or after school is another method for students living far from school to participate in organized encouragement activities.

Conducting walkability assessments, or audits, are a strategy for addressing safety concerns in rural communities at school sites and surrounding neighborhoods. Walkability assessments are an opportunity for school officials, parents, students, community residents, and other stakeholders to learn about how the roadway environment around the school supports or inhibits safe walking and bicycling. In addition to identifying possible infrastructure improvements, the walkability assessment introduces strategies to address safety concerns such as encouragement activities, safety education, law enforcement activities, and community safety campaigns. Often conducted in a workshop style, walkability assessments create opportunities for public participation, which is necessary to garner community and school support to apply for SRTS funding. (Refer to the *Rural Walkability Audit Guide and Tool* in this Guide for more information).

Schools and school districts have existing structures in place that may serve as a forum to address concerns related to walking and bicycling such as traffic, safety, and wellness committees. School district wellness committees advise on the creation of school district wellness policies, which are required for all schools participating in the National School Lunch Program. Elements of the wellness plan include goals for physical activity and other school-based activities that promote student wellness. SRTS can be incorporated into wellness plans in a number of ways; examples include declaring administrative support for activities and programs, committing to the creation of secure bicycle storage, or establishing of a school crossing guard program. Some school districts have adopted policies that restructure student pick-up and drop-off areas to prioritize the safety of students traveling by foot or bicycle, and vehicle anti-idling policies to improve air quality around schools.

Refer to the SRTS TARC's SRTS Programs in Rural California: A Guide for Communities and Partners online resource page section for web addresses, resources, and tools that support the strategies described in this section:

- Get Out & Get Moving: Opportunities to Walk to School Through Remote Drop-Off Programs
- Model General Plan Language Supporting Safe Routes to Schools
- Incorporating Safe Routes to School into Local School Wellness Policies
- Main Street, California: A Guide for Improving Community and Transportation Vitality

Every California city and town must prepare a comprehensive, long term general plan to guide its future land use and development. These plans are an opportunity for communities to set goals and direct resources toward improving active transportation and SRTS. By including language supportive of SRTS in a city or county general plan, communities can establish an action plan to coordinate with community partners, prioritize infrastructure investments, and guide future development that promotes safe and active transportation.

It is important to note that while engineering projects can improve safety in the long-term, communities need to include education, encouragement and enforcement strategies, such as safety campaigns, speed limit reductions, and increased law enforcement patrols, for less expensive and more immediate ways to address safety.

COUNTY HIGHLIGHT - SHASTA

Shasta County located in Northern California is comprised of mountains and waterways with the town of Redding as the county seat.[xvi] Interstate 5 runs through the county with several state routes intersecting at various points providing transportation routes to approximately 165,000 residents.

Healthy Shasta – a partnership based in Redding that includes the county public health department and promotes healthy and active living – has helped create a strong foundation for SRTS efforts throughout the County. Healthy Shasta identified that Shasta College was in great need of safer routes for walking and bicycling to the campus as well as within the campus itself. Shasta College students primarily live off-campus and many are low-income, making car ownership, parking fees, and even public transportation unaffordable.

To begin improving active transportation options for students, Healthy Shasta hosted a walking and bicycling workshop, including walkability audits, for Shasta College and the surrounding community in the Fall of 2013. These efforts coincided with Shasta College's update to its Campus Master Plan, including the creation of a Bicycle Plan. The workshop participants identified key issues and opportunities for on-campus walking and bicycling as well as access to the campus from Shasta County roadways. One of the primary access points to Shasta College, the Old Oregon Trail/Collyer Drive/Shasta College Drive intersection was identified as a major barrier to walking and bicycling to campus. The report generated from the workshop and its walkability audits documented findings and suggestions for next steps, including a proposal to examine options for addressing the challenge of accessing the Shasta College campus from the surrounding community.

Healthy Shasta received monies from CA4Health, a project of the Public Health Institute in partnership with the California Department of Public Health with funding from the Centers of Disease Control and Prevention's Community Transformation Grant. These monies allowed Healthy Shasta to complete a feasibility study focused on the "last mile" bicycle access to campus from Old Oregon Trail and College View Drive. The feasibility study reflects the coordination and cooperation between three key stakeholders: Shasta College, Shasta County Department of Public Works, and Caltrans. The roadway improvements proposed in the study crossed several jurisdictional boundaries and included road segments within the County right-of-way, Caltrans right-of-way, and Shasta College property. Shasta College and Shasta County can include this feasibility study in project prioritization efforts and future grant applications.

Shasta's SRTS work continues to expand. Healthy Shasta staff has been invited to join the Shasta Regional Transportation Agency's (SRTA) Technical Advisory Committee, and have partnered with the Shasta County Department of Public Works and Shasta College to apply for Caltrans ATP funding.

COUNTY HIGHLIGHT - HUMBOLDT

Washington Elementary is located in Eureka, the principal city and county seat in the Redwood Empire region of California. Located on U.S. Route 101 it is bordered on one side by Humboldt Bay and on the other by mountains filled with redwood trees. Eureka has a population of approximately 27,000 residents.[xv]

The SRTS program at Washington Elementary School in Eureka developed a system to allow children who ride the bus to school to participate in Walk to School Day. The school district requires bus drivers to only allow students to exit the bus at designated bus stops. Therefore, organizers worked with the school principal and transportation manager to designate the remote drop off location as a bus stop.

If students brought a signed permission slip they were allowed to ride the bus as far as the remote drop off location and then walk the rest of the way to school while supervised by adult volunteers. The school principal even volunteered to meet the bus at the remote drop off location every month to walk to school with the students. (Learn more about this strategy in the *Rural Remote Drop-off Location Guide*).

Political Concerns

Challenges

Many rural communities do not prioritize construction of pedestrian and bicycle facilities over road maintenance and construction projects. Rural counties are often dispersed with many miles of roads to maintain. Schools that lie in unincorporated parts of a county often have limited financial resources due to limited county budgets for making infrastructure improvements. Small communities can be overlooked entirely when it comes to funding opportunities and get passed up for infrastructure projects in favor of areas with a larger population. Therefore, in rural areas with a lack of safe infrastructure for pedestrians and bicyclists, schools and school districts sometimes feel the safest choice is to discourage children from walking and bicycling to school. These concerns have also led some rural schools to refuse to participate in Walk to School events or to modify them, such as by only conducting an on-campus walking activity.

Tight budgets often also force rural school districts into juggling staff, creating challenges that can result in high staff and school principal turnover rates. Subsequently, administrators who may have been supportive of SRTS programs one year might not return to school the following year. These staff changes can hinder or even halt programs entirely. If buy-in is lacking with the school district or school, educating administrators may be a critical first step toward establishing a SRTS program.

School closures present another challenge to SRTS as declining enrollment and school siting decisions often result in neighborhood schools closing their doors. These changes affect the distance that children must travel to get to school. School choice policies, which permit parents to opt out of their neighborhood school, also create barriers for students' ability to walk and bicycle and lead to increased traffic congestion around schools. These situations create traffic dangers as more children are being driven to school, putting additional cars on the road and in the queue to drop off and pick up children at school sites.

Additionally, there are some rural communities that have a conservative decision-making body that is hesitant to embrace change. This does not have to be a barrier of forward movement. Often taking small steps, beginning with advocates and residents

sharing success stories with decision-makers, can assist in paving the way for more integrated education and action to support active transportation.

Opportunities

While rural communities have significant challenges to implementing successful SRTS programs, they are often leading the way with innovative practices and policies. It is frequently easier to connect with local elected officials in small towns to discuss safety concerns. Local partnerships often help support SRTS efforts where governmental budget constraints exist and can be extremely useful in creating opportunities to improve walking and bicycling conditions. Collaborating with groups that have similar goals and forming a SRTS Task Force makes it possible to shed light on diverse views, make connections using data and effectively tackle issues from a broad professional perspective. (See *Forming a SRTS Task Force* in this Guide.)

While school administrators may agree that walking and bicycling are healthy for children, they are not always familiar with the SRTS program or understand how it is relevant to their school. Administrators may need to be educated about the myriad ways SRTS can support school district goals including boosting student achievement, improving student health, and potentially reducing absenteeism.[xvii]

Because rural communities are often overlooked when it comes to funding opportunities, SRTS awards and active transportation funding are particularly sought out to help create additional safe, inviting opportunities for children to be physically active in their community. However, competition between schools within a community for the same funding source is not beneficial. Using prioritization metrics to determine which schools have the greatest need and capacity to plan or implement SRTS programs is a way for rural communities to collaborate and determine which schools should receive priority for grant funding. Learn more about this strategy in the *SRTS Prioritization Metrics Guide* in this Guide.

COUNTY HIGHLIGHT - CALAVERAS

In Calaveras County, in the unincorporated city of San Andreas, the main street is State Route 49 and provides access to neighboring communities for approximately 2,800 residents.[xix] Highway 49 has a constant flow of high speed vehicles and is the major roadway access to the high school and elementary school, thus making it very dangerous for children and adolescents to walk or bicycle to school. Through monies from CA4Health, the Calaveras County Public Health Department formed a SRTS Task Force to strategize opportunities for increasing safe physical activity in San Andreas. Building on a desire for community engagement and education, this dynamic task force was able to engage most of San Andreas' community organizations and leaders to support various strategies for improving safety and active transportation.

The relationships formed during SRTS efforts resulted in an invitation to the Calaveras County Public Health Department from the Calaveras Council of Governments to become a non-voting member of its Technical Advisory Committee. This new partnership provides public health staff an unprecedented opportunity to regularly report on its work and voice local concerns to a major decision-making body that can impact the development of more walkable and bikeable communities throughout the County.

COUNTY HIGHLIGHT - TUOLUMNE

Tuolumne County in California is located in the central Sierra Nevada and has a total area of 2,274 square miles. Major rivers flank the north and south region of the county with the Central Valley in the west. The Sierra Nevada range forms the eastern border and is well known as the home of Yosemite National Park. Small-town communities are dispersed throughout the county and are surrounded by large areas consisting of agriculture, open vegetation, and low-density development. Driving is the primary mode of transportation in Tuolumne County with 78 percent of employed county residents driving to work, as compared to 73 percent throughout California. About three percent of employed county residents use other means such as walking and bicycling to get to work. [xx,xxi]

In 2011, Tuolumne County Public Health Department staff partnered with schools and community stakeholders to support SRTS policy efforts that synergistically promote safe active transportation throughout the entire County. A SRTS Task Force was established with support from CA4Health.

In early 2012, the Tuolumne County Department of Public Health conducted a Health in All Policies (HiAP) review. The final HiAP report included recommendations for promoting safe physical activity and active transportation by implementing SRTS policies and programs.[xxii] In September 2013, the Tuolumne County Board of Supervisors adopted the HiAP report's SRTS related recommendations and committed to considering many of them for inclusion in the General Plan update scheduled to take place the following year.

As 2012 unfolded, public health staff offered support to other county departments' staff to provide local data to support the creation of a new Healthy Communities Element of the General Plan update. Public health staff was invited to review the draft plan and provide recommendations on safe, active transportation including the development of walking/bicycling route maps to schools, the creation of SRTS district policies and administrative regulations, the provision of traffic safety education and bicycle skills training to county residents, and the encouragement of active transportation to and from school. As of this publication, the Healthy Communities Element of the General Plan update was accepted by the County Planning Commission and the County Board of Supervisors in draft form. The final draft is currently undergoing an Environmental Impact Study and final adoption is expected.

In addition to these important milestones, new relationships established through public health staff over the course of three years led to more awareness and support for safe active transportation in the county. The Tuolumne County Transportation Council, a joint powers agency, eventually designated an Active Transportation Coordinator position for the county. Three planning projects were initiated as a result of the partnership between the Tuolumne County Public Health Department and the Tuolumne County Transportation Council, including the Dragoon Gulch Trail Master Plan and the Groveland Pedestrian Access Plan. Tuolumne County Department of Public Health now has a stronger voice in the active transportation conversation and has served as a bridge between governing bodies and local residents.

COUNTY HIGHLIGHT - HUMBOLDT

Humboldt County in California is located on the far north coast and is home to nearly 135,000 residents. It encompasses 2.3 million acres and has 97 public and charter schools. Because of its remote location, infrastructure, climate and culture, the region faces many challenges around safe active transportation.[xxiii] In spite of these challenges, Humboldt has been a leader of SRTS programming and policy-making.

In 2012, an existing SRTS County-wide Task Force began investigating county needs and opportunities for creating safer and more pedestrian and bicycle friendly streets around schools with monies from CA4Health. Concurrently, the Humboldt County Association of Governments (HCAOG) initiated a subcommittee to develop a SRTS prioritization tool.

The SRTS Task Force was comprised of many partners including administrators from various schools, the California Highway Patrol (CHP), public health staff, public works staff, parents, non-profit organizations, and community members. Together they reached across sectors to improve safe active transportation around schools throughout the county and to promote education around safe walking and bicycling.

Local law enforcement agencies educated the community of the importance of paying attention and driving slower in school zones. They shared safety messages, provided additional patrols during school drop-off and pick-up hours, assisted with school crossing guard trainings and continued enforcement reminders to drivers as schools resumed session from summer breaks.

As SRTS projects evolved, and schools and communities became more engaged, stakeholders began to explore the options for reducing speeds around schools. To gain support for potential school zone speed reductions, they referenced California's Safer School Zone Act, which was established in 2008 and allows counties and cities to expand 25 miles per hour school zones to 100 feet and reduce speeds around certain public school locations, where appropriate, to 15 miles per hour.

By April of 2015, the SRTS County-wide Task Force was prepared to make its case on traffic speed reductions in schools zones. It submitted a letter of support to the Humboldt County Board of Supervisors requesting the adoption of California's Safer School Zone Act as an additional tool for the county and law enforcement to improve safety around schools. Also included in its submission was a sample ordinance requesting a decrease of speed limits on various county roads near schools, traffic-related pedestrian injury data, and a list of ten schools found eligible and recommended for speed reduction due to prior engineering traffic studies. Local stakeholders attended the May 12, 2015, County Board of Supervisors meeting in support of the measure, and the board voted unanimously to pass an ordinance California's Safer School Zone Act in Humboldt County.

Often times in cases where an individual or organizational body presents concern, shared information and encouragement from invested stakeholders can make a difference.

Grant Elementary School is located in Eureka, California a mountainous region accessible by U.S. Route 101 in Humboldt County. When the school Principal was first approached about starting a SRTS program, she did not feel comfortable with the idea. So, SRTS champions educated the school Principal on SRTS strategies. The school has since participated in a SRTS Workshop and Walk Audit and received funding to improve infrastructure near the school to allow for safer walking and bicycling opportunities.

School Capacity

Challenges

School capacity, or the interest and ability to support and sustain SRTS programs, can be a challenge in rural communities. While some rural schools have high enrollment, other schools serve remote areas and have a very small school population. Small schools have inherent challenges: fewer staff to support programs, tight budgets, and fewer parents to volunteer in programs such as SRTS. Another challenge of rural schools is single-school districts, which tend to have fewer resources available and generally are not prioritized over larger districts for funding. School administrators and staff often serve multiple positions within a one-school district such as a Superintendent/Principal or janitor/bus driver.

The multiple roles of school staff may hinder time and resources available to be dedicated to SRTS programs. It can also be more difficult to enact policies that encourage walking and bicycling as a means of transportation to and from school. Reduced school staff capacity also affects the ability to fund or staff crossing guard programs.

Equity is also an important consideration for many rural walking and bicycling programs as rural areas often have fewer opportunities for high-paying jobs than urban areas. Parents of low-income families may work multiple jobs, making them less available to volunteer for programs. Low-income schools tend to have more carless households with no means of getting children to school other than walking, bicycling, or riding the bus, making safe routes to school even more critical.

COUNTY HIGHLIGHT – SOLANO

Solano County in California is located in the eastern most county of the North Bay with a portion of land extending into the Sacramento Valley. The county consists of seven cities home to the majority of the residential population totally approximately 413,000 people.[xxiv] Utilizing monies from CA4Health, the Solano County Public Health Department (SCPHD) staff worked with the cities of Vacaville, Fairfield and Vallejo to pilot four Walking School Bus (WSB) programs. The programs at each of the schools shared several keys to success including school principal involvement, one or more parent champions, assessing and mapping the safest route(s), training and equipping the adult/parent volunteers, and promoting the WSB programs.

SCPHD staff also provided training and tools for volunteer parents, including development of a WSB program "how to" manual, teaching parents "rules of the road" and proper intersection crossing behaviors, as well as how to manage groups of students crossing roads safely. Safety vests, whistles, and signs were provided to the parents. Acknowledging parents' contributions and thanking the parent champions publically helped to sustain their involvement. In addition, the relationships built with the schools' front office staff and principals were instrumental to the WSB programs' success.

When the pilot WSB programs began to show promises of success, Solano Transportation Authority (STA) wrote a Caltrans grant with assistance from the SCPHD to apply for funds to continue and to expand the WSB programs. When the award was granted, STA hired new staff to coordinate a county-wide WSB program, which continues to grow and is operating in multiple schools in eight school districts in Solano County.

Although the work done in this county focused on larger cities not usually considered rural, the work served as a model to enhance SRTS practices and active transportation efforts throughout Solano County.

Opportunities

SRTS programs are an opportunity to bring school and community together around issues that are important to everyone. Understanding the unique opportunities and challenges schools face around safe walking and bicycling is important to assess early in the planning process. Engaging and listening to parents, principals, teachers, and other stakeholders early on can address potential problems and keep programs running smoothly. It is important to provide appropriate training opportunities for parents and community members participating as volunteers so that they not only feel prepared but are enthusiastic, empowered, and able to sustain programs.

As noted earlier, when school administrators understand how SRTS programs can complement and support academic goals, they are more likely committed to working with stakeholders to initiate SRTS activities and attract funding for needed infrastructure improvements and complimentary non-infrastructure efforts. There is evidence that physical activity and fitness boost students' learning, memory, and test scores, and that healthy students have lower rates of absenteeism.[xxv]

Involving school facilities and maintenance staff is important since they are often applying for funding for school improvement projects. It is key to assure teachers, staff, and administration that their participation in the program contributes to its success. Be transparent about the work that may be needed so that expectations and commitments can be realistically made. Share details about outside partners who may also be able to assist to distribute the work. This helps build trust and lay the groundwork for a strong working relationship. Opportunities to work with school staff may present themselves within existing school district groups such as transportation, safety, or wellness committees. Stakeholders can introduce support for SRTS activities by working within existing institutional and policy structures where shared goals and interests align. By working with a school district's wellness policy, for example, student health and physical activity goals can be bolstered by acommitment to SRTS activities.

Finally, utilizing a prioritization tool such as the one provided in this Guide can help coordinate local SRTS efforts and maximize the impact of limited staff time and funding. It can streamline decision-making around SRTS projects and increase the capacity for effective programs and funding applications. Learn more about this strategy in the *SRTS Prioritization Metrics Tool* in this Guide.

Refer to the SRTS TARC's SRTS Programs in Rural California: A Guide for Communities and Partners online resource page section for web addresses, resources, and tools that support the strategies described in this section:

- Cultivating Support for Safe Routes to School: A Guide to Building Relationships with School Board Members and Superintendents
- Healthy Students, Thriving Districts: Including Safe Routes to School in District Policies Key Facts for School Board Members and Superintendents
- Crosswalk: Where the Needs of School Principals and Safe Routes to School Programs Intersect
- California Pedestrian and Bicycle Safety Curriculum for Grades 4 and 5
- Incorporating Safe Routes to School into Local School Wellness Policies

COUNTY HIGHLIGHT - IMPERIAL

Imperial County is located in the far southeast of California and is the most economically diverse region in the state. Bordered by Arizona and Mexico, with a population of approximately 180,000 residents, it is a melting pot of Hispanic and European American cultures. Agriculture accounts for 48 percent of all employment. The county seat is El Centro, with Interstate 8 connecting it to the rest of the County via three additional state highways.[xxvi,xxvii]

With monies from CA4Health, the Imperial County Public Health Department convened a SRTS County-wide Task Force. The task force assessed opportunities to support safe walking and bicycling within small communities throughout the county. Over the course of three years, working with multiple partners including law enforcement, schools, community organizations, and local champions, several successes emerged.

In the town of Brawley, the school district adopted a policy supporting SRTS programs and activities. The policy language encouraged the establishment of new SRTS programs; exploration of SRTS funding sources; community evaluation regarding attitudes toward walking and bicycling to school; review of pedestrian and bicyclist injury data and tracking student modes of transportation as well as their attendance. In tandem with policy efforts, Brawley Elementary School District held Walk to School events, provided pedestrian and bicyclist safety education and added bicycle racks to their campuses, which benefit approximately 3,800 students.

With support from the Imperial County Public Health Department, other small communities followed suit. In September 2013, bicycle racks were

provided to the City of Holtville and the Quechan Indian Tribe and were installed at various school locations. In October 2013, the cities of Holtville, Brawley and Westmorland, and the Quechan Tribe located in Winterhaven, hosted Walk to School events reaching over 1,500 students. The City of Holtville adopted a SRTS resolution to formalize systems and environmental change strategies that support SRTS, which impacts four schools. In February 2014, the Quechan Tribe adopted a resolution stating that the tribe will participate in the county-wide SRTS initiative to benefit its 780 children at 5 schools within the county.

The SRTS County-wide Task Force efforts paved the way for securing new funding to develop a regional SRTS master plan. At the time of this publication, the Imperial County Transportation Commission and the Southern California Association of Governments have sponsored development of the plan, which will identify infrastructure improvements, programs, and funding sources for SRTS projects. In addition to increased safety, expected results include increased mobility, and improved air quality, health, and academic performance for Imperial County's students.[xxviii]

COUNTY HIGHLIGHT - MERCED

The San Joaquin Valley in Northern California is home to Merced County.[xxix] The small, unincorporated community of Winton is a largely Hispanic population and approximately 11,000 residents. With three elementary schools and one middle school serving 2,000 students, Winton School District is a trusted center of the community. However, the lack of pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure and high crime rates have discouraged families from engaging in active transportation or allowing students to walk or bicycle to school.

With support from CA4Health, the Merced County Department of Public Health (MCDPH) led a county-wide SRTS Task Force which took a two-pronged approach to improving active transportation in Winton. The task force first worked with schools and partners to develop programs and school district policies that addressed school community needs around health, physical activity, and safety. Secondly, it engaged local decision-makers to develop local government policies supporting SRTS efforts.

The task force began by investigating needs at each school. They collected information on walking and bicycling activity as well as parental concerns through parent surveys, two walk audits, and observing and documenting school pick-up and drop-off activity. Surveys revealed that although 83 percent of students lived within a mile of the school, about 25 percent walked to school and less than one percent bicycled. The largest barriers identified were fear of violence and crime, the safety of intersection crossings, and traffic speeds.

The task force conducted walk and bicycle assessments in the community that engaged the county planning department, public works department, county board of supervisors, Winton Municipal Advisory Council (WMAC) members, non-profit organizations, and community members. MCDPH assembled a report for community stakeholders that included findings from the walk and bicycle audits along with community input and the parent survey results. This report informed the development of the Winton Community Plan. County planners in collaboration with the task force shared the findings at the WMAC and Winton School Site Council meetings.

MCDPH partnered with Merced Bicycle Coalition to provide bicycle education including bicycle rodeos, safety assemblies, and helmet fittings. The Merced Bicycle Coalition also conducted a teacher training on how to incorporate SRTS curriculum into regular school day lessons. A media campaign in English and Spanish encouraged drivers to slow down around schools. Walking school bus programs were initiated and mini-grants were provided to each elementary school to support safe walking and bicycling habits. MCDPH staff conducted presentations for school board members and met with principals of each of the elementary schools to address SRTS issues.

The events and education efforts built excitement and interest in safe walking and bicycling and ultimately led to the Winton School Board's unanimous support of a district-wide SRTS policy that passed in December 2013. The policy requires active transportation trainings and traffic safety

education for students and teachers, encourages Walk to School and Bike to School Day activities, and supports the formation of walking school buses and bicycle trains.

Although the Winton Community Plan has not been completed at the time of this publication, the relationships that were formed set the stage for future collaboration. The Merced County Department of Public Works partnered with MCDPH to successfully apply for Caltrans ATP Cycle 1 funding. The project award will deliver infrastructure improvements to create a "complete street" on a major road that provides access to one of Winton School District's elementary schools, as well as provide bicycle education programs to improve students' safe operation of bicycles on public streets.

Rural Perspectives

Challenges

Because there are multiple types of rural communities, such as a town that serves as the county's core business district or a geographically remote area with a few residences, it is important to acknowledge the diversity of each community and its potential challenges and considerations. A smaller population usually creates a less crowded community that has lower traffic congestion, and air quality may be better while the landscape is more scenic and open. Some rural communities serve as major agricultural and industrial centers and experience heavy trucking traffic that may pass through on state highways. Other rural communities are gateways to tourist destinations and may experience seasonal changes in population and visitors, with crowded main streets during the summer and empty roads during the winter. Living in a rural area has many benefits, but for most rural communities in California, rural lifestyles are often associated with a culture of driving.

Longer distances are generally travelled in rural areas from home to school, work, and other destinations. Thus, car travel is often deemed necessary for any trip. Some families in rural areas do live close enough for their children to walk or bicycle to school, yet parents drive children because it is perceived as faster since they are already driving themselves to work.

Rural communities have unique qualities that are attractive, and its residents often take pride in the slower-paced lifestyle that rural living provides. Residents are often supportive of the idea of children walking and bicycling, but feel it is unsafe on rural roads due to the high speed of cars and the lack of safety-promoting infrastructure. At the same time, many rural residents do not want to see their small communities urbanized with sidewalks and other pedestrian facilities that may feel out of place in the rural landscape.

In rural communities that are more dispersed and less developed, residents must rely on driving and are less likely to engage in active transportation which may reduce their daily participation in the physical activity needed to maintain healthy weights and reduce the risk of developing certain chronic illnesses.[xxx,xxi,xxxii]

Finally, rural agricultural communities tend to have higher diverse migrant populations, which can create language and cultural barriers. Parents who do not have legal citizenship are often nervous about volunteering in SRTS programs because of a fear of background checks and fingerprinting requirements of some programs.

Opportunities

Smaller rural communities may provide an opportunity for closer relationships between neighbors and businesses which creates a strong sense of community and security. Sometimes, local elected officials are more accessible as well and more readily address community concerns. This sense of close community may alleviate some parental and community concerns about walking and bicycling to school and support the development of rideshare and carpool systems or coordinating remote drop-off sites and Walking School Buses. Additionally, connecting with neighbors or local elected officials in small towns and communities can help address walking and bicycling safety concerns by engaging law enforcement or forming neighborhood watch programs.

Creative approaches are needed to develop walking and bicycling plans for small communities that wish to preserve rural characteristics. Designating walking paths or trails that are separated from roadways and organizing walking school buses where adults walk groups of children to school are just examples of effective ways to overcome some of the challenges of incorporating SRTS programs in rural areas.

Rural communities can be just as diverse as urban centers. It is important not to exclude children or families because of a language or cultural barrier. Providing program information (flyers, letters, surveys, etc.) in languages relevant to the school population increases inclusiveness and can also help attract more parent volunteers. Being flexible and sensitive to the needs of families and volunteers will help ensure that everyone is comfortable with their role in the SRTS program.

Conclusion

By tackling these challenges with a lens to the unique characteristics of each region and school site, many rural schools have successfully implemented SRTS programs and policies that not only increase safe walking and bicycling, but engage the community providing pedestrian and bicycle safety education to students and parents and offer fun opportunities for students to become more healthy and better connected to their community.

COUNTY HIGHLIGHT - SANTA BARBARA

Santa Barbara County in California spans approximately 2,700 square miles and is known for its beautiful beaches located along the central coast.[xxxiii] One hour north of the city of Santa Barbara, where scenic Highway 1 meets Route 246 rests the city of Lompoc. Most of the city sits in the valley of the Santa Ynez River and expands north nestling into the Santa Rita Hills. Lompoc is home to lush vineyards as well as Vandenberg Air Force Base. The population of nearly 65,000 residents is diverse. In Lompoc, with Federal Cycle 3 SRTS Non Infrastructure (Education, Encouragement, Enforcement, and Evaluation) funding, the city established a Walking School Bus program. However, parents were not comfortable with their children being escorted to school by adults they did not know. When volunteer background checks were offered to appease parent concerns, many parent volunteers pulled out of the program for fear of having their immigration status revealed. The program coordinator had not considered this as being a potential obstacle when planning SRTS activities at the school. An alternate plan was quickly developed that remedied the situation: instead of coordinating Walking School Buses, the encouragement focus changed to holding regular Walk to School Day events, and parents were more than happy to walk with their own children to school.

COUNTY HIGHLIGHT - MARIN

Marin County is situated along the California Pacific Coast just north of San Francisco across the Golden Gate Bridge. It covers 520 square miles of land accessible by US Route 101 and Interstate 580 with several intersecting state routes including scenic State Route 1. The county is known for its rugged beaches, wooded landscapes and extensive trail system. Marin is also known for its liberal politics and affluence with an approximate population of 260,750 residents.[xxxiv]

Vehicular traffic in Marin County is on the rise.[xxxv] In an effort to reduce car trips, local advocates organized the Marin SchoolPool Program, which includes three school districts serving 14 elementary and middle schools in rural and urban areas. A SchoolPool is a way of sharing in the duties of getting children to and from school. SchoolPool options include carpooling, walking school buses, bike trains or arranging bus buddies for students who use school buses or public transit. Two or more families agree to share responsibilities by trading days as pool leaders.

COUNTY HIGHLIGHT - HUMBOLDT

At Grant Elementary School in Eureka, California the PTA coordinated regular Walk to School Days on the first Wednesday of each month beginning on International Walk to School Day in October. Students who walked, bicycled, or rolled to their bus stops and checked in at designated Walking Wednesday tables to receive a paw print token incentive to add to their collection.

Parent volunteers were provided orange safety vests to designate them as walk leaders, enabling participating students to easily identify school walking groups. Students unable to walk or bicycle to school could participate by walking or running a lap around the campus track while supervised by an adult volunteer. Each month the classroom with the highest participation of student walkers was awarded the "Golden Sneaker;" a gold painted shoe to showcase in their classroom for the month.

Since the implementation of SRTS education and encouragement activities at Grant Elementary School, there has been an increase in walking and bicycling and an increase in Walking Wednesdays participation. The average participation in Walking Wednesdays steadily increased to 50 percent of the students participating in Walking Wednesdays at least once. The amount of traffic at school in the morning decreased, because some families now drop their children off further from school so that they can walk with a group.

STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESSFUL SRTS PROGRAMS IN RURAL CALIFORNIA

There are several effective strategies that have proven to be pivotal in reaching desired outcomes for SRTS projects in rural communities. Forming a SRTS Task Force is one way to explore community needs while offering an organized process for education and action. Another strategy, incentivizing school and parent participation, can ensure a level of community engagement that may deepen understanding of the connection between active transportation and health and motivate staff and parents to participate. Finally, developing remote drop-off locations for rural students has contributed to an increase in safe walking and bicycling for students who live far from schools.
These strategies are reviewed in detail in this section.

STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESSFUL SRTS PROGRAMS IN RURAL CALIFORNIA: Forming a SRTS Task Force

What is a Task Force?

A SRTS Task Force is a group of individuals that forms to study specific problems, issues, or concerns and takes action to resolve them with the goal of improving safe walking and bicycling conditions for local children.
A SRTS Task Force helps guide community discussions and decision-making about encouraging active transportation and improving safety issues for children walking, bicycling, skating, and rolling to school.
It also provides opportunities for information sharing and for communication among stakeholders, as well as informing stakeholders so that they become champions for SRTS within their respective spheres of influence.

SRTS Task Forces typically share information during regular meetings, guided by an agenda to discuss or accomplish projects. Having a SRTS Task Force with

membership diversity can help strengthen the quality of proposed SRTS projects and better ensure that projects meet the needs of the intended beneficiaries. A SRTS Task Force often becomes a catalyst for broader community change.

Why Should Rural Areas Form a SRTS Task Force?

Forming a SRTS Task Force in rural areas can help create key resources, gather information and develop partnerships in small communities where funding and resources are often limited or lacking.

A SRTS Task Force is formed to help guide a specific project or reach a specific goal, but SRTS Task Forces also create opportunities to coordinate across agencies and schools, making planning and implementation of projects more efficient and effective. Expanding partnerships through Task Force formation can improve communication, aid in resource sharing, and provide better outcomes through collaboration.

A SRTS Task Force can also help small towns and rural communities come together to advocate for safer transportation options, educate local elected officials on transportation safety issues and share strategies that have worked elsewhere. Many rural areas have used SRTS Task Forces to create a system to share information such as a regional website or clearinghouse for SRTS.

Another benefit of forming a SRTS Task Force is that it allows local communities to take a proactive and participatory approach to active transportation ensuring that all interests and perspectives are considered as decisions are made. This is especially helpful when considering the diverse nature of SRTS issues that most rural schools and communities face.

Some SRTS Task Forces have focused on developing effective public engagement opportunities, such as walkability audits, in order to share information and perspectives and identify needs and concerns within the community.

Identifying Effective Rural SRTS Task Force Members

Doing research to identify key SRTS stakeholders in a community is the first step to forming a SRTS Task Force. One way to identify possible SRTS Task Force members is to determine if existing groups or agencies already meet to discuss transportation safety, and if there are particular "hot topics" related to active transportation or safety being discussed in the community. Regional Transportation Planning Agencies often have staff dedicated to pedestrian and bicycle issues as do City Traffic Safety Committees. Consider contacting elected officials and other decision makers to obtain contact information to help begin relationship building.

To form a SRTS Task Force, rural communities should consider engaging the following stakeholders:

- **Advocates:**
  Walking and bicycling coalitions, disability rights advocates, and older adult groups
- **City/County Government:**
  Local elected officials, planning, public works, air quality, public health, law enforcement (city police, CHP, or sheriff), emergency services, parks and recreation departments, Caltrans District offices, Council of Governments
- **Tribal Government and local Native American community leaders**
- **Schools:**
  District superintendents, principals, teachers, students, parents, bus transportation managers, facilities staff, and district risk managers
- **Community and Business:**
  Residents, community non-profit organizations, local business owners, media, and health care representatives

Questions to consider when exploring potential members include:

- Does the community have a Regional Transportation Planning Agency (RTPA) or Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO)?
- Are safety concerns or proposed projects located within city or county boundaries?
- What are some potential liability concerns for SRTS, and who might be able to help address them?

In addition, including people from as many sectors of the community as possible is almost always more effective than excluding them. The presence of a broad range of stakeholders creates opportunities to consolidate expertise and resources and coordinate activities across municipalities, schools, organizations, and residential areas.

Recruiting SRTS Task Force Members

Once potential task force members have been identified, it is important to be consistent and persistent in your recruiting efforts. Whether recruiting by phone or in person, be prepared to share the expectations of SRTS Task Force members.

Personal phone calls are a successful method for recruiting potential SRTS Task Force members. Let the potential member know the purpose of the telephone call is to form a SRTS Task Force. If you do not yet know the individual, communicate who you are and the purpose for forming the SRTS Task Force. Use specific examples to let them know why they have been selected to participate and use language that honors the individual and explains the importance of being a SRTS Task Force member. One technique that works well is recalling a prior project or activity that the individual was involved with, e.g. "Your project has been so successful, and your content expertise would enhance SRTS efforts in the community."

Allow the conversation to be more than a promotion of the SRTS Task Force. Know the potential member's organizational mission and vision and ask questions to better understand the person's role in the organization. Listen carefully to identify opportunities for naming mutual goals and making connections that support collaboration. Also, be prepared to describe the benefits the SRTS Task Force can bring to his/her organization or agency. For example, his/her participation can help schools to be more competitive for grant funding, assist public health departments with injury prevention, or help police departments by reducing collisions, crime, and violence. Keep in mind that while not all members will be available for regular meetings, their expertise and/or support can be valuable in other ways, such as making important community connections.

Parent representatives for a SRTS Task Force can be identified through existing networks such as Parent Teacher Associations/Organizations (PTA/PTO) or local mothers clubs. Consider reaching out to parents of children who already walk and bicycle to school. This not only provides a parental perspective, it can help attract additional parents through word of mouth. Attending PTA/PTO, booster club, school site council, and school wellness committee meetings are other ways to reach parents and school staff. When contacting schools, speak with the PTA/PTO president or school principal in order to arrange a formal presentation to introduce SRTS to the school staff and parents. Be sure to secure a place on the meeting agenda.

COUNTY HIGHLIGHT - SOLANO

Solano County in California is located 45 miles southwest of Sacramento and is primarily agricultural with larger urban city centers. It covers 675.4 square miles of rural land. The county now serves seven jurisdictions including several unincorporated areas with a total county population of approximately 431,000 diverse residents. Vallejo is the largest city with the county seat located in Fairfield. Most of the Solano County residents live within the city limits.

The Solano Transportation Authority (STA) is the organization responsible for countywide congestion management and transportation planning. They partner with city and county transportation and planning agencies and engage the public through various committees. Two active committees are the Bicycle Advisory Committee and Pedestrian Advisory Committee, which include local elected officials, public works directors, transit operators, and concerned citizens.

When STA recruited members for a SRTS Advisory Committee as a first step in developing their countywide SRTS plan, they identified partners from transportation, engineering, schools, and law enforcement. After attending the Solano County Public Health Department's Obesity Prevention and Built Environment Summit, staff from STA and the public health department began a dialog about the synergies between land use, transportation, and health and the specific health benefits that SRTS can achieve. Shortly thereafter, the STA created an official public health position on the SRTS Advisory Committee and added several health related goals in the Solano 2008 SRTS Plan.

STA began a phased planning process that included assessing SRTS needs in each jurisdiction. SRTS Community Task Forces were created in each of the seven incorporated cities of Solano County and included representatives from the city council, school district, police departments, public works, as well as pedestrian and bicycle advocates. Some cities had existing traffic safety committees with school district staff. Representation from school facilities and maintenance staff was vital. Local SRTS plans were used, along with input from the SRTS Advisory Committee, to develop the STA countywide plan. The plan was subsequently distributed back to city councils and school boards.

Over the course of the next five years, STA continued participating in meetings and planning sessions with local task forces, stakeholders and the SRTS Advisory Committee to further expand on the 2008 plan. Countywide maps with suggested walking and bicycling routes for schools in seven districts were developed. Walk audits were conducted at 17 schools, and student and parent surveys continued to be collected. Programmatic recommendations and priority engineering projects were identified, and the primary topics of health improvements, safer routes, reduced school-related traffic congestion and long-term sustainability options were identified. In 2013, the Solano County Safe Routes to School Plan Update was released, serving as an update to the 2008 STA SRTS Plan as well as a stand-alone document for guiding the program into the future. The potential reach from this action is 64,500 students. The plan can be viewed at the STA SRTS website.

Additionally, at the time of this publication, Solano County had Walk to School Day events at 31 schools with participation from 6,500 students. The Vallejo City Unified School District revised its School District Wellness policy to increase focus on physical activity and SRTS reaching an estimated 14,700 students per year.

Tactics for a SRTS Task Force Success

- Create a vision, mission and guiding principles
- Identify SRTS Task Force goals, roles, responsibilities, and a meeting schedule

  Make sure a SRTS Task Force has a purpose for meeting. If it is being established to work on a specific project, create a project timeline that includes dates of expected deliverables. If a specific project is yet to be identified, develop reasonable goals such as "increase safe and healthy transportation options for students" or "decrease the number of vehicle/pedestrian or vehicle/bicycle collisions in the school neighborhood." Collectively create a list of roles and responsibilities for SRTS Task Force members and include realistic time expectations for participants. Determine the regularity of meetings (monthly, bi-monthly) and reserve a meeting room that is accessible to all members.
- Keep a SRTS Task Force member contact list up to date

  Once a SRTS Task Force has been formed, create a contact list of members that includes their name, job title/ organization, telephone number, and email address. Be sure to ask members' permission to release their contact information before sending the list out to the rest of the group.
- Select a facilitator and note taker

  Identify someone to facilitate meetings on a regular basis. The facilitator is usually also tasked with creating a meeting agenda and sending it out to the SRTS Task Force at least one week prior to meetings. The facilitator should ask for input from members for agenda items each month. A note taker should be available at each meeting to record the discussion and send out meeting minutes to the members after each meeting for approval. It is also recommended to consider establishing a revolving chairperson position.

COUNTY HIGHLIGHT - HUMBOLDT

When Eureka, California received funding for its first comprehensive SRTS program, it contracted with a non-profit organization to provide the education and encouragement components of the program.

The non-profit contractor realized the importance of forming a SRTS Task Force and planned for this by putting aside a small amount of grant money to pay for the few administrative tasks needed to form and maintain a citywide SRTS Task Force. The short-term goal of the SRTS Task Force was to help guide the SRTS programs taking place at a local school; it was also hoped that the SRTS Task Force could help spread the reach of SRTS to other schools in the greater Eureka area.

Once funding for the program ended, the SRTS Task Force began to look at other issues affecting students who walk and bicycle to school in the Eureka area. By this time, the SRTS Task Force was more familiar with the issues of the community, had established strong collaborations, and had built enough momentum to agree to continue to meet on a voluntary basis. Because the roles and responsibilities had already been established, a rotating facilitator system was welcomed for the meetings. Currently, SRTS Task Force members share newly identified active transportation issues and projects seeking assistance during the meetings. These items are then included for discussion and potential action. Foresight early on in the SRTS Task Force planning process helped to make a difference in the sustainability of this group that continues to meet monthly.

- Build SRTS Task Force efforts into grant projects

  It can be challenging for small towns and rural communities to find funding to support SRTS projects and programs. Competition for grant funding is fierce, particularly with cyclical changes in available funding. While it is not necessary to have funding to form and sustain a community SRTS Task Force, incorporating SRTS Task Force activities and meetings into proposed grant-funded projects can encourage accountability and continuity.

Recognizing and Celebrating Successes

Acknowledging SRTS Task Force members' contributions and hard work is an important and often overlooked aspect of the work of many task forces and similar groups. Recognition can be elaborate or simple, but it is worth taking the time to publicly note both the achievements of a SRTS Task Force and the individual contributions of participants who have played a key role in those accomplishments.

Accomplishments can be recognized through media press releases, newspaper articles and radio public service announcements. Speaking during public comment at community meetings is another way to communicate successes to the public and local elected officials at the same time. Also, formally recognizing stakeholders at public events and school assemblies can highlight SRTS Task Force efforts as well as its member contributions.

Recognizing achievements can be incorporated into the evaluation process and provides a time to reflect on potential future improvements. Completing projects creates the opportunity to examine what is working well and what needs to be changed.

Conclusion

Rural regions face many unique challenges when it comes to children safely walking and bicycling to school. Collaborative SRTS Task Forces can help residents, schools, and decision makers share information, pool resources, and make positive strides in creating safe walking and bicycling opportunities for children and their families.

Rural regions typically have fewer available resources particularly when funding allocations are based on population. However, rural areas do have some advantages: often residents know their neighbors better in small towns, and communicating with local elected officials can be easier than in urban areas.

Forming a SRTS Task Force will help speed up the process of bringing health and safety issues to the attention of decision makers and make it easier to work on SRTS projects through collaboration and partnerships.

COUNTY HIGHLIGHT - CALAVERAS

Calaveras County in California convened a SRTS work group, led by the Calaveras County Public Health Department, to strategize opportunities for increasing walking and bicycling in the San Andreas community. Funding for this work group was provided by CA4Health. The SRTS work group selected the sprawling unincorporated town of San Andreas to focus its efforts. San Andreas is located on Highway 49 and is home to approximately 3,000 residents. The four schools in San Andreas are part of the larger Calaveras Unified School District (CUSD).

The SRTS work group met monthly engaging many partners including a CUSD School Board member, two San Andreas Recreation and Park District representatives, Mark Twain Medical Center (MTMC) Hospital Community Benefits Manager, Volunteer Center/Valley Springs Youth Center staff, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Education (SNAP-Ed) staff, and the University of California Cooperative Extension Nutrition Manager.

Using pedestrian and bicycle community survey data, the SRTS work group identified a major concern of parents in Calaveras County. In addition to traffic, concerns for behavior of children when walking to school were emphasized. Approximately 60 percent to 75 percent of all parents had similar concerns about students bicycling to school. They also cited the lack of sidewalks and crosswalks, traffic congestion and speeding vehicles as the biggest impediments to riding a bicycle to school.

With the input and support of local families and business, the SRTS work group began to organize a community health walk to foster awareness and bring people together around the safety concerns. They also strategized with partners to identify "healthy mile walks" from local schools in the San Andreas community to share with local community as a strategy for increasing walking.

The first community health walk was launched and supported the CUSD Wellness Plan policy that promotes increased physical activity. Elementary school children from San Andreas Elementary School walked the one-mile route led by the County Supervisor and accompanied by teachers, parents and high school students. Additional local partners included community health workers, the Calaveras Volunteer Center, CHP, local Emergency Preparedness Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) members, Sheriff's volunteers, San Andreas Fire Department, local musicians and Red Cross.

Turner Park, the only smoke-free park in Calaveras County, was used as the halfway point for the walk routes. Partners created educational health displays and fitness experts provided hula-hoop demonstrations. The hospital gave 200 hula-hoops for the events, which were then donated to the elementary school. The hospital also donated bottled water for all participants and volunteers. Zumba dance demonstrations were conducted for adults and students.

The CERT members were certified in traffic control to assist with the walk through areas that included Highway 49 and back roads that did not have sidewalks. Safety equipment including cones, ropes and radios added to the safety for all who walked. The SRTS work group received compliments for having a well-organized event from the Calaveras County Public Works Department.

Over the years, the community health walk has grown from a public health event to a community event and is expected to continue to grow. The Public Health Emergency Preparedness Program has built part of the community health walk into its budget for on-going radio exercise and "just in time" training. Local community health workers and eight community partner organizations have collaborated

to sponsor the community health walk drawing in over 300 people each year. The event has been covered by local media including interviews with community members who highlight walkability concerns in San Andreas.

An important addition to the event has been a local celebration of volunteers and stakeholders who make the walk possible. A hosted event in Turner Park (the park where the initial work began) includes awards for all those involved, photo highlights of the events, and a potluck celebration.

The working relationships with community members and organizations that were formed and strengthened have contributed to additional collaboration opportunities. Public health staff was asked to join Calaveras Council of Governments (CCOG) Technical Advisory Committee as a non-voting member. They have been given time on each meeting agenda to share updates on public health work and local safety concerns. Public health participation on this committee is unprecedented and has placed public health at the table with key decision-makers that can impact a more walkable community.

STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESSFUL SRTS PROGRAMS IN RURAL CALIFORNIA: Incentivizing Parent and School Participation

Parents and schools will agree that creating safe, inviting walking and bicycling environments for children and their families is a great strategy to improve health, reduce injuries, and reduce childhood obesity by providing regular opportunities for physical activity. Although many school administrators agree that walking and bicycling is healthy for children, not all are familiar with the SRTS program or understand how it is relevant to their school. SRTS programs that are developed with parent involvement and tailored to fit the needs of individual schools and communities can have lasting effects that will improve safety conditions, even in rural regions with smaller populations.

Introduce the Program

Getting buy-in for a SRTS program is an important first step. SRTS leads can help school administrators, teachers, and parent groups become familiar with the program by meeting with them individually, as well as through informative program presentations to superintendent, teaching staff, and school boards. Be prepared with details and evidence of the many benefits of a SRTS program. Tailor the presentation to the interest of the audience being addressed. A principal may be most excited to hear about the benefits of academic achievement and school safety, while a parent group may be interested in student health. For guidance on working with school administration, refer to *Crosswalk: Where the Needs of School Principals and Safe Routes to School Programs Intersect* and *Cultivating Support for SRTS: A Guide to Building Relationships with School Board Members and Superintendents*, as well as SRTS TARC's *SRTS Programs in Rural California: A Guide for Communities and Partners* online resource page.

The presentations should also describe the five E's – Education, Encouragement, Enforcement,

Engineering, and Evaluation (as well as other E's like Equity) to demonstrate the wide-range of strategies used to overcome barriers that prevent children from safely walking and bicycling to school. Some strategies work better than others at specific school sites, so communicating the variety of ways to get involved is likely to result in more parent participation and greater success at sustaining a regular SRTS program. If technology allows, consider showing the National Center for SRTS' "Why Safe Routes Matter" video.

Incorporate examples shared in this Guide of SRTS programs to highlight as success stories for inspiration and to demonstrate the unique challenges rural schools may need to address to increase opportunities for safe, active transportation. Some students may not be able to walk or bicycle to school from home, but there are many other innovative ways schools can get children moving safely, reduce traffic congestion during school arrival and dismissal times and instill independence and self-confidence in students. Successful SRTS programs from around California can be downloaded from SRTS TARC's website.

Volunteers Support a SRTS Program

Volunteers are the lifeline of a successful SRTS program. It is important to recruit volunteers early in the school year to find reliable and committed parents. Coordinate with the school principal to get permission to attend PTA/PTO or booster club meetings and prepare a short presentation on the benefits of walking and bicycling and how SRTS programs can improve health and safety for students. Come prepared with examples of activities and strategies that get results and encourages volunteers to start a SRTS program that is healthy, educational, and fun. Find low-cost SRTS strategies at the SRTS TARC website.

Attending and displaying SRTS information at back-to-school nights and school events can provide opportunities to identify potential volunteers that may help support SRTS efforts such as Walk or Bike to School events or remote drop-off location programs.

At school events, "mingle" with parents rather than sitting stationary at a display table because often parents are often too busy to or uncomfortable with stopping at a table. Bring flyers or brochures to distribute information to parents. Handing out incentives such as safety awareness stickers, buttons, or safety gear can also increase student and parent interest in SRTS.

Often schools have existing champions in teachers or parents who regularly walk or bicycle and encourage students to do the same. These champions can be tremendous resources as well as role models for students. Speak with school administration and staff to identify potential champions interested in volunteering to shape and implement the SRTS program. Invite these champions to be part of your task force. Listen to the National Center for SRTS webinars for tips about recruiting and retaining volunteers.

Train Volunteers for Success

Training should be provided to volunteers for all SRTS programs to ensure awareness of roles and responsibilities and to have the guidance and information needed to conduct a fun, safe SRTS program. Teachers, parents, administrators, and all other participating adults should attend the training so that everyone receives consistent information, the process is streamlined, and everyone involved can act as positive role models for students. Having adults reinforce safety information with students and encouraging volunteers to follow agreed upon protocols will help ensure the SRTS program or event runs smoothly and safely.

SRTS volunteer trainings should be tailored for specific events to meet the goals and expectations of that particular project. To maximize participation from busy parents, consider holding trainings in the evening or on a weekend and provide supervised activities for children. Begin with a brief overview of SRTS so that everyone understands the program.

At the training, review the specific logistics of the event being planned. Describe the types of assistance needed, and assess from volunteers their individual interests and strengths. Keep in mind that not all jobs are appropriate for all volunteers.

Matching volunteers with appropriate roles strengthens engagement, makes volunteering fun, and supports volunteer retention. For example, a volunteer who is shy and would prefer to remain out of the limelight might be perfectly suited to take photographs during an event. Having a photographer is important and to document the event and provide photographs to the media and potential funding agencies. If possible, select a volunteer with an interest in photography who has the necessary skills to perform this task well.

Some parents might be interested in volunteering but unable to attend events. These volunteers can still participate in the planning process or event close out. They can help coordinate the collection of donations, incentives, and healthy snacks or assist in promoting the event or SRTS program. Assign a volunteer with an interest in writing to develop an article for the school newsletter and draft a press release for the local paper. Other volunteers who work well with children can support students in creating posters and flyers to advertise SRTS events and programs. If the event is scheduled annually or monthly, some volunteers may assist with sending out thank you cards, organizing report data or setting up tools and materials for the next gathering. In addition to covering the basic logistics of a SRTS program or event, SRTS trainings should also provide safety information that is appropriate for rural areas. This may include ways to address lack of infrastructure as well as discussion and strategies for facing volume and speed of traffic. The trainings should be interactive and provide information for volunteers to learn safety tips and instructions that align with the varying developmental stages and learning styles of children. Consider utilizing *Teaching Children to Walk Safely as They Grow and Develop: A Guide for Parents and Caregivers*.

Create Incentives for Schools

Studies have shown that walking or bicycling to school improves student academic achievement, which may result in higher academic test scores. This fact resonates well with school staff.[xxxvi] Help build school support for SRTS by communicating the wide-range of benefits of a SRTS program – not only to students and their parents, but to schools and school districts staff as well. Another route for gaining support from schools is to engage with your school board.

Most school administrators understand that walking and bicycling is healthy for children. But what they may not know is that participating in SRTS programs can make them eligible and competitive to receive funding for infrastructure improvements and education, encouragement, and enforcement programs through state and federal grant programs. When schools get involved with a SRTS program they are often better connected with local government and advocates who can guide them in getting the assistance they need when safety issues arise.

SRTS programs and events are also a way for school staff to socialize with and get to know students and parents in a relaxed, non-academic setting. This relationship-building can increase SRTS program engagement and buy-in. Consider rewarding supportive participating school staff members with incentives such as safety gear or other items to show appreciation. Local businesses are often willing to donate prizes or gift cards that can be raffled off during staff meetings or school assemblies.

Incorporating program activities into existing curricula can provide benefits to children while teachers meet State Content Standards. Teachers and physical educators can teach pedestrian and bicycle skills and safety during classes. Students in the classroom can track the distance they walk each day, week, or month and incorporate the mileage into math lessons. Some teachers have had students translate the local miles they walk each year onto a map and "track a trip" across the country or overseas. Use of standard aligned materials can bring active transportation alive in the learning environment while meeting California Common Core Standards. SRTS TARC has developed the *California Pedestrian and Bicycle Safety Curriculum for Grades 4 and 5* that is aligned with the state Common Core standards, California Health Education Standards, and National Health Education Content Standards and are integrated into typical courses including English Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, and Health and Physical Education.

Not all school administrators and schools will want to participate in SRTS programs right away. With limited budgets and overworked staff, schools have increasingly become skeptical about adding new programs to already overwhelming schedules. Subsequently, school officials and staff may need additional education on how a SRTS program will assist them in meeting academic goals as well as improving student health and safety. It is important to always follow through in making school participation as seamless as possible for principals, teachers, and support staff. Support for a SRTS program will continue to grow once school staff discovers how easy it can be to link a SRTS program with the existing school schedule. Consider utilizing SRTS TARC's *Crosswalk: Where the Needs of School Principals and Safe Routes to School Programs Intersect*, to help build relationships with school principals.

Encourage district and school administrations to adopt policies so that SRTS efforts are ongoing. Having policies in place ensures that when the children

Refer to the SRTS TARC's SRTS Programs in Rural California: A Guide for Communities and Partners online resource page section for web addresses, resources, and tools that support the strategies described in this section:

- California Pedestrian and Bicycle Safety Curriculum for Grades 4 and 5
- Crosswalk: Where the Needs of School Principals and Safe Routes to School Programs Intersect
- Cultivating SRTS: A Guide to Building Relationships with School Board Members and Superintendents
- Healthy Students, Thriving Districts: Including SRTS in District Policies
- Incorporating SRTS into Local School Wellness Policies: A Model Policy to Encourage Active Transportation
- Low-Cost SRTS Activities
- The National Center for SRTS Data Collection Tools
- Recruiting and Training Volunteers for Long Term Success! and Managing and Retaining Volunteers for Long Term Success! Webinars
- SRTS TARC's Gather Data Webpage
- Success Stories from Rural California Schools
- Teaching Children to Walk Safely as They Grow and Develop: A Guide for Parents and Caregivers
- Why Safe Routes Matter Video
- Working With Your School District Board to Support Healthy, Active Students
- Minimizing Liability Risk: A factsheet about Safe Routes to School programs

COUNTY HIGHLIGHT - MERCED

The Merced City School District is located in the City of Merced, California. Situated in the San Joaquin Valley of Northern California, the City of Merced has a population of approximately 82,000 and offers a small community atmosphere with wide, tree-lined streets found in residential neighborhoods. Merced City and County's agricultural industry supports a large migrant farm laborer population.[xxxvii]

Funded by CA4Health, the Merced County Department of Public Health raised awareness and provided education on pedestrian and bicycle safety to the local school district. As a member of the Merced City School District Local Wellness Committee, public health staff was involved in the development of a local wellness plan including SRTS language. Pointing to local SRTS program successes along with health data, public health staff was able to support the committee in making a strong recommendation to the school board. The local wellness plan was approved by the school board for implementation, which potentially impacts 10,800 students.

of parent champions graduate or there is change in school staff, the school will continue to encourage and support walking and bicycling to and from school. Some examples of different avenues for integrating SRTS policies include transportation policies, umbrella SRTS school policies, and district wellness policies. Some helpful resources include *Healthy Students, Thriving Districts: Including SRTS in District Policies*; *Cultivating Support for SRTS: A Guide to Building Relationships with School Board Members and Superintendents*; *Working With Your School District Board to Support Healthy, Active Students*; *Incorporating SRTS into Local School Wellness Policies: A Model Policy to Encourage Active Transportation*.

Create Incentives for Parents

Communicating the health benefits of SRTS to parents can help recruit supportive volunteers. Parents want their children to be healthy and active, and SRTS programs provide a great opportunity for parents to get involved and to spend quality time with their children. SRTS also helps reduce traffic congestion in front of schools during arrival and dismissal times, something all parents can appreciate. Supporting children to safely walk and bicycle to school will save money otherwise spent on gas, which is another appealing benefit.

Once your volunteers are trained and engaged in your programs, it is important to regularly recognize them and let them know they are valued and appreciated. To maintain high morale among volunteers present them with certificates of appreciation during assemblies, PTA/PTO and parent group meetings and acknowledge them in school newsletters. Consider giving incentives to champion volunteers as a special "thank you." Providing valuable trainings free of charge, such as First Aid and CPR, is another strategy for attracting and maintaining volunteers. Parent volunteers will come and go as children get older and matriculate to other schools; having a solid volunteer recruitment and training program in place with built in service recognition will build commitment to grow and sustain SRTS programs from year to year.

Evaluate the Program to Build Support

An excellent SRTS program best practice is to annually collect baseline (pre-program) and post-program data on student travel patterns and parental perceptions to show mode shift and collision reduction once SRTS programs have been established. Data collection can be done through SRTS parent surveys, student travel tallies, or local police department collision data. Although it is ideal to begin collecting data at the

on-set of a SRTS program, it is never too late to begin collecting data and identifying changes and needs. Evaluation is also a way to gauge effectiveness and satisfaction with the program and make adjustments or improvements as necessary.

When schools and parents learn that more students are safely walking and bicycling to and from school and fewer collisions are taking place, they often become allies for sustaining SRTS programs and helping spread the reach of SRTS to other schools and districts.

Find evaluation and data collection tools at the SRTS TARC's Gather Data webpage and parent survey and student travel tallies at the National Center for SRTS's website.

Conclusion

Creating incentivized opportunities for education and engagement of families and school staff is imperative in building momentum around SRTS programs in rural California. With local schools often facing a shortage of staff time and families living long distances from school sites, this task may initially feel quite challenging. However, emphasizing the benefits of SRTS programs including improved health, academic outcomes, and increased community safety can capture attention and trigger engagement.

As activity begins and new champions emerge, the advantages begin to outweigh any perceived difficulty. Applying innovative strategies and inviting parents to be part of their children's learning serves to build a more inclusive school culture while creating an aligned community value of health.

COUNTY HIGHLIGHT - STANISLAUS

The City of Ceres, California, is located in the north central San Joaquin Valley within the greater Modesto area of Stanislaus County. The city is predominantly agrarian with rural farms, dairies, orchards, and almond groves throughout. Ceres has a population of approximately 46,000 people, with a Hispanic majority. A language other than English is spoken in 53 percent of homes. Ceres also has a large agricultural workforce. The median household income in Ceres is about $47,000, as compared to about $61,000 for all California households.[xxxviii]

The Central California Regional Obesity Prevention Program (CCROPP) and the Stanislaus County Public Health Department conducted an assessment in Ceres that found that neighborhoods needed infrastructure improvements to increase pedestrian safety. These findings led to the initiation of a SRTS pilot program and creation of a SRTS Task Force.

Working in partnership with CCROPP, the Ceres School District received several SRTS awards to expand the program to multiple schools. A demand for walking programs and education efforts was great, and parents became very engaged. Parent Teacher Association (PTA) members, program staff and parents began meeting to develop consistent school safety zones, walking school bus programs, and proposed walking routes throughout the school district.

A Walking School Bus (WSB) program was initiated in 2010 at Caswell Elementary School with 300 students participating. By the second year, the program expanded to include Don Pedro Elementary School, and the total number of participants grew to around 500 children. While there were challenges with managing the WSB program at two schools, the project coordinators conducted walking school buses Monday through Friday, with about six routes per school.

A consistent "bus" schedule was developed and pre-determined routes were planned. As the WSB program expanded, volunteer crossing guards and walking school bus leaders were offered free CPR and first aid training and certifications. Volunteer crossing guards were trained to help students and drivers safely use roadways and intersections.

The PTA became an excellent source of volunteers, with many PTA parents already walking with their children to and from school. Nonetheless, getting volunteers to stay involved and assume leadership roles was a challenge. Initially, SRTS program staff met with parents frequently to encourage more children and their families to walk to school. Staff later realized that a model utilizing a "parent captain" as the point person for communications and leadership was more effective. Parents began to take on the role of running the WSB program while SRTS program staff served as higher-level organizers. A continued emphasis on communication helped all participants and volunteers to understand their roles and allowed the program to successfully evolve.

Several strategies to engage families and volunteers were employed throughout the WSB program. The school nutrition department provided breakfast to participating children and their families, which bolstered interest and excitement, particularly since universal breakfast at schools was not yet available. Children and their parents received a free breakfast through the family resource center when they arrived at school together. During assemblies, raffles were conducted and incentive items with a healthy theme were provided. Volunteers were also recognized at the close of each year for their contributions.

Bilingual trainings and meetings were key to success in this rural community, where local non-profits' bilingual staff were brought in to provide translation between program staff, school staff and parents. Additionally, involving children and their parents in the decision-making

process, especially for proposed major infrastructure upgrades, demonstrated the importance of community input in achieving results.

Outreach and education activities were simultaneously organized and predominantly focused around pedestrian safety, family involvement in SRTS activities, and obesity prevention. Parents were contacted via newsletters, rallies, by volunteers at crosswalks during morning drop-off, and while participating in WSB programs. In collaboration with the City of Ceres police department, parents and volunteers distributed information and provided education to drivers about safe driving around schools. Safety and health information was offered in both English and Spanish through multiple forms of media. Participation in Walk to School Day and other walk to school efforts increased over the course of the SRTS program, as did the number of participating schools.

At Adkison Elementary, the school principal estimated that about 40 percent of students walk to school. Walk to School events at Don Pedro Elementary School had over 200 participants out of 300 total students, and Caswell Elementary School saw participation from 300 students out of 500 total students.

COUNTY HIGHLIGHT - SISKIYOU

Siskiyou County in California sits in the northernmost part of the state along the Oregon border in the Shasta Cascade region. It is home to a population of approximately 45,000 people and encompasses 6,347 square miles. The county is geographically diverse, ranging from Mount Shasta in central Siskiyou County to oak woodlands, mixed conifer forests, and large cattle ranches.[xxxix]

When the Siskiyou County Public Health Department received monies to support SRTS and active transportation from CA4Health, it decided to take a county-wide approach. From late 2012 to early 2013, public health department staff conducted a needs assessment and in-person key informant interviews with all 29 elementary school principals. Additionally, National Center for SRTS surveys were collected at each school site to obtain additional information.

The needs assessment and key informant interviews revealed that eight elementary schools had the capacity to work on SRTS issues. The remaining schools are adjacent to highways or busy roads lacking pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure or even sufficient space to allow for safe walking or bicycling, or local interest in supporting SRTS efforts was minimal to non-existent. Thus, public health department staff began taking steps to educate, engage and collaborate with the eight schools interested in SRTS. In October 2013, public health department staff was successful in supporting six of the eight elementary schools to conduct Walk to School Day events. Approximately 530 students, staff, parents, and volunteers participated collectively. In the City of Mt. Shasta, two of the participating elementary schools established Bike to School Fridays. Teachers, administrators, and parents became committed to supporting SRTS and active transportation strategies and new community partner relationships were formed.

Utilizing the findings from the needs assessment, community stakeholders identified pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure improvements needed in the county. The Bicycle Tourism Partnership became very instrumental in supporting SRTS as it aligned with the Bicycle Tourism Partnership's vision and plan to make Siskiyou County more bicycle-friendly. The bicycle-friendly plan was presented to the Siskiyou County Board of Supervisors, and county resident support of active transportation has increased through annual events and ongoing safety and SRTS education.

COUNTY HIGHLIGHT - MONTEREY

Monterey County in California is located on the central coast of California and is known for its beautiful coastline along Highway 1. Most of the residents live near the northern coast and Salinas Valley. The city of Seaside is an ocean-side community that overlooks Monterey Bay. This ten-square mile city continues to grow, attracting a diverse population of approximately 35,000 residents.[xl]

The City of Seaside established a SRTS Leadership Team, which was funded partially by California Kid Plates, a program of the California Department of Public Health (CDPH), and CA4Health. The Leadership Team was led by the Monterey County Public Health Department and included school and parent advocates as well as stakeholders from multiple community sectors including a city councilmember champion. The Leadership Team members met weekly to discuss community challenges and to take small steps to create SRTS programs and raise awareness around active transportation for students.

The Leadership Team conducted parent surveys, student travel tallies and a walk audit near Seaside Elementary School, which revealed street safety as a primary concern due to speeding vehicles.

Law enforcement was already engaged and soon education strategies and walk events were taking place through a multi-agency collaboration. "Slow Down Children Crossing" signs were distributed to each school and permanently installed by the Monterey Unified School District. SRTS efforts began bolstering awareness and engagement within the community. The Leadership Team members developed collective ownership around the importance of student safety and increasing physical activity and it continues to meet on a quarterly basis. The Leadership Team addressed community safety issues, received updates on pedestrian and bicycle traffic-related collisions and provided recommendations for roadway improvements. It has played a key role in the expansion of the city's neighborhood watch program by establishing a parent patrol. The Leadership Committee provides support to popular Walk a Child to School events. SRTS efforts receive positive feedback from residents. Community members who attend the Leadership Team meetings report they have seen an increase in walking by students and parents. They have also reported that drivers and pedestrians are benefiting from education and enforcement efforts as driver behavior has improved.

Three schools in Seaside are working to create safe school zones, and have requested the city consider provisions of AB 321 (reduced speeds in school zones) for implementation. A letter has been submitted to the Seaside City Council to approve a traffic study in school zones, and a formal request has been made to the Monterey Unified School District for awareness and support of reduced speed zones around schools.

STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESSFUL SRTS PROGRAMS IN RURAL CALIFORNIA: Remote Drop-Off Locations for Students Who Live Too Far to Walk or Bicycle

Create Opportunities for Remote Drop-off Locations

SRTS programs can face inherent challenges at rural schools where many students live too far to walk or bicycle. However, SRTS programs can still be a vibrant and positive addition to a school.

One strategy for supporting safe active transportation is to establish remote drop-off or "Park and Walk" locations near school zones. This is a pre-determined location where children can be dropped off by parents or school buses to safely walk as a group to school while escorted by adults. It not only provides children with the opportunity to be physically active but also alleviates safety concerns of parents and school staff. Encouraging the use of a remote drop-off location has the added benefit of parents avoiding the hectic queue of cars during school drop-off time that contributes to poor air quality and dangerous traffic conditions around schools.

Establishing Remote Drop-off Locations

Pick a Location:

To establish a remote drop-off location, first determine whether there is an adequate meeting space within a 10 to 20-minute walk to school. The remote drop-off location should be easy to access with a safe place for parents to conveniently drop children off. Traffic flow around potential sites should be observed before committing to a location. Local businesses, such as grocery stores and banks, are often willing to allow the use of their parking lots, and some businesses even provide volunteers for the remote drop-off location during events. Churches can also be excellent allies

and will often provide both a meeting location and congregation members who are willing to volunteer. Additionally, community parks can also provide good meeting locations. Often Parks and Recreation Department staff may be able to lend support for activities.

Evaluate Safety of Location:

After potential locations are scouted, determine whether adequate pedestrian facilities exist to accommodate walkers from the remote drop-off location to the school. Be sure there are connected sidewalks along the entire route, that stoplights or stop signs are present at intersections, and that the route is free of obstacles and other potential hazards (e.g. trash cans, problem dogs, etc.). Have a SRTS Task Force, Wellness Committee, or PTA/PTO test the route by walking it in advance during the morning school commute time. If possible, invite parents with children in strollers or residents in wheelchairs and assistive devices to test the accessibility of the route as well.

Plan a Drop-off Time:

Part of the planning process should include determining the amount of time it will take a child to walk to school from the remote drop-off location. Consider that some children are easily distracted and typically walk at a slower pace than adults. Allow an extra five minutes when doing a test walk to compensate for their pace. Ideally, have a few children join the test walk to best determine the actual time it may take to walk the route. Many students also depend on school breakfast before class. Be sure the walk schedule provides plenty of time for students to arrive at the remote drop-off location and walk to school with sufficient time to receive school breakfast.

Include School Bus Riders

Schools in rural areas tend to have a higher percentage of students who ride the bus to school due to the longer distance that families live from school. Often these students are not able to participate in traditional SRTS programs. It is important to accommodate all students in SRTS activities in order to promote an equitable program. There are several ways to incorporate school bus riders in the remote drop-off location program.

Involving the school district's Bus Transportation Manager is essential to achieve inclusion for all students. Bus Transportation Managers are typically responsible for coordinating and overseeing the scheduling, routing, and daily transportation services of a school or school district that includes regular and special education bus routes. Their job includes training and supervision of bus drivers, arranging for substitute drivers, and conferring with parents and school administrators regarding issues around the transportation of students. Bus Transportation Managers want to make sure that all eligible students receive the transportation they need and that bus routes operate smoothly and safely. Taking time to meet with them and share SRTS program information can be very beneficial for your SRTS efforts.

Most schools will not allow students to enter or exit a bus at a non-designated bus stop. Establishing the remote drop-off location as a designated bus stop at the beginning of the school year allows students to use the stop, making it possible for them to ride the bus as far as the remote drop-off location and walk the rest of the way to school. This is a great opportunity for bused children to participate in SRTS and to be more physically active. It is important to notify parents about the remote drop-off location and secure parent permission slips.

With a signed permission slip, riding the bus to the remote drop-off location could be viewed as a field trip that takes place before school, and thus alleviates potential liability issues. Another strongly recommended strategy to address liability concerns is to have a responsible adult volunteer at the remote drop-off location when the bus arrives to escort children as they walk the rest of the way to school.

Once a successful method is determined at one school, it is possible for the Bus Transportation Manager to work with other schools in the school district to make remote drop-off locations accessible to all students who ride the bus in that school district.

Use the Remote Drop-off Location Regularly

Remote drop-off locations are a great option for encouraging students who live too far to walk or bicycle to school to participate in Walk to School Day events. It is possible however, to establish regular remote

drop-off locations that are used every day of the week. Some remote drop-off locations may be at alternate school entrances or gates to provide convenient school access from different neighborhoods adjacent to the school. When considering a location for year round use, remember to think about how inclement weather may affect unpaved portions of walking paths and apply wood chips or gravel to trails in order to keep students' shoes clean and dry.

Promote and Sustain Remote Drop-off Locations

Outreach about a newly established remote drop-off location will inform parents and students about the location and its proper use and protocol to ensure all users are being safe and courteous. Develop a map with use instructions to include in school newsletters and bulletins. Also, be sure to include information about why the remote drop-off location was established and how best to use it.

A press release or public service announcement can serve as a means of communicating about the remote drop-off location and any anticipated changes in traffic patterns to nearby motorists and residents. Media coverage will contribute to a safer and more efficient remote drop-off location program and can also build support for your SRTS programs and projects.

Conclusion

Local schools in rural California have begun implementing opportunities for children and their families to engage in a walking activity before the start of the school day. Having a coordinated and supported monthly, weekly, or daily remote drop-off location reinforces schools' commitment to the health, well-being, and safety of their student population.

Refer to the SRTS TARC's SRTS Programs in Rural California: A Guide for Communities and Partners online resource page for web addresses, resources and tools that support the strategies described in this section:

- Get Out & Get Moving: Opportunities to Walk to School Through Remote Drop-Off Programs

COUNTY HIGHLIGHT - MENDOCINO

The Anderson Valley in Mendocino County, California stretches along Highway 128 and is comprised of four small, unincorporated communities with a total population of 3,000. This is a remote, rural area and Highway 128 is a winding road that cuts through the county toward the coast.[xli] Many areas through the valley have no shoulder for walking or bicycling. Most homes in the area are not within walking distance to schools.

In 2011, Anderson Valley Elementary School began work to reduce obesity among students primarily through increased physical activity. Some support for this work was provided by CA4Health. The school principal, along with staff and local champions, launched a monthly "walk-along" originating at a remote drop-off location near the school. Parents and the school district school buses drop students off within walking distance of the school and students safely walk to school accompanied by school staff and volunteers.

The lack of sidewalks and walking paths were an initial barrier for the "walk-along" program. As a temporary solution, the school set cones in the roadway. Mendocino County Public Health Department staff convened the school district and County Department of Transportation (DOT). Together they worked with the local fire department to close half the road during scheduled "walk along" times. It was hoped that the "walk-along" could occur on a weekly basis.

However, it was challenging to consistently have enough adult volunteers and staff to supervise the students during the "walk-along." The school tried recruiting high school students to assist, but the "walk-along" schedule conflicted with the high school students' class time. The principal then worked with a local service organization to recruit community volunteers.

Regardless, the school chose to continue with a monthly walk event over a weekly "walk along" schedule due to the level of organization, number of volunteers needed, and necessary assistance from the local fire department (a predominantly volunteer organization) for road closure. Despite the limited expansion, Anderson Valley Elementary School's monthly "walk-along" works well. Participation has increased as the program has become integrated with the school culture.

CONCLUSION

Many in rural communities recognize that safe walking and bicycling to and from school are an important opportunity for children to stay physically active and healthy while providing other social and environmental benefits. As demonstrated in this Guide, SRTS programs are beginning to take hold throughout rural California. SRTS strategies can be adapted to meet the needs of rural areas while capitalizing on their unique strengths.

The remainder of this Guide consists of two tools to assist in clarifying needs and prioritizing SRTS work: the *Rural Walkability Audit Guide and Tool*, and the *Tool for Prioritizing Rural SRTS Efforts*.

For assistance or any questions on the strategies discussed in this Guide, please contact the SRTS TARC for rural success stories to share with entities interested in developing or growing SRTS programs in their communities.

TOOLS FOR IMPROVING INFRASTRUCTURE AROUND RURAL SCHOOLS

Delivering successful SRTS projects and programs requires intentional collaborative planning as well as community support. The use of assessment tools can provide new insight and structured guidance for moving forward toward implementation. Below are two tools for exploring infrastructure needs around rural schools: a *Rural Walkability Audit Guide and Tool* and a *Tool for Prioritizing Rural SRTS Efforts*.

TOOLS FOR IMPROVING INFRASTRUCTURE AROUND RURAL SCHOOLS: Rural Walkability Audit

What is a Walkability Audit?

Residents and officials hoping to make their communities safer for walking and bicycling often need to study existing streets and neighborhoods to understand what needs to be changed to make the environment safe for children to walk or bicycle to and from school. A school site walkability audit is a school and community event used to observe and evaluate the safety and accessibility issues around a school.

Walkability audits give SRTS staff, neighbors and the school community an opportunity to identify engineering and infrastructure treatments that are the most appropriate solution for a school. Ideas on improving traffic flow and safety for drop-off/pick-up areas are also considered during a walkability audit.

In addition to taking a walk around the school site and surrounding neighborhoods for assessment, walkability audits typically begin with a presentation about safety strategies and what to look for during the walk. Immediately following the walk assessment, participants review the area walked utilizing oversized street-view maps depicting the school and adjacent neighborhoods and share ideas for street improvements in writing or by drawing directly on the map. (Note: large scale site maps can be secured through the city or county's department of public works.) This two-pronged approach provides an opportunity for participants to contribute ideas by writing or drawing directly onto street view maps depicting the school and adjacent neighborhood. Public participation provides a diverse lens when looking at various ways to overcome barriers to safe walking and bicycling.

Why Conduct a Walkability Audit?

Walkability audits are conducted in order to improve conditions to encourage walking and bicycling as a means of transportation. The audits give the public an opportunity to identify and voice safety concerns and be part of the solution process, as well as inform local decision makers about the needs and desires of the community.

This section of the guide is intended to help SRTS program champions lead a walkability audit for their school. Walkability audits are typically led by a trained facilitator, but trained facilitators are not always accessible to California's rural communities. If a trained facilitator is not available, it is recommended that SRTS program champions work with their local traffic engineer to plan and conduct the audit.

How is a Walkability Audit Different in Rural Areas?

Walkability audits can benefit both urban and rural regions, but rural areas can face unique obstacles and challenges around walking and bicycling that urban regions do not.

For example, rural areas tend to have smaller populations spread out over large geographic areas where there are fewer transportation options for residents. Rural areas usually have many miles of

roads, mostly remote, with fewer financial resources to maintain and repair their roads. Students often live further away from schools and roads lack the pedestrian and bicycle facilities that more urban areas can rely on.

In addition, state highways often serve as the "Main Street" for many rural communities, posing challenges to local residents and shaping the walking and bicycling environment through their communities. It is important that rural walkability audits address the unique issues of rural communities and that residents are informed as to who has jurisdiction (e.g. city, county, state) over roads in question during the walkability audit process.

Because rural regions have these unique challenges, rural schools conducting walkability audits should tailor the audit so that specific school needs are addressed. Typically walkability audits focus on assessing existing infrastructure and determining ways to improve walking and bicycling environments through engineering solutions. Rural areas with minimal or non-existent pedestrian and bicycle facilities benefit by thinking creatively about strategies to address safety concerns.

Who Should Attend a Walkability Audit?

Participants of a walkability audit traditionally include:

- Students
- Parents
- Teachers
- School administration and staff
- City or county planners and engineers and Caltrans District staff
- County public health staff
- Neighbors
- Advocacy groups—especially representatives of youth and older adult/senior groups
- Fire department and law enforcement
- Emergency services personnel
- Local elected officials
- Local businesses

Walkability audits can be led by a planning and design firm experienced in working with SRTS programs; however, any school, jurisdiction, or community group can conduct a walkability audit.

It is important to invite all relevant stakeholders to the walkability audit so they may help identify concerns that might otherwise be overlooked. For example, invite engineers from all jurisdictions that have authority over the roadways children will use to get to school. Also invite law enforcement, fire department, and emergency services personnel who have experience navigating all parts of the county. Including them in this process can provide helpful insight as to whether or not proposed safety strategies will be effective or disruptive to their services. Additionally, including pedestrian and bicycle advocates, older adults, and persons with disabilities can provide valuable input for making the roadways safe and accessible for all residents or visitors.
It is imperative to involve youth in this process because their experience, observations, and perceptions are often more relevant when identifying and addressing safety issues. There are many different ways to work with youth. For some tips and strategies, see SRTS TARC's Safe Routes to School and Student Leaders: Facilitator's Guide to Engaging Middle School Youth. Parents and other participants may provide details on suspected or known gang or drug activity. Everyone in the community may have something relevant to contribute.

How Does a Rural Walkability Audit Work?

Pre-Audit Organization

In preparation for the walkability audit field exercise, a pre-walkability audit interview should be held with the principal, PTA / PTO, or other key members of the school community in order to learn background information about the school, which can include enrollment information, bus loading/ridership procedures, and existing policies. This is also the time to learn what safety concerns the school administration and parents may have. Collecting this information in advance will allow SRTS program champions or outside facilitators to better tailor the walkability audit to the school.

Rural areas have unique barriers and resident concerns. For example, some communities may lack sidewalks and others may even be opposed to them because they affect the rural "feel" of the community. Conducting a walkability audit can help provide innovative ideas and suggestions for improvements that meet the diverse needs of rural areas. Establishing relationships with residents ahead of time will likely result in more vested participants and successful outcomes. In some cases a questionnaire can be used as a tool in lieu of face-to-face interviews.

In addition to gathering interview data, it is also important to visit the school site before the walkability audit to observe conditions firsthand. These observations can then be used as explorative possibilities and to determine a walking route for the day of the audit. Taking photos of the school site and surrounding neighborhood in advance can help tailor the group presentation and better illustrate challenges and needs. If the facilitator is not already part of the school community, the facilitator may attend a parent group or PTA/PTO meeting to discuss the intent of the walkability audit. Recruiting parents to take pre-walkability audit photos to better understand the issues and areas around the school generates engagement from the beginning. Remember to include students, parents, teachers, and neighbors to determine the key areas of concern. Use their information to create a walkability audit route based on opportunities to see and discuss the safety concerns they identify.

Materials/Supplies List for Day of Walkability Audit

- Sign-in sheet
- Clipboards, pencils/pens
- Oversized aerial maps
- Projector and laptop (for presentation prior to walk)
- Flipchart, pens, easel (for recording outcomes during discussion after walk)
- Camera
- Nametags
- Safety Vests
- Educational Materials (optional)
- First Aid Kit
- Refreshments (water and healthy snacks)

Timeline and Preparation

On the day of the walkability audit, plan at least three hours for a complete process; an initial meeting and presentation, walking the route, and wrap-up discussion to share observations, next steps and roles of responsible parties.

The walking portion of the walkability audit should be 25-30 minutes. Choose a route that will not take longer than ten minutes to walk, allowing for another 15-20 minutes for observation and discussion at key sites. If a longer route is necessary, plan accordingly for a longer participant time commitment.

Secure a presentation space that is on the school site, easily accessible, suited for a presentation and available before and after the walking tour. Scheduling the audit to take place during school drop-off or pick-up hours allows for current behaviors and hazards to be identified.

Create an invitation/flyer and public service announcement about the event several weeks in advance. Include the event purpose, description, date, time, location and materials to bring (e.g. comfortable shoes, water, and a reminder to dress for the weather). Canvass the neighborhood by distributing invitations/flyers door-to-door and/or inviting neighbors personally to the event. Ask the school to distribute invitations to parents. Write a media advisory (rather than a press release, which is a draft article), which includes information about the event, and distribute to the media at least a week in advance. Invite local, pertinent partners (e.g. law enforcement, fire department and emergency service personnel, public works staff, public health staff, advocates, school principal, etc.) to attend the scheduled walkability audit.

Part I: Group Meeting and Field Exercise

Invite all walkability audit participants to meet at a set time in the secured room on the school site. Post directional signs and inform facility staff of meeting location to ensure that all attendees have easy and timely access. Begin the meeting on time with a welcome and introductions. Include an overview of the purpose for the walkability audit as well as any supporting evidence validating the SRTS efforts. Be sure to give an overview of the SRTS program as well as some background on how a walkability audit works. Be inclusive of student participation by acknowledging their unique perspective and reinforcing the importance of their contributions and feedback. For some participants this may be their first experience in a collaborative project focused on active transportation. Be sure to include a list of items to look for (as described below) to provide walkers with an agenda during the walk. Introduce the "Rural Walkability Audit Tool" (included in this Guide) as a means for recording data and notes. Follow up with an overview of the scheduled activities including an introduction to safety strategies and any tools that may be needed during the walk.

Once questions have been answered, begin the walking assessment portion of your meeting.

What to Look for During a Walkability Audit

Common infrastructure deficiencies as they relate to the following topics should be considered when walking the route: sidewalks/trails/paths, street crossings, speed and volume of traffic, school zone signs and other general barriers along the way (i.e. telephone poles, electricity boxes, oversized shrubs obstructing sidewalks, loose dogs, lack of shade, insufficient lighting).

School Drop-off Locations

The first area to observe is the drop-off/dismissal zone. This area is often very congested during arrival and dismissal times, so scheduling the walkability audit when students are arriving or leaving campus will help provide insight as to actual safety issues children face. Observe the process for parents dropping off or picking up children in vehicles and determine if parents are following protocol.

Also consider:

- Are students separated from traffic or otherwise protected from cars?
- Is signage clear for vehicles and pedestrians?
- Are accessible curbs for wheelchairs present?
- Does traffic move or is it congested?
- How well is the area lit?

Sidewalks/Trails/Paths

Rural areas often lack sidewalks or have sidewalk gaps, even in school zones. In fact, some rural areas consider sidewalks inappropriate or inconsistent with the rural character of their community. Connected sidewalks near schools are important for getting children to and from school safely by foot, but unpaved walking paths that are separated from traffic can be equally as effective.

Determine if sidewalks exist, are connected, or are in disrepair. Existing sidewalks, particularly in unincorporated areas with fewer resources, may have issues that can impede safe travel. Broken or cracked sidewalks pose a big danger to pedestrians of all ages. Consider all the challenges people pushing strollers or using walkers or wheelchairs might face when using the sidewalks, trails or paths near the school. Note the placement of power poles and other utilities and whether or not they block the sidewalk or path. Observe the width of the sidewalk and record the lighting conditions.

Historically, many rural schools have used paths leading to or from campuses. Determine the condition and safety of these paths. If in disrepair, consider what improvements are necessary to make them safe and inviting. If the walking surface is not level or if shoes get wet or muddy by walking on the path, discuss how this can be remedied during the post-walk discussion.

Street Crossings

Rural areas may not have adequate facilities for pedestrians to cross the street safely. Observe the presence and location of traffic signals, stop signs, and crosswalks near the school. Determine if these crosswalks or traffic devices are well marked and visible to oncoming traffic. Take note of the number of traffic lanes and the width of the street. Wide streets tend to encourage faster vehicular traffic making crossing the street more dangerous.

Also consider:

- Is advance school signage present?
- How are motorists behaving?
- Do motorists yield to pedestrians?
- Are street crossings well marked?
- Are crosswalks visible?
- How are the curb ramps designed? (Can they accommodate wheelchairs, walkers, and strollers?)

Speed

Observe the presence or absence of posted speed limit signs and whether or not motorists are obeying speed limits. Rural regions often have state highways traveling through them that may serve as the area's primary road. Unfortunately, children are often forced to walk and bicycle along these highways or to cross them. Determine whether it is known if law enforcement tends to be present along these high-use roadways.

School Zone

Advance signs indicating to drivers that they are approaching a school zone should be present. In California, school zones have a speed limit of either 25 or 15 mph depending on the location of the school and any local adopted ordinances. School zones typically mark crosswalks with advance crosswalk signs as well as signage at the crosswalk location. Signs should not be discolored, faded, damaged, or outdated. It is worth noting that the Safer School Zone Act allows cities and counties to expand 25-mile-per-hour school zones and reduce speeds immediately around schools to 15 miles per hour.

Other Barriers

It is important that children are visible at all times when walking and bicycling to school. It is possible that a driver's sightline can be limited in some areas that children walk or bicycle. Some streets and crossings may have better visibility than others depending on location. A crossing at the top or bottom of a hill may be different for drivers to see in advance. Also the existence of vegetation along the route can affect visibility.

Other challenges include obstacles and barriers. For example, obstacles on sidewalks, such as trashcans or recreational vehicles that block the path should also be noted. Loose or stray dogs along the route can be dangerous and should be noted. Gang a drug activity create unsafe and uncomfortable conditions. Be sure to note any concerns or hazards that are identified during the walk even if they seem insignificant.

After the Walk: Bringing it all Together

Part II: Strategy Session Using Data, Maps and Interactive Exercises

After the walk, reconvene with the group in the meeting space to discuss the safety concerns identified in each walkability audit category. Form small groups and have participants write concerns directly onto oversized aerial maps in their groups.

As a reminder, maps are often available by contacting the public works department of the jurisdiction where the school is located. In some cases this will be a city, but unincorporated areas will need to contact their county public works department. If no one is available to print maps for your walkability audit, they can be downloaded from Google Maps.

Once participants mark issues of concern on the maps, they should discuss and record potential solutions generated by their group. Invite teams to discuss ideas and consider multiple perspectives. It is important to encourage participants to brainstorm education, encouragement and enforcement strategies in addition to engineering solutions.

Once all of the ideas are down on paper, have the groups report out to the larger group. Request a summation including a list of their ideas for improvement. The facilitator should draw a matrix on a flipchart or chalkboard listing short term, mid-term, and long-term solutions to safety concerns that are presented. Identify action items to move solutions forward. Ask specific participants if they are willing to take responsibility for action items. Write down tasks and responsibilities on the flip chart so those individuals agreeing to take responsibility for an action are held accountable. Finally, create an additional column to chart a timeline for the action items.

Post Walkability Audit

After the walkability audit meeting, create a written report using the walkability audit forms from all participants. In the report be sure to include all elements of the day, including brainstorming, participants present, the route map, areas of concern, photos to document concerns, suggestions for improvements/programs, participant commitments, and the action items timeline. The report can be used to inform next steps for the group, inform decision-makers at one-on-one meetings or at public hearings, and provide background information in future funding applications.

Improvements needed on school campuses can often be accomplished quickly and at a minimal cost by school or school district maintenance staff. Repainting red curbs, improving visibility through vegetation removal, and removing or replacing outdated or confusing signage are examples of low-cost quick fixes that school district maintenance staff can easily accomplish.

Having a city/county engineer attend the walkability audit will provide invaluable insight as to what safety improvements can help remedy concerns; county or city engineers can also assist in elevating recommendations to the appropriate public works department staff quickly and efficiently for improvements needed outside of the school property. If there is no engineer at your walkability audit, contact the public works department where the school is located to discuss the concerns identified and suggested recommendations.

Representatives from local law enforcement should also join as both an opportunity to learn about safety concerns as well as to answer questions and provide input.

Furthermore, local elected officials can often ensure the necessary remedies are made in a timely manner, so be sure to secure their support throughout the process. The surefire way to gain support is by having a local elected official or his/her staff participate in the walkability audit to learn firsthand about the safety and accessibility issues affecting the school and its surrounding neighborhoods.

School: _____

Date: _____ Time: _____ Weather Conditions: _____

Section 1: School Drop-Off/Pick-Up Area		YES	NO	N/A	NEEDS ACTION
a.	Are students entering and exiting vehicles protected from other cars?	❑	❑	❑	❑
b.	Is there a continuous raised curb separating vehicles from pedestrians?	❑	❑	❑	❑
c.	Are there existing Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) accessible curb ramps?	❑	❑	❑	❑
	If so, do ramps have tactile warning strips or textured concrete?	❑	❑	❑	❑
	If so, can people using walkers or wheelchairs easily maneuver through the ramps?	❑	❑	❑	❑
e.	Are there clearly posted signs directing vehicular traffic?	❑	❑	❑	❑
f.	Are drivers following drop-off/pick-up protocol/procedures?	❑	❑	❑	❑
g.	Are there clearly posted pedestrian signs?	❑	❑	❑	❑
h.	Is the drop-off/pick-up area lighted?	❑	❑	❑	❑
i.	Is traffic congested or does it move freely?	❑	❑	❑	❑

Section 2: Sidewalks, Designated Walking Paths/Trails, and Bicycle Routes		YES	NO	N/A	NEEDS ACTION
a.	Are current pedestrian and bicycle routes separated from vehicles by the use of sidewalks or separated walking paths/trails?	❑	❑	❑	❑
b.	Are there wide paved or gravel shoulders on the roadway?	❑	❑	❑	❑
c.	Is there a footpath along the roadway?	❑	❑	❑	❑
d.	Are marked bicycle lanes present?	❑	❑	❑	❑
e.	Are bicycle routes designated by signage?	❑	❑	❑	❑
f.	Are sidewalks or designated walking paths/trails continuous and without gaps?	❑	❑	❑	❑
g.	Are sidewalks and bicycle paths regularly maintained and free of debris, cracks, and holes?	❑	❑	❑	❑
h.	Are accessible ramps for wheelchairs present?	❑	❑	❑	❑
i.	Are the sidewalks lighted?	❑	❑	❑	❑

Section 3: Adjacent Intersections		YES	NO	N/A	NEEDS ACTION
a.	Are there high volumes of vehicle traffic?	❑	❑	❑	❑
b.	Are there high volumes of pedestrians?	❑	❑	❑	❑
c.	Are there painted crosswalks in all crossing directions?	❑	❑	❑	❑
d.	Are there curb ramps located at all adjacent intersections?	❑	❑	❑	❑
e.	Is there appropriate vehicle signage?	❑	❑	❑	❑
f.	Is there traffic control, such as a stoplight or stop signs?	❑	❑	❑	❑

Section 4: Sight Distance (clear views between motorists and pedestrians)		YES	NO	N/A	NEEDS ACTION
a.	Are desirable sight distances provided at all intersections within the walking zone? (visibility is free of obstruction)	❑	❑	❑	❑
b.	Do cars park or wait blocking views of other motorists, bicyclists, and pedestrians?	❑	❑	❑	❑
c.	Has the placement of fences, walls, dumpsters and the location of parking areas for service vehicles been carefully considered in view of sight distance requirements on the school site?	❑	❑	❑	❑
d.	Are there any barriers present that block the viewing of pedestrians and bicyclists (dumpsters, utility boxes, landscaping, parking areas, ground mounted signage, building walls)?	❑	❑	❑	❑

TOOLS FOR IMPROVING INFRASTRUCTURE AROUND RURAL SCHOOLS: Tool for Equitably Prioritizing Rural SRTS Efforts

Rural areas face unique challenges in access to safe transportation and safe pathways to school. Residents of small towns and rural communities often have multiple barriers to active transportation and public transit, such as geography, failing infrastructure, distance, limited choices, sharing the road with tourist traffic, and state highways serving as "main streets" through many rural communities.

There is recognition in rural communities that safety improvements around most schools are high priorities for improving community safety and livability. Safety issues at many schools must continue to be identified and addressed before children can be encouraged to safely walk and bicycle. Utilizing a prioritization tool is a strategy to coordinate local SRTS efforts and maximize impact of limited staff time and funding. It can streamline decision-making around SRTS projects and increase the capacity for effective programs and funding applications. Statewide, the need for robust criteria to evaluate SRTS programs and to prioritize decisions has been acknowledged. Prioritization metrics will assist jurisdictions in assessing school capacity and need for SRTS programs, as well as to identify which schools are best poised for SRTS projects or most competitive to apply for funding.

This is an advanced planning tool designed to assist city/county engineers and planners in equitably prioritizing SRTS projects.

Prioritization Metrics Tool Overview

This prioritization tool applies a set of criteria that considers need, health, and equity when selecting schools for infrastructure and non-infrastructure SRTS projects. By using this tool, more communities will have the opportunity to benefit from SRTS programs, particularly those that have disproportionately higher health and safety risks that could be mitigated through such SRTS projects or programs. Using this tool also meets California's Assembly Bill 516 (Pérez, 2011) requirements to promote the equitable distribution of funds through SRTS programs by prioritizing communities that are most in need of these infrastructure dollars. Limited funding at the county and city level makes it even more important to prioritize projects to maximize allocating scarce resources wisely.

Having a better understanding of the relative priority of schools offers guidance for jurisdictions in apportioning available funding strategically. Schools that have the greatest needs based on safety and health concerns, as well as those that have existing support in the school community, will rise to the top. Beyond the goal of understanding need and capacity, the criteria used for this tool lends itself to sustainability and prioritization of schools with underserved populations. In addition to providing an approach that incorporates need, capacity, and equity, this tool is formatted in a way that also promotes efficiency. To this extent, the metrics are easily updatable as new data emerges from year to year.

The prioritization tool uses a qualitative matrix to understand school capacity, and combines this with survey information and Geographic Information System

(GIS) based spatial data along with additional data sources to assess three categories of criteria:

1. School Capacity for SRTS projects and programs, gathered through school SRTS inventory telephone calls and SRTS parent surveys.
2. School Internal Need, including demographic factors within the school that may indicate a need for SRTS programs, gathered via publicly available data on school enrollment, physical fitness testing scores and socioeconomic status of the school population.
3. School External Need, including physical and socioeconomic factors in the immediate vicinity of the school that may influence safety or need for SRTS programs, compiled from spatial data available through publicly available spatial datasets and jurisdictions.

The qualitative matrix, survey tool, and GIS tool are included as Appendices.

1. School Capacity Criteria

Policy and administrative support at the school and school district level are critical to the success of funding applications as well as long-term success and sustainability of SRTS projects and programs. Administration support is a baseline indicator that informs funders and planners about the level of resources that may be needed to support the school in attaining a higher level of walking and bicycling behavior among students. In general, grant-making agencies tend to score projects with school administration support higher as it demonstrates schools will be able to sustain SRTS programs after initial investments. For example, infrastructure applications that demonstrate concrete ways the school will encourage use of new streetscape improvements are likely to have greater long-term impact.

Parent support, a SRTS champion, or ongoing activities are also key for success of school-based SRTS programs. Historically, funding for SRTS projects and programs are for one to two years. Existing parent or teacher support is one indicator of the potential for SRTS efforts to survive after the initial funding period. As with administration support, a lack of existing interest does not mean the school would not be considered for SRTS funding, but rather indicates a higher level of resources and outreach will be needed for the SRTS program to be successful.

School SRTS Inventory

Prioritization metrics should include a comprehensive SRTS inventory for all public, private, and charter schools in a region. Direct communication with school administrators and SRTS champions is necessary in order to understand school safety concerns and ongoing SRTS interest and activities. The inventory is best conducted by contacting each school by telephone in order to obtain information and insight into safety concerns and interest in SRTS. Utilize a SRTS inventory survey in order to collect consistent information from each school. The survey should include questions about ongoing SRTS activities, safety concerns, presence of pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure near the school, whether or not SRTS policies are in place, and parent involvement. In addition, distributing SRTS parent surveys will provide further insight into parental safety concerns and behavior around how their children get to and from school. Finally, the surveys can also serve to inform future evaluation efforts on program impact.

2. School Internal Need Criteria

In order for School Internal Need Criteria to be easily replicated in the future, this prioritization tool uses data sources that will be regularly updated and publicly available. The demographic indicators of the Internal Need Criteria help identify schools that may have greater need based on equity and health concerns. Total student enrollment in the school is also considered as one potential factor indicating need for funding. All data sources used are updated annually and made available

through the California Department of Education (CDE). The importance of equity in addressing safety concerns and SRTS need at schools should not be overlooked. Therefore, data on school socioeconomic indicators should be included as primary criteria.

Internal Need Indicator 1: Percentage of Students Eligible for Free and Reduced Price Meals

Children from low-income families are twice as likely to walk to school as children from higher-income families.[xlii] However, students living in low-income areas may encounter neighborhood barriers to safe walking and bicycling, such as higher numbers of busy through streets and poor pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure. They may also be faced with challenges such as distance to school and a shortage of sidewalks, walking trails or paths. This leads to increased risk of traffic injuries with children from low-income households having higher risk of being injured or killed as pedestrians.[xliii] Compounding these concerns is that children from low-income families are at greater risk of obesity.[xliv] Given these risks, it is important to identify and support schools that have a high percentage of low-income students.

In the education system, family income is used to qualify for Free and Reduced Price Meals (FRPM) in the National School Meals Program. FRPM are available to students with family incomes of up to 185 percent of the federal poverty limit. At the federal level, schools are often categorized as low-income when more than half of their students qualify for FRPM. Rather than classifying schools as low or high income, this prioritization tool allocates points based on the percentage of FRPM eligibility. The intent is to prioritize those schools with a very high percentage of low-income students.

Internal Need Indicator 2: Percentage of Students Meeting Healthy Fitness Zone Benchmarks

The FITNESSGRAM® uses Healthy Fitness Zones (HFZs) to evaluate fitness performance. These zones, established by The Cooper Institute of Dallas, Texas, represent minimum levels of physical fitness that can protect against the diseases caused by sedentary living. CDE considers a student who meets or exceeds a HFZ as meeting the desired performance goal. Schools with a low percentage of students meeting the basic HFZ standards receive higher scores. The intent is to identify those school populations that may benefit the most from increased physical activity from walking and bicycling to and from school.

Internal Need Indicator 3: Student Enrollment

With limited resources available for SRTS projects and programs, it is important that jurisdictions consider where resources can reach the most people. As student enrollment varies widely across schools, it is important to document student population.

This indicator supports schools with larger populations that could safely walk or bicycle to school. This indicator, however, should not be weighted heavily or used to normalize percentage scores. The scoring was developed to add points to those larger schools where improvement would likely benefit many students, while not discriminating against rural schools whose enrollment size will often be smaller.

3. School External Need Criteria

These criteria are intended to assess and document spatial information relevant to external school need. Thus, a GIS component is included to efficiently and accurately assess the external factors that may influence each school's need for SRTS projects and programs. GIS offers a cost-effective and accurate proxy for walkability audits at a range of spatial scales. In the case of a countywide assessment, prioritization using only field verification would be prohibitively expensive, both in terms of time and financial cost. A GIS component is designed to assess a school's external need for SRTS based on a variety of roadway characteristic and demographic indicators.

The School External Need Criteria looks at existing

pedestrian facilities, posted speed limits of school roads and roads intersecting within 660 feet of schools, existing bicycle and trail facilities, percentage of carless households, and the frequency of pedestrian and bicycle collisions. It is possible to survey the available spatial data through public sources and individual jurisdictions that can help assess external school need.

External Need Indicator 1: Existing Pedestrian Facilities

A connected pedestrian network of sidewalks near schools ensures students and families have a safe route to walk to school. Pedestrian facilities can be assessed during the SRTS inventory telephone calls to schools because sidewalks and other pedestrian facilities may not be spatially catalogued by jurisdictions. Existing pedestrian facilities can also be determined through walkability audits.

External Need Indicator 2: Posted Speed Limit

Speed has a direct impact on frequency and severity of pedestrian and bicycle collisions with motorized vehicles. According to the Federal Highway Administration, "reductions in vehicle speeds can have a very significant influence on pedestrian crashes and injuries," and "pedestrians suffer much more serious injuries when struck by high-speed vehicles than when struck by vehicles going more slowly."[xlv] Speed is a risk factor even at the relatively low speeds found in school zones. For example, a pedestrian struck by a vehicle travelling at 25 mph or less has an 89 percent probability of survival; the survival rate drops to 11 percent when a pedestrian is hit by a vehicle traveling at 35 mph or higher.[xlvi]

Because of the difficulty of collecting accurate data from jurisdictions, Average Daily Traffic (ADT) information is not used in this prioritization tool. Traffic speeds can viably assess potential safety concerns along streets adjacent to schools, and is not likely to need regular updating.

External Need Indicator 3: Existing Bicycle and Trail Facilities

Measuring school proximity to bicycle and trail facilities is key. Data on existing bicycle and trail facilities can usually be collected from MPOs or RTPAs. The presence of bicycle and trail facilities increases the likelihood that children and adults will choose active transportation, such as walking or bicycling, for both recreation and transportation. One study indicates that trails increase the likelihood that people will choose to walk as a mode of transportation in areas with available trails.[xlvii] Another found the availability of bicycle facilities directly correlates to increased bicycle ridership.[xlviii]

External Need Indicator 4: Percentage of Carless Households

Lack of access to a motorized vehicle indicates that children will travel to and from school by walking, bicycling, or using public transit. The percentage of carless households is determined by creating a spatial data layer from the U.S. Census Bureau demographic data, and integrating spatial data for census tracts (statistical geographic subdivisions within a county).

External Need Indicator 5: Pedestrian and Bicycle Collision Frequency and Location

Safety of young pedestrians and bicyclists is of paramount importance when establishing priority for SRTS projects. While it is important to consider collisions involving children, collisions involving people of all ages may indicate an area of higher risk. The Safe Transportation Research and Education Center at the University of California, Berkeley has created the Transportation Injury Mapping System (TIMS) which provides several tools to easily search and create GIS maps of traffic collision data from the Caltrans Statewide Integrated Traffic Records System (SWITRS) database, a repository of all collision data collected in California. The TIMS project packages select SWITRS data into a geo-referenced file suitable for use with GIS software. When mapping, select the buffer size (e.g. a half mile)

around each school to map, and include a count of pedestrian and bicycle collisions with motor vehicles.

Ready-made PDF maps of pedestrian or bicycle collisions in school zones can also be downloaded on the TIMS website.

Scoring

The complete inventory of SRTS data relating to each criterion must be gathered for each school before scoring can begin. School SRTS inventory telephone calls for criteria determination must be thorough. While this process is time-intensive, it will reveal valuable information specific to each school and help promote SRTS programs.

School Capacity Criteria

The School Capacity Criteria offers a choice of scoring schools with zero, five, or ten points depending on responses to the inventory survey questions. For each school, determining the presence or absence of school administration support, SRTS activities, parent support, SRTS policy, and SRTS surveys will correspond with a score. These scores are tallied and added to the scores of the Internal Need and External Need sections of the prioritization tool.

Data Sources

- School Inventory Telephone Calls (see Appendix B)

School Internal Need Criteria

Using the Ed-Data website, determine the percentage of students receiving FRPM and utilize that percentage to determine a score. A higher percentage will result in a higher score. Likewise, determining the percentage of students achieving the benchmark physical fitness level will allow you to determine a score for Indicator 2: HFZ. As described above, the lower the HFZ percentage, higher the score that school will receive to identify school populations that may benefit the most from increased physical activity from walking and bicycling to school.

A school's total student enrollment is also considered as one potential factor indicating need for funding. With limited resources available for SRTS efforts, it is important to consider where resources can reach the most people. This indicator supports schools with larger populations that could potentially walk or bicycle to and from school. This indicator is not weighted heavily or used to normalize percentage scores, but rather it will add points to larger schools while not discriminating against rural schools whose enrollment size is smaller.

Data Sources

- FRPM eligibility: http://www.cde.ca.gov/ds/sd/sd/filessp.asp
- Physical Fitness: http://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tg/pf/pftresults.asp
- Student Enrollment: http://www.cde.ca.gov/ds/sd/sd/filesenr.asp

External Need Criteria

Determining whether or not schools have a connected pedestrian network of sidewalks can be assessed through SRTS inventory calls to schools and/or city/county engineers. A value of five, three, or one is assigned, with schools indicating absent facilities scoring the highest, indicating the greatest external need.

Because speed has a direct impact on frequency and severity of pedestrian and bicycle collisions with motorized vehicles, the speed limit for roads that each school is located on should be examined and a score assigned depending on the speed. Speed limit information should be available as a GIS shapefile from the GIS office at your city or county's planning, public works, or information technology departments. Schools located on roadways with higher than 35 mph speeds will earn the highest score. Schools located within 660 feet of such a roadway will rank next. Schools on roadways with speed limits less than 35 mph, including adjacent roadways within a 660 foot buffer, will rank last.

Data on the presence or absence of existing bicycle and trail facilities within a 660 foot buffer leading to each school campus is another criterion to consider and tally, and should be available through your County GIS department. The percentage of carless households is determined by creating a spatial data layer from U.S. Census Bureau demographic data. More carless households within the census tract result in a higher score for that school; likewise, a higher number of collisions produces a higher score. A high score indicates a greater need for safety interventions and SRTS programming.

Data Sources

- Pedestrian Facilities: School Inventory Calls
- Posted Speed Limit: City or County GIS Department
- Existing Bicycle and Trail Facilities: City, County, or MPO GIS Office
- Percentage of Carless Households: http://www.census.gov/acs/www/
- Pedestrian and Bicycle Collision Frequency: http://www.tims.berkeley.edu/

By tallying all three sets of criteria, each school will receive a score that will provide valuable insight on its capacity, and need for a SRTS program. The intent is that the higher a school scores, the more the school's students will benefit from infrastructure improvements, education, encouragement, and enforcement activities to allow safe walking and bicycling opportunities for students. These scores should ideally be used to prioritize schools for SRTS funding and program efforts that can help increase safety, build partnerships, and encourage active transportation as a means for children to travel safely to and from school.

The Prioritization Metrics Tool can help ensure coordination of SRTS efforts across jurisdictions, increase capacity for SRTS programs at schools, and increase competitiveness across regions for competitive ATP funding. The prioritization tool was developed to be user friendly and easily updated to guide evaluation of potential SRTS projects and programs perpetuity. As SRTS funding opportunities have shifted at the federal level, these metrics will be crucial in equitably allocating funding for pedestrian and bicycle improvement projects around schools and neighboring communities.

The following Appendices are part of the Tool for Prioritizing Rural SRTS Efforts:

A. SRTS Prioritization Metrics Tool

B. School SRTS Inventory Survey

C. SRTS Prioritization Metrics Spatial Component Instructions

This matrix relies on the information gathered from the tools in Appendix B and C along with other data sources as indicated within the matrix. Using this matrix as a guide creates an overall school capacity score for each school and generate a prioritization list.

School Capacity Criteria

Data Source	Criteria Description	Measured by	Values	Maximum Score
School Inventory Telephone Calls	School administration support	Presence/Absence	Present = 5 Absent = 0	5
School Inventory Telephone Calls	SRTS activities/discussions/interest	Presence/Absence	Ongoing = 10 Present = 5 Absent = 0	10
School Inventory Telephone Calls	SRTS champion present at the school	Presence/Absence	Present = 5 Absent = 0	5
School Inventory Telephone Calls	Active school/parent support organization (e.g. PTA/PTO, Booster Club, school site council)	Presence/Absence	Present = 5 Absent = 0	5
School Inventory Telephone Calls	SRTS school district or school policy adopted	Presence/Absence	Present = 5 Absent = 0	5
School Inventory Telephone Calls	Completed SRTS parent surveys	Annual Reporting	Present = 5 Absent = 0	5

Internal Need Criteria

Data Source	Criteria Description	Measured by	Values	Maximum Score
Ed-Data *(http://www.cde.ca.gov/ds/sd/sd/filessp.asp)*	Free and Reduced Price Meals	Schools scored based on percentage of students eligible as reported	75-100% or greater =10 60-74% = 8 40-59% = 6 20-39% = 4 0-19% = 2	10
FitnessGram *(http://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tg/pf/pftresults.asp)*	Aerobic Fitness (% meeting Healthy Fitness Zone)	Schools are scored based on percentage of students achieving the benchmark fitness level	70-100% = 0 40-70% = 3 0-40% = 5	5
Ed-Data *(http://www.cde.ca.gov/ds/sd/sd/filesenr.asp)*	Student Enrollment	Schools are scored based total student enrollment	Above 300 = 5 101-300 = 3 Under 100 = 1	5

External Need Criteria

Data Source	Criteria Description	Measured by	Values	Maximum Score
School Inventory Telephone Calls	Pedestrian facilities	Score based on the presence or absence of dedicated pedestrian facilities leading to the school campus	Absent = 5 Present but insufficient = 3 Present = 0	5
County, City or MPO GIS Office	Posted Speed limit	Speed limit of school roads and speed limits of roads intersecting within 660 ft	School on a road over 35mph = 10 Intersects Over 35mph = 5 25 or under and no intersections = 1	10
County, City or MPO GIS Office	Existing bicycle and trail facilities	Score based on the presence or absence of dedicated bicycle facilities within 660 ft. buffer leading to the school campus. Includes only Class I and II facilities and trails	Absent = 5 Present = 0	5
2013 Census or American Communities Survey (ACS) *(http://www.census.gov/acs/www/)*	Percentage of carless households	Score based on the percentage of carless households per census area in which the surveyed school is located. Classification performed by natural breaks (Jenks Method)	13-17% = 5 9-12% = 4 6-8% = 3 3-5% = 2 0-2% = 1	5
UC Berkeley SafeTREC Transportation Injury Mapping System (TIMS) *(http://www.tims.berkeley.edu/)*	Pedestrian and Bicycle Collision Frequency	Based on the total number of pedestrian or bicycle involved collisions within .5 mile buffer, scores assigned based on natural breaks in the data	25-71 = 5 6-24 = 3 1-5 = 1 0 = 0	5

	Total Capacity Score	**35**
	Total Need Score	**45**
	Total Possible Score	**80**
Adjusted score for schools without Fitnessgram Data	**Total Adjusted Score**	**75**

B. SCHOOL SRTS INVENTORY SURVEY

The first step of the prioritization process is to create an inventory of SRTS-related information for every public, private, and charter school in a county or region. The information will be used to create the criteria that will rank each individual school's need for and capacity of SRTS projects.

The following questions can be provided to each school need, capacity, and support for a SRTS program:

- Has your school engaged in SRTS programs or discussions about the importance of SRTS?
  - What is your school's awareness of, interest in, or history with SRTS?
- Is there a SRTS champion (or walking/bicycling champion) at your school?
  - Is there a teacher, parent, or administrator who is active in or enthusiastic about encouraging children to walk and bicycle to school?
- Are there concerns around children's health or students getting enough physical activity?
- Are there any existing programs that currently support student physical activity?
- Are there safety concerns about children traveling to school or safety or health concerns around the pick-up/drop-off zone?
- Does your school have an active Parent Teacher Association/Organization or other engaged parent group?
- Do you know how many children walk or bicycle to your school?
- What are the main walking and bicycle routes to your school?
- Does your school have bicycle parking (racks)?
  - If so, does it adequately accomodate bicycles?
- Does your school currently have a crossing guard, or has it had one in the past?
  - If so, at which road crossing(s) did or does the school crossing guard work?
- Are there city or school district polices (or informal policies) around student transportation at your school?
  - This can include but is not limited to: supporting active transportation, limits on car idling, a drop-off/pick-up location, safe school ingress and egress, or limits on walking or bicycling to school
- Do any after school programs occur at your school?
  - Who runs the program(s)?
  - Is physical activity incorporated into the program(s)?
- Have you encouraged the completion of SRTS surveys by parents at your school?
- Has your school encouraged the completion of SRTS travel tallies by students at your school?
- Who in the school administration would be willing to work on SRTS related issues?

Additional questions for school districts if individual schools do not have the data:

- How many school bus stops are there and where are they located?
- What is the percentage of the total school budget going towards bus transportation?
- What is the percentage of students riding school buses at each school?

C. SRTS PRIORITIZATION METRICS SPATIAL COMPONENT INSTRUCTIONS

These instructions for updating and utilizing the spatial component of the Prioritization Tool were prepared for a user with moderate GIS experience, and rely on Excel to perform some tasks that can also be accomplished by a more advanced GIS user in the ArcMap environment.

These instructions assume basic understanding of core GIS concepts and tools, including data management, fundamentals of projections and rudimentary geo-processing functions such as geocoding, buffering, merging and joining spatial and tabular data.

Software and Data Requirements

Software:

- Environmental Systems Research Institute (ESRI) ArcGIS ArcMap, ArcView license (version 9.0 or higher)
- Microsoft Excel

Data, Data Source and Projection:

Data Layer	Data Source	Projection
School.shp	Geocoded list obtained from County Office of Education; locations confirmed via Google Earth and contacting principal	Universal Transverse Mercator (UTM), NAD 83, Zone 10N
BikePed_Facilities.shp	Class I, II, and III Bicycle Facilities from a Regional Trails Master Plan (RTMP) or similar data source from local Regional Transportation Planning Agency	UTM, Zone 10N
Street_Centerline.shp	County GIS	UTM, Zone 10N
BikePed_Collisions.shp	Transportation Injury Mapping System database http://www.tims.berkeley.edu/	UTM, Zone 10N
CensusTracts_ 2010.shp	US Census http://www.census.gov/cgi-bin/geo/shapefiles2010/main	UTM, Zone 10N
Household Vehicle Inventory, ACS Table B08201	US Census, American Fact Finder Advanced Search http://factfinder.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/searchresults.xhtml?refresh=t	N/A

Prior to starting, add the following fields to Schools.Shp

- RTMPVal
  - Short integer, scale = 5
- TotColl
  - Long integer, scale = 8
- TIMSVal
  - Short integer, scale = 5
- SpdLmtVal
  - Short integer, scale = 5
- PctCarless
  - Double integer, precision = 12, scale = 10
- CarlessVal
  - Short integer, scale = 5
- SRTSVal
  - Short integer, scale = 5

Geoprocessing Steps for Schools.shp

Existing Bicycle Paths and Lanes from RTMP Data Sets

- Use the Select by Location tool to select which schools are within 660 feet of existing Class I and II bicycle facilities.
- Open Schools.shp attribute table and use the field calculator to populate the selected schools with a 5. These are the schools that do not have Class I and II bicycle facilities near them.
- Switch the selection.

Collisions History

- Create a half mile buffer around Schools.shp and name it SchoolBuff_HalfMile.shp.
- Create a Spatial Join between SchoolBuff_HalfMile.shp (target) and BikePed_Collisions.shp (join features).
  - Join type = one-to-one.
  - Output = SchoolBuff_Coll_SpJ.shp.
  - Using the school name as the common field between School.shp and SchoolBuff_Coll_SpJ.shp, join the table of SchoolBuff_Coll_SpJ.shp to School.shp.
  - With the join intact, use the field calculator to populate TotColl with the SchoolBuff_Coll_SpJ.shp.JoinCount field (Join Count contains the total collision events per buffer as a result of the spatial join).
  - Remove join.
- Display schools by proportional symbols or color ramp using the TotColl field.
  - Use four intervals with the Natural Breaks classification method (manually change the lowest value to zero so as to have a range of three classes).
- Reopen the School.shp attribute field.
- Select the schools containing the highest number of collisions and populate TIMSVal with five.
- Select the schools containing the mid-range collision totals and populate TIMSVAL with 3.
- Select the schools containing the least amount of collisions (sans 0) and populate TIMSVal with 1.

Speed Limit

- Use the Select by Location tool to select which schools are located on or near streets with speeds of 35 mph or higher (First select all streets that are 35 mph or higher and select schools based on this selection of street).
  - To select schools that are on 35 mph streets, select schools that intersect with selected streets (you may need to use a short distance proxy of approximately 50 or 100 feet to capture this criteria as schools on such streets may not be snapped to the centerline).
  - Open the Schools.shp attribute table.
  - Use the field calculator to populate SpdLmtVal with five.
  - Select schools that are within 660 feet of selected street.
  - Use the field calculator to populate SpdLmtVal with three.
  - For all remaining schools that have not been populated, select them and assign a 1 to SpdLmtVal. These are schools that are not on or near 35 mph streets.

Vehicle Inventory

- Add the following fields to CensusTracts2010.shp:
  - TotHH = long integer, scale = 10
  - TotNoVeh = long integer, scale = 10
  - PctNoVeh = double integer, scale = 20; precision = 20
- Perform a tabular join between ACS table B08201 and CensusTracts2010.shp, using the GEOID as the common field for the basis of the join.
- Use the field calculator to populate TotHH and TotNoVeh with total households and total housheulds with no vehicles, respectively.

- Calculate percentage of carless households in PctNoVeh with the following equation: (TotNoVeh/TotHH)*100.
- Remove join.
- Create a Spatial Join between Schools.shp (target) and CensusTracts2010.shp (join features).
  - Join type = one-to-one.
  - Output = School_NoVeh_SpJ.shp.
  - Using the school name as the common field between School.shp and School_NoVeh_SpJ.shp, join the table of School_NoVeh_SpJ.shp to School.shp.
  - With the join in tact, use the field calculator to populate PctCarless with the School_NoVeh_SpJ.shp.PctNoVeh field.
  - Remove join.
- Display schools by proportional symbols or color ramp using the PctCarless field
  - Use five intervals with the Natural Breaks classification method.
- Reopen the School.shp attribute field.
- Select the schools containing the highest interval and populate PctCarless with five.
- Select the schools containing the second highest interval and populate PctCarless with four.
- Repeat for the remaining intervals, assigning scores of three, two and one for the lowest interval.

Percent Carless Indicator Footnotes:
1: Many of the schools will occur in the same census tracts, and thus will have the same percentage of carless households. Geometric intervals are ideally suited to classifying data sets that share many similar numbers. See http://blogs.esri.com/esri/arcgis/2007/10/18/about-the-geometrical-interval-classification-method/ for further explanation.

Calculating the SRTSVal (total points)

- Each of the four indicators are added together for each school to yield the total point score for the prioritization tool. This value is the SRTS value, or SRTSVal, and will be added to the quantitative and spatial score totals for each school.
- Use the field calculator on SRTSVal and enter the following equation:
  - [CarlessVal] + [RTMPVal] + [SpdLmtVal] + [TIMSVal]
- Export the SRTSVal column and school names to Excel for inclusion with the qualitative and spatial tool values.

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