

HCAOG REGIONAL SAFE ROUTES TO SCHOOLS PRIORITIZATION TOOL



November, 2012

**Prepared for Humboldt County Association of
Governments**

**By the Natural Resources Services Division of
Redwood Community Action Agency
and Alta Planning + Design**



HCAOG Regional Safe Routes to Schools Prioritization Tool

Thank you to the community members, agency staff and Safe Routes to Schools County-wide Task Force for providing guidance throughout the planning process. Your participation and contributions are key to this and future Safe Routes to Schools efforts.

Consultant Team

Natural Resources Services Division of Redwood Community Action Agency

Emily Sinkhorn, Projects Coordinator

Jennifer Weiss, Planner

Alta Planning + Design

Dana Dickman, Senior Planner

Tony Salomone, GIS Analyst

Humboldt County Association of Governments

611 I Street, Suite B Eureka, CA 95501

(707) 444-8208

Oona Smith, Project Manager

This document can be found online at www.hcaog.net under our Projects page.

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HCAOG Regional Safe Routes to School Prioritization Tool

November, 2012

Executive Summary

As schools and communities face growing challenges of kids getting to school safely and meeting physical activity needs, Safe Routes to Schools (SR2S) projects and programs are thriving as a means to address traffic safety concerns, childhood obesity and rising transportation costs. A safe environment for children going to and from school is clearly a priority for schools and parents across both urban and rural communities.

The Humboldt County Association of Governments (HCAOG) has developed this Regional SR2S Prioritization Tool to help streamline decision-making around SR2S projects and increase the capacity for effective SR2S programs and grant applications. The project team was led by the Natural Resources Services Division of Redwood Community Action Agency and Alta Planning + Design in consultation with County of Humboldt Public Works.

The Regional SR2S Prioritization Tool is a tool for HCAOG and member jurisdictions to use to assess school readiness and need for SR2S programs and to identify which schools are best poised for SR2S projects or most competitive to apply for funding. The Tool includes a spatially explicit GIS-based component and a qualitative matrix framework that can be easily updated and sustained. The Tool includes criteria which evaluate school readiness for SR2S projects and programs, socioeconomic need and factors external to the school that influence equity and traffic safety.

This project includes the most comprehensive SR2S inventory for all public and charter schools in Humboldt County to date, providing a depth and breadth of SR2S information unparalleled with any previous regional effort. The inventory informed the development of the Prioritization Tool and provided insight into safety concerns and interest in SR2S from each school. The project also enabled the formation of the Humboldt County SR2S Task Force which guided the work on this project and supported expanding SR2S efforts throughout the County.

As part of this project, walkability audits were conducted at two schools selected through draft iterations of the Prioritization Tool. The walkability audits provided the chance for school administrators, parents, law enforcement, elected officials and SR2S advocates to analyze the walking environment at the selected schools

and recommend potential SR2S projects. A walkability audit report and recommendation map provided for each school will help to prepare these schools for future funding applications.



Kids walking to Washington Elementary on a SR2S Walking Wednesday

The Prioritization Tool ranks schools for HCAOG and each member jurisdiction to focus future SR2S projects and programs. The Tool offers an approach to prioritization that incorporates need, capacity, and equity in a format that also promotes efficiency. The Tool can be easily updated as new data emerges from year to year. HCAOG, as the regional transportation planning agency for Humboldt County, is well positioned to sustain the Regional SR2S Prioritization Tool and carry forward the recommendations from this Tool Report.

As SR2S funding opportunities have recently shifted with the passage of the new Federal Transportation Bill MAP-21, the Regional SR2S Prioritization Tool will remain crucial to equitably and robustly evaluate potential bicycle and pedestrian improvement projects around schools and neighboring communities. HCAOG should continue to support SR2S coordination in future Overall Work Plans and consider alternative funding allocations to sustain SR2S projects throughout the region.

1. Introduction

Purpose and Need for a Regional SR2S Tool

The number of children walking and bicycling to school has decreased more than three-fold over the past few decades. The distance families live from school, school-siting issues, budget cuts for transportation, and perceived safety dangers are just some of the reasons for this change. As more children are being driven to school instead of walking or biking, communities experience more cars on the road and traffic congestion in front of schools during arrival and dismissal times. At the same time, children achieve less and less of the daily physical activity that they need to be healthy.

Many people in Humboldt recognize that safety improvements around most schools are high priorities for improving community safety and livability. Safety issues must continue to be identified and addressed before children can be encouraged to walk and bicycle to many schools across Humboldt County. The Regional SR2S Tool is a much needed step to coordinate local SR2S efforts.

This project sought to increase capacity for Safe Routes to Schools (SR2S) programs and projects at all public and charter schools across Humboldt County. To this end, the project objective was to develop a prioritization tool to inform HCAOG and individual jurisdictions which schools are poised for SR2S funding and projects. Although Humboldt County has had success in implementing SR2S programs and attracting SR2S funding, there was no established method for evaluating prospective schools for SR2S grant applications. Statewide, SR2S advocates have recognized the need for robust criteria to evaluate SR2S programs and to make prioritization decisions. The Prioritization Tool will help HCAOG and member jurisdictions better assess the schools with the greatest need and highest level of support to ensure that grant applications from our county will be more competitive and that programs will be successful.

The Prioritization Tool applies a set of criteria metrics to consider need, health, and equity when selecting schools for SR2S projects. By addressing and prioritizing low income communities in this Tool we will enable more communities to benefit from Safe Routes to Schools programs, particularly communities that have disproportionately higher health and safety risks that could be mitigated through SR2S programs. The Tool also meets California's AB 516 requirements to promote the equitable distribution of funds through SR2S 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 schools to maximize allocating scarce resources wisely.

Background of SR2S

Safe Routes to Schools is a unique program that integrates safety, community health, active living and transportation, traffic relief, socio-economic equity, and ecological awareness into schools and communities. SR2S programs are working to identify the barriers that prevent children from walking or biking school. SR2S educates and encourages children to walk, roll, and bus to school. It can help create safer streets and promote healthier lifestyles for children

and other community members. When children can safely walk, bike, and roll to school, parents and caregivers can feel more comfortable letting their children get to school by their own power. Fewer car trips can also improve air quality by lowering greenhouse gas emissions from automobiles.

Rural areas, such as Humboldt County, face unique challenges in access to safe transportation and safe routes to school. Residents of small towns and rural communities often have multiple barriers to active and public transport and safe routes to schools, such as geography, failing infrastructure, distance, limited choices, and sharing the road with shipping and tourist traffic. State highways serve as “main streets” through many communities here in Humboldt County. For example, eight schools are located on state highway corridors and five other schools are directly adjacent to a state highway.

2. SR2S in Humboldt County

Humboldt County, a rural region on California’s north coast, encompasses 2.3 million acres, has nearly 135,000 residents, and has 97 public and charter schools. The region faces many challenges around walking and bicycling because of its remote location, infrastructure, climate, and culture. Yet, Humboldt has been on the cutting edge of SR2S programming and policy-making.

Thriving SR2S Programs in Humboldt County

SR2S is an important funding program for installing infrastructure improvements and traffic calming measures, and it is also a movement that is familiar to Humboldt County. Since the first Walkability Audits were conducted here in 2005, schools districts and jurisdictions have been working towards creating safer walking and bicycling environments for students. Concerned parents, school administrators, teachers, neighbors, and advocates have been investigating the barriers to walking and biking locally. Together, they are working towards providing more opportunities for children to get physical activity by using active transportation to school.

Diverse partners coming together for environmental, social, and policy change has been a key element of local SR2S successes. It takes parents, teachers, law enforcement officers, planners, engineers, and community members collaboratively identifying safety concerns and solutions to enhance the built environment and improve opportunities for walking and biking to school.

Safe Routes to Schools efforts in Eureka were bumped up in 2010 when the City of Eureka received a Cycle 8 SR2S grant to install traffic calming measures and lighted crosswalks, and to hold education and encouragement events at Washington Elementary School. The program kicked off with a safety workshop for all the students and families of Eureka City Schools. The “Step into Safety Family Fun Day” was designed to provide a fun, interactive way for families to learn about transportation options and develop a safe, convenient, and affordable travel plan to and from school. The school coordinated International Walk to School Day as well as regular Walking Wednesdays on the first Wednesday of each month. This program encouraged students to walk or bike to school from home if safe to do so, or meet at a remote drop off location where they could walk the rest of the way to school with friends supervised by adult volunteers. Students who rode the bus who wished to participate could bring a signed permission slip to be dropped off at the remote drop off and walk to school with the other children. There was also an option for students dropped off directly at school to walk a lap around a track. Classroom participation was tracked and the classroom with the highest percentage of walkers and bikers each month received the “Golden Sneaker” award for their classroom.



This grant with Washington School was also the impetus to form the Greater Eureka SR2S Task Force. Initially formed to help guide and oversee the education and encouragement program at Washington Elementary, it has since branched out to help spread the reach of SR2S to other Eureka schools.

Since the completion of the Cycle 8 SR2S grant at Washington, the Greater Eureka SR2S Task Force has been working with Alice Birney, Lafayette, and Grant Elementary Schools. A Walkability Audit at Grant led to the PTA receiving a \$5,000 mini-grant to begin a SR2S encouragement program that included coordinating regular Walking Wednesdays, painting a “Bulldog Boulevard” to mark the safest crossing next to the school, and making improvements to a heavily used historic path to school. The Humboldt County Public Works Department applied for a Cycle 10 SR2S grant on behalf of Grant Elementary School, which was recently awarded a grant to install traffic calming measures and infrastructure improvements at and near the school.

Alice Birney Elementary School in Eureka has also been positively affected by Safe Routes to Schools. The Greater Eureka Task Force performed a mini Walkability Audit that resulted in immediate quick fix improvements at the school such as increasing crossing visibility in front of the school, in the parking lot, and in the adjacent neighborhood. Most impressively, a champion teacher started an afterschool bicycle club to teach students bicycle safety skills and basic mechanics, which has since been correlated with a reduction in bicycle collisions in the neighborhood.



Family Bike Rodeo event at Alice Birney Elementary

Outside of Eureka, Jacoby Creek Charter School, Coastal Grove Charter School, Sunnybrae Middle School, and Arcata Elementary School, all in Arcata, have also been participating in International Walk to School Day. Several safety improvement projects in Arcata were made possible over the years thanks to SR2S funding, increasing the number of students walking and bicycling.

Freshwater and Garfield Elementary Schools, each in their own school districts, have also received SR2S funding in the recent past. Located in a more rural setting with fewer opportunities for students to walk or bike, SR2S projects provided traffic calming measures which have made the environment more welcoming to those using active transportation to get to and from school.

The Rio Dell School District in the small city of Rio Dell has two schools, one elementary and one middle school. Their community is very compact and ideal for walking; therefore the school district does not provide busing for any of its students. The City of Rio Dell recently applied for and received a SR2S Cycle 10 grant to help make the community even more safe and inviting for

pedestrians and cyclists. Rio Dell’s SR2S award will improve walking and biking infrastructure and connectivity around the elementary and middle school.

3. Humboldt County SR2S Task Force

Roles, purpose, member representation

In 2012, coordinated SR2S efforts expanded county-wide with the formation of the Humboldt County SR2S Task Force. The Task Force formed to help guide the Regional SR2S Prioritization Tool and increase capacity for addressing walking and bicycling concerns at rural schools throughout the county. The Task Force met monthly February – November, 2012.

The Humboldt County SR2S Task Force is made up of County Public Health Education staff, a County Public Works Engineer, a California Highway Patrol Information Officer, Bus Transportation Managers, Redwood Community Action Agency planners, Humboldt County Office of Education Risk Manager, and various principals, teachers, and parents from throughout the county. A Task Force member contact list is provided in Appendix A.

The roles and responsibilities of the County-wide Task Force are as follows:

- Assist in developing SR2S information for each school in Humboldt County, including past funding history, parent surveys, walkability audits, plans for infrastructure improvements, and existing programs.
- Select two pilot schools for school site walkability audits.
- Attend and assist at school site walkability audits.
- Assist with creating a map that identifies all schools and relative safety risks.
- Help create a detailed walkability map of pilot schools.
- Come to consensus on prioritization criteria for Humboldt County SR2S projects.
- Come to consensus on weight assigned to criteria.
- Share announcements and information pertaining to SR2S.
- Identify short- and long-term goals for specific Humboldt County schools as issues arise.
- Act as liaisons to other schools, committees, community groups, or city/community departments/districts as applicable.
- Develop and/or provide assistance for a County-Wide Crossing Guard Program.
- Develop relationships with other SR2S Task Forces and programs throughout Humboldt County.

4. SR2S Inventory of Humboldt County Schools

School SR2S Inventory Calls

The project team relied on direct communication with school administrators and SR2S champions to understand schools' safety concerns and ongoing SR2S interest and activities. In addition SR2S parent surveys gave insight into parents' safety concerns and behavior around how their kids get to school. These school calls and parent surveys were the basis of the school readiness criteria component of the Prioritization Tool described in the next section.

Before this project, there had not been a comprehensive effort to survey transportation safety concerns and potential SR2S interest and capacity at all schools throughout Humboldt County. In the spring of 2011, the Greater SR2S Eureka Task Force distributed SR2S Parent Surveys to many schools across the County. The SR2S inventory calls conducted through this project yielded an even greater breadth of information from across the County.

The project team received school contact information through the Humboldt County Office of Education. The project team called school champions, when known or identified, or the school principal or the transportation manager.

Outreach was conducted via phone calls to the 97 public and charter schools in Humboldt County (including alternative schools). These SR2S inventory calls helped assess school readiness for SR2S programs. The school inventory calls utilized a SR2S inventory survey in order to collect consistent information from each school. The survey included questions on ongoing SR2S activities, safety concerns, presence of pedestrian and bicycling infrastructure near the school, and parent involvement. The survey and talking points used during the inventory calls are provided in Appendix B.

School SR2S Inventory Contacts

The project team was able to reach 78 of the 97 public and charter schools across the County – an 80% response rate! The school SR2S inventory contact list in Appendix B details which schools responded to the SR2S inventory calls and with whom contact was made. This contact list will inform future SR2S coordination efforts and identify SR2S champions across the County.

Nineteen schools were not reached because either the site had closed, the students were all utilizing independent study, the school was an alternative school located on the same campus as another school, or phone calls and emails from school contacts were not returned.

Many small schools did not express safety concerns or SR2S interest either because of the rural nature of the school's population area, transitional nature of a court or community school, or a sense of the lack of relevance of SR2S to their particular school's situation.

School SR2S Inventory Findings

This project conducted the first comprehensive SR2S school inventory in Humboldt County. The information gleaned is invaluable. The SR2S school inventory calls were utilized to inform the Regional SR2S Prioritization Tool and will continue to assist SR2S advocates as further SR2S work or partnerships are pursued across the County. A summary of responses from each inventoried school is included in Appendix B.

Many schools have ongoing SR2S activities and support these programs that help their students get to school safely and engage in physical activity. SR2S activities are particularly active at schools in the micro-urban centers of Eureka, Fortuna, and Arcata. Current SR2S activities include International Walk to School Day, Walking Wednesdays, Bike Rodeos, an after-school bicycling club, and pedestrian and bicycling safety education. Many rural schools also recognize the importance of SR2S as a tool to address safety concerns near their school. For example, Trinity Valley Elementary in Willow Creek recently completed an asphalt path along Highway 96 that connects the school with the center of Willow Creek.

How close a school is to students' homes greatly influences the numbers of kids who walk or bike to school. Neighborhood schools that serve a majority of students who live within one to two miles of the school see many more students walking or biking to school. Schools that attract students from across the district or that serve very rural communities with a low population density have few students who walk or bike to school. As an example, at Toddy Thomas Middle School in Fortuna, over half of the 300 students walk to school from nearby neighborhoods. In contrast, at Weitchpec School in eastern Humboldt, the majority of students lives many miles away and is bussed. One student walks to school. SR2S projects and programs must recognize these diverse situations and be tailored to meet individual school's needs.

Cuts to bus transportation are a major concern at many schools across the County—especially very rural schools where kids live far from school. Over 80% of students are bussed to many schools within the Klamath-Trinity Joint Unified School District, Southern Humboldt Unified School District, and many smaller districts. Effective SR2S programs in school districts like these will need to consider creative interventions to alleviate school transportation budget shortfalls.

SR2S Parent Surveys

In order to better assess the need for and capacity of ongoing or burgeoning SR2S programs at Humboldt County schools in the fall of 2011, SR2S Parent Surveys were distributed to all Humboldt County public and charter schools. The surveys went home with students in the fall of 2011, parents/caregivers filled out the surveys and students returned them to school. Parent surveys help examine school, district, and county-wide behavior patterns and safety issues in getting children to and from school. They also help evaluate programs before, during, and after implementation.

The project team determined which schools would be most apt to distribute and complete surveys. Several schools have multiple sites or off-campus locations to which few students physically travel. Thirty-two out of 75 schools returned surveys, a 43% return rate. We distributed surveys to schools through the Humboldt County Office of Education's (HCOE) courier service and were picked up from schools by various SR2S Task Force members and stakeholders. Completed surveys were then shipped to the National Center for Safe Routes to Schools for data entry and compilation. Figure 1 shows the first section of the SR2S Parent Survey.

Figure 1: SR2S Parent Survey

Parent Survey About Walking and Biking to School			
<p>Dear Parent or Caregiver, Your child's school wants to learn your thoughts about children walking and biking to school. This survey will take about 5 - 10 minutes to complete. We ask that each family complete only one survey per school your children attend. If more than one child from a school brings a survey home, please fill out the survey for the child with the next birthday from today's date. After you have completed this survey, send it back to the school with your child or give it to the teacher. Your responses will be kept confidential and neither your name nor your child's name will be associated with any results. Thank you for participating in this survey!</p>			
<p>+ CAPITAL LETTERS ONLY – BLUE OR BLACK INK ONLY +</p>			
<p>School Name: _____</p>			
<p>1. What is the grade of the child who brought home this survey? <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> Grade (PK,K,1,2,3...)</p>			
<p>2. Is the child who brought home this survey male or female? <input type="checkbox"/> Male <input type="checkbox"/> Female</p>			
<p>3. How many children do you have in Kindergarten through 8th grade? <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/></p>			
<p>4. What is the street intersection nearest your home? (Provide the names of two intersecting streets) _____ and _____</p>			
<p>Place a clear 'X' inside box. If you make a mistake, fill the entire box, and then mark the correct box.</p>			
<p>5. How far does your child live from school?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Less than ¼ mile <input type="checkbox"/> ½ mile up to 1 mile <input type="checkbox"/> More than 2 miles <input type="checkbox"/> ¼ mile up to ½ mile <input type="checkbox"/> 1 mile up to 2 miles <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know</p>			
<p>Place a clear 'X' inside box. If you make a mistake, fill the entire box, and then mark the correct box.</p>			
<p>6. On most days, how does your child arrive and leave for school? (Select one choice per column, mark box with X)</p> <table border="0" style="width: 100%;"> <tr> <td style="width: 50%; vertical-align: top;"> <p>Arrive at school</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Walk</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Bike</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> School Bus</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Family vehicle (only children in your family)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Carpool (Children from other families)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Transit (city bus, subway, etc.)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Other (skateboard, scooter, inline skates, etc.)</p> </td> <td style="width: 50%; vertical-align: top;"> <p>Leave from school</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Walk</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Bike</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> School Bus</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Family vehicle (only children in your family)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Carpool (Children from other families)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Transit (city bus, subway, etc.)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Other (skateboard, scooter, inline skates, etc.)</p> </td> </tr> </table>		<p>Arrive at school</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Walk</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Bike</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> School Bus</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Family vehicle (only children in your family)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Carpool (Children from other families)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Transit (city bus, subway, etc.)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Other (skateboard, scooter, inline skates, etc.)</p>	<p>Leave from school</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Walk</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Bike</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> School Bus</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Family vehicle (only children in your family)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Carpool (Children from other families)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Transit (city bus, subway, etc.)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Other (skateboard, scooter, inline skates, etc.)</p>
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<p>+ Place a clear 'X' inside box. If you make a mistake, fill the entire box, and then mark the correct box +</p>			
<p>7. How long does it normally take your child to get to/from school? (Select one choice per column, mark box with X)</p> <table border="0" style="width: 100%;"> <tr> <td style="width: 50%; vertical-align: top;"> <p>Travel time to school</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Less than 5 minutes</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 5 – 10 minutes</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 11 – 20 minutes</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> More than 20 minutes</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Don't know / Not sure</p> </td> <td style="width: 50%; vertical-align: top;"> <p>Travel time from school</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Less than 5 minutes</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 5 – 10 minutes</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 11 – 20 minutes</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> More than 20 minutes</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Don't know / Not sure</p> </td> </tr> </table>		<p>Travel time to school</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Less than 5 minutes</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 5 – 10 minutes</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 11 – 20 minutes</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> More than 20 minutes</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Don't know / Not sure</p>	<p>Travel time from school</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Less than 5 minutes</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 5 – 10 minutes</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 11 – 20 minutes</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> More than 20 minutes</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Don't know / Not sure</p>
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<p>+ +</p>			

SR2S Parent Survey Results

As a whole, SR2S parent surveys indicated that 12 percent of Humboldt County students are walkers, 3 percent bike, 26 percent ride the bus, and 59 percent are driven in private vehicles. More populated regions showed a higher percentage of walking and biking to and from school. The survey results were not surprising given the high number of inter-district transfer students, i.e. students that live outside the school district and are not within walking or biking distance. Many schools showed a higher percentage of students walking after school rather than to school. This is likely due to the fact that many families send their children to daycare facilities after school, many of which are located within walking distance of school.

While not always the case, survey results typically show a correlation between students who walk and the distance they live from school. For example, in the Eureka City Schools District where 1,924 surveys were distributed and 379 surveys returned, 44 percent of students living within a quarter mile of school walked to school and 48 percent walked home. Of students living within a half mile of school, 28 percent walked to school and 33 percent walked home. As the school district allows out-of-district transfers, there are significant numbers of students who live too far to walk or bike to school. Thus, distance to school is a barrier that affects the ability for many children to walk and bike. Other barriers are traffic volume and speed along the route, the perceived safety of intersections and crossings, and the fear of crime and/or violence.

Surveys returned from the Fortuna Union Elementary School District, another area of high population density in the county, shows that many students live close to school. In Fortuna, 178 surveys were returned out of 765 surveys distributed. Forty six percent of students living within a quarter mile of school walk to school and 68 percent walk home. Thirty five percent living less than a half mile from school walk there with 47 percent walking home. Four percent of students living less than a quarter mile are shown to bike to and from school. Students living one to two miles are typically bussed and those living more than two miles from school are driven in a family vehicle. Overall, 21 percent of students walk to school and 30 percent walk home.

In the Arcata Elementary School District, 69 surveys were returned out of 660 surveys distributed. Surveys indicate that sixty-four percent of students live more than 2 miles from school. Seventeen percent live between one and two miles, 10 percent between a half mile and one mile, 3 percent between a quarter mile and a half mile and 6 percent live less than a quarter mile from school. While surveys show that 69 percent of students arrive and leave school via private vehicle, 67 percent of students living less than a quarter mile from campus walk to school and 78 percent walk home. Forty percent of students living within a half mile walk to school and back. Twelve percent of students living between a quarter and one mile walk to school and 18 percent walk home. Of students living between one-half to one mile from school, 24 percent bike to school and 18 percent bike home. Of students living one to two miles from school, 15 percent bike to and from school. Again, distance is the main factor affecting if parents allow students to walk and bike to School. Other factors are weather and climate, amount and speed of traffic along the route, and duration of travel. Arcata School District's relatively high rate of students driven to school correlates to the high number of students who live outside the city.

At Blue Lake Union Elementary School, 31 surveys were returned out of 160 distributed. Forty percent of students who live less than a quarter mile away walk to school and 44 percent walk home. Here it is easy to see the connection between distance and parents permitting children to walk. But the surveys also indicated that, for students living less than a quarter mile away from school, 50 percent travel to school by private vehicle and 44 percent travel home by car. Parents indicated that the amount and speed of traffic along the route, along with weather issues as the reasons they would not allow their children to walk or bike. No students were shown to bike the short distance, of less than ¼ mile; yet, 75 percent of students living ½ to 1 mile bike to and from school. One hundred percent of students living more than 2 miles get to school by private vehicle.

Survey results show that throughout the county the lack of crossing guards heavily influences parents' decisions to not allow their children to walk where walking and bicycling is an option. The County of Humboldt will be addressing school district liability concerns as well as funding for crossing guard positions as part of a five-year SR2S non-infrastructure grant.

Survey results from smaller, more rural districts in the county, such as Southern Humboldt and Klamath-Trinity, were not returned at a rate high enough to determine accurate rates of walking and bicycling. We recognize that it is a challenge connecting with smaller communities that struggle with barriers such as greater distances between school and home, less funding than larger districts, and budget cuts for transportation. These schools and districts often do not think Safe Routes to School is relevant to their schools and communities. It is not always clear exactly how SR2S can help schools until each unique school situation is analyzed.

Maple Creek School has fifteen K-8 students and is located on a remote two-lane road nestled in the mid-Mad River watershed and surrounded by pastureland, forest, and mountains. While the principal did respond to the inventory call, she was not interested in distributing parent surveys because she did not believe they were relevant to her school where the majority of students are driven to school. Because of this initial contact, however, the principal reached us later in the year to express her concerns that cars drive too fast on the narrow, winding road in front of the school, and that there are no School Speed Zone signs posted next to the school. We contacted the Engineer with the County Public Works Department who was surprised to hear there were no signs. In less than a week, a very excited Maple Creek principal contacted us to say she was pleased to let us know the signs had been posted. She said she now sees how the program can make an impact even by just improving communication between agencies that can get safety improvements in place.

As we move forward with county-wide SR2S efforts, better communication and networking techniques need to be established in order to show partners and champions in the remote regions of the County that SR2S programs are diverse and creative, and that they can and do address the unique challenges rural communities face.

Survey results for participating schools in Humboldt County can be viewed on [HCAOG's website](http://hcaog.net/humboldt-sr2s-local-data#overlay-context=documents/safe-routes-school-whats-happening-humboldt) (<http://hcaog.net/humboldt-sr2s-local-data#overlay-context=documents/safe-routes-school-whats-happening-humboldt>).

5. Prioritization Tool

The Prioritization Tool is used to understand the circumstances at schools so that HCAOG may apportion available funding to the highest priority schools. Schools that have the greatest needs based on safety and health concerns are identified as well as those that have existing support in the school community to ensure the programs or projects success. The Tool leads to a ranked list of schools to recommend priority schools for SR2S projects and programs.

Beyond the goal of understanding need and readiness, the Tool criteria were selected with two additional principles in mind: to ensure sustainability beyond this project and to prioritize schools with underserved populations.

In order to ensure sustainability, the Tool was developed with criteria that will be tracked on a regular basis, primarily by other entities such as Caltrans, California Department of Education, and local jurisdictions through regular local plan update processes. It is expected that that rural counties throughout the state will continue to see little funding available for data collection. By selecting data that can be gathered from publicly available sources, HCAOG can use the Tool on an ongoing basis with minimal annual or biannual investment. The intent is a Tool that can be updated every two years to add schools' new priority projects and SR2S programs.

The Tool prioritizes schools with underserved populations and at-risk students. California state law now requires equity be fully considered in evaluating SR2S applications. The Tool uses demographic indicators and safety data as proxies for understanding which student populations may benefit most from travel options and increased physical activity.

Schools that do not rank highly during the Prioritization process may still need support for Safe Routes to School programs or infrastructure improvements. The ranked list of schools should be considered a "living document."

Primary Criteria Overview

The Tool combines GIS-based spatial data and a qualitative matrix to understand a school's readiness to proceed with SR2S programs. The project team gathered information to assess three categories of criteria:

- **School readiness** for SR2S projects and programs (gathered through the school SR2S inventory calls and SR2S parent surveys).
- **School internal need** (demographic factors within the school that may indicate a need for SR2S programs; gathered via publicly available data on school enrollment, fitness testing scores and socioeconomic status of the school population).
- **School external need** (physical and socioeconomic factors in the immediate vicinity of the school that may influence safety or need for SR2S programs; compiled from spatial data available through publicly available spatial datasets and HCAOG members' jurisdictions).

The complete Tool criteria are included in Appendix C. The Tool itself is included in Appendix D.

School Readiness Criteria

Most of the data for the school readiness criteria was gathered during the SR2S inventory calls to each school. See Table 1 for school readiness criteria.

Table 1: Indicators for School Readiness Criteria

Data Source	Criteria Description	Measured by	Values	Maximum Score
<u>School Readiness Criteria</u>				
School Inventory Calls	School administration support	Presence/Absence	Present = 5	5
			Absent = 0	
School Inventory Calls	SR2S activities/discussions/interest	Presence/Absence	Ongoing = 10	10
			Present = 5	
			Absent = 0	
School Inventory Calls	SR2S champion present at the school	Presence/Absence	Present = 5	5
			Absent = 0	
School Inventory Calls	Active school/parent support organization (e.g. PTO/PTA, Booster Club, school site council)	Presence/Absence	Present = 5	5
			Absent = 0	
School Inventory Calls	SR2S district or school policy adopted	Presence/Absence	Present = 5	5
			Absent = 0	
SR2S Parent Surveys	Completed SR2S parent surveys	Annual Reporting	Present = 5	5
			Absent = 0	

For schools with little detail about safety concerns or interest or awareness of Safe Routes to School, school readiness criteria were not scored.

Policy and administrative support at the school and district level are critical to the success of grant applications. Long-term success of projects and programs can be hindered by a lack of high-level support at the school. Administrative support is a baseline indicator that informs funders and planners about the level of resources that may be needed to the support the school in attaining a higher level of bicycling and walking.

Parent support, a SR2S champion and/or ongoing activities are also a key part of sustainability of programs in each school. Typically, Safe Routes to School projects provide start-up funding or programs for one to two years. Existing parent or teacher support of Safe Routes indicates the potential for programs to survive after the initial funding period. As with administrative support, a lack of existing interest does not mean the school would not be considered for Safe Routes to School support – but rather indicates a higher level of resources and outreach needed to the school.

School External Need Criteria

The Prioritization Tool was intended to assess and document spatial information relevant to external school need. Thus, a Geographic Information System (GIS) component is included to efficiently and accurately assess the external factors that may influence each school’s need for SR2S 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 county-wide assessment, prioritization using only field verification would be prohibitively expensive, both in terms of time and financial cost. The GIS component is designed to assess schools’ external need for SR2S based on a variety of roadway characteristic and demographic indicators.

The project team surveyed the available spatial data from public sources and individual jurisdictions that could help assess external school need. The project team and Task Force researched potential spatial data relating to schools’ external need for SR2S programs and chose indicators show in Table 2.

Table 2: Indicators for School External Need

External Need Criteria				
School Inventory 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
Humboldt County Road Centerline Shapefile	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
HCAOG Regional Trails Master Plan Shapefiles	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
2012 Census or American Communities Survey (ACS)	Percentage of carless households	Scored are 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) / Caltrans SWITRS	Bicycle and Pedestrian Collision Frequency	Based on the total number of bike or pedestrian 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

The project team initially collected additional spatial data from HCAOG member jurisdictions that were not included in the Tool because of difficulty in accurate data collection. The project team recognized the lack of comprehensive, spatially explicit Average Daily Traffic (ADT) volumes would hinder the Prioritization Tool being easily updated in the future. The project team and the Task Force decided that traffic speeds could viably assess potential safety concerns along streets adjacent to schools; therefore, the Tool does not utilize ADT. In addition, sidewalk connectivity was not assessed spatially due to the lack of digitized locations of sidewalks and other pedestrian infrastructure. Instead, the presence of pedestrian facilities connecting to the school was assessed during the SR2S school inventory calls.

The spatial component of the Tool and detailed instructions for updating this component are included in Appendix D.

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. As noted above, pedestrian facilities were assessed during the SR2S inventory calls to schools as sidewalks and other pedestrian facilities were not spatially catalogued by HCAOG members’ jurisdictions. The Tool scores the presence or absence of pedestrian facilities in proximity to the score as shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Existing Pedestrian Facilities

Pedestrian Facilities	Values
Pedestrian facilities absent	5
Pedestrian facilities present but insufficient	3
Pedestrian facilities present and sufficient	1

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.”¹ There is much greater severity between a bicycle/pedestrian collision that occurs at 35 mph versus 25 mph. A pedestrian struck by a vehicle travelling at 25 mph or less has an 89% probability of survival; the survival rate drops to 11% when a pedestrian is hit by a vehicle traveling at 35 mph or higher.²

¹ W.A. Leaf and D.F. Preusser. Literature Review on Vehicle Travel Speeds and Pedestrian Injuries Among Selected Racial/Ethnic Groups. National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. 1999

² Wisconsin Department of Transportation. 2006.

<http://www.dot.wisconsin.gov/safety/motorist/pedestrians/injuries.htm>

A child’s ability to successfully judge walking and biking safety is limited by the following factors:

- Children’ have not yet developed judgment to assess traffic without help.
- Children’s peripheral vision is a third narrower than adults.
- Children have very acute hearing, but have difficulty identifying the direction sound is coming from.
- Children assume that if they can see a vehicle, it and its operator can see them.
- Children cannot judge a vehicle’s speed, or even if a vehicle is moving or parked.
- Children have an underdeveloped sense of danger; they do not understand what a serious physical injury means.
- Children think motor vehicles can stop as fast as they can as pedestrians.



Kids walking to school on a street without sidewalks

For the Posted Speed Limit indicator of the Prioritization Tool, break points were selected according to best available data correlating safety and speed limits. A spatial buffer of 660 feet (roughly 2 blocks) was mapped around each surveyed school, and posted speed limits were evaluated for adjacent and nearby roadways. The Tool scores three levels for this criterion:

Table 4: Posted Speed Limit Criteria Scoring

Posted Speed Limit Criteria	Values
School on a 35+ MPH roadway	10
School within 660’ of a 35+ MPH roadway	5
All roads under 35 MPH within 660’ buffer, including adjacent roadways	1

The levels for this indicator was determined by the statistically significant survivability rate between 25 mph (and lower) and 35 mph (and higher), combined with driver reaction time and children’s limited capacity to judge roadway safety.

External Need Indicator 3: Existing Bicycle and Trail Facilities

Indicator 3 measures school proximity to bicycle and trail facilities. The presence of bicycle and trail facilities increases the likelihood that children and adults will choose active transportation, for both recreation and commuting. A recent study indicates that available trails increase the likelihood that people will walk as a mode of transportation.³ Also, a study published in the

³ Chin et al. Accessibility and connectivity in physical activity studies: The impact of missing pedestrian data. Preventive Medicine. 2008.

journal *Preventive Medicine* found the availability of bicycle facilities directly correlates to increased bicycle ridership.⁴

The spatial component of bicycle and trail facilities led to the inclusion of Spatial Indicator 2 in the Prioritization Tool. As with Spatial Indicator 1, a 660 foot (two block) buffer was used to score the presence of Class I/II bicycle facilities or trails. The score is determined solely by the presence or absence of one or more bicycle or trail facility within each school buffer zone.

Table 5: Existing Bicycle and Trail Facilities Scoring

Bicycle and Trail Facility Criteria	Values
Bicycle/Trail Facilities Absent	5
Bicycle/Trail Facilities Present	0

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 bicycle, walking, or transit.

The percentage of carless households is determined by creating a spatial data layer from the US Census Bureau’s demographic data, and integrating it with spatial data for Humboldt County census tracts (statistical geographic subdivisions within a county). The percentage scores are classified by natural breaks in the data, yielding the following scoring:

Table 6: Percentage of Carless Households Scoring

Percentage of Carless Households Criteria	Values
13-17%	5
9-12%	4
6-8%	3
3-5%	2
0-2%	1

Indicator 5: Bicycle and Pedestrian Collision Frequency and Location

Collision data was downloaded from the Transportation Injury Mapping System (TIMS) website at the University of California, Berkeley. TIMS data is derived 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. Bicycle and pedestrian collision data for Humboldt County was collected for the years 2005-2010 and added to the spatial component of the Prioritization Tool. A half-mile buffer around each school was mapped, and a count of bicycle and pedestrian collisions with motor vehicles was tallied. The resulting collision count was divided into three groups according to natural breaks, then manually reclassified into four groups to include a zero-point group for schools with no collisions in a half-mile radius between 2005-2010.

⁴ John Pucher, Jennifer Dill, and Susan Handy, "Infrastructure, Programs and Policies to Increase Cycling: An International Review," *Preventive Medicine*, Vol. 50(S1): S106-125, January 2010

Table 7: Bicycle and Pedestrian Collision Scoring

Bicycle and Pedestrian Collision Criteria	Values
25-71 collisions	5
6-24 collisions	3
1-5 collisions	1
0 collisions	0

School Internal Need Criteria

The Tool’s Internal Need Criteria are intended to be easily replicated in the future, thus the 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. A school’s total student enrollment is also one potential factor indicating need for funding. All data sources used are updated annually and made available through the California Department of Education. Recent criteria for California State SR2S grant awards have emphasized equity in addressing safety concerns and SR2S need at schools. Therefore, data on school socio-economic status was included as primary criteria for the Prioritization Tool.

Table 8: Indicators for School Internal Need Criteria

Data Source	Criteria Description	Measured by	Values	Maximum Score
<u>Internal Need Criteria</u>				
Ed-Data	Free & Reduced Lunch	Schools scored based on percentage of students eligible as reported	80-100% or greater = 8	8
			60-79% = 6	
			40-59% = 4	
			20-39% = 2	
CA Dept of Education	Aerobic Fitness (% meeting Healthy Fitness Zone)	Schools are scored based on percentage of students achieving the benchmark fitness level	0-19% = 0	5
			70-100% = 0	
			40-70% = 3	
Ed-Data	Student Enrollment	Schools are scored based total student enrollment	0-40% = 5	5
			Above 300 = 5	
			101-300 = 3	
			Under 100 = 1	

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

Children from low-income families are twice as likely to walk to school as children from higher-income families.⁵ In addition, children from low-income households have a higher risk of being injured or killed as pedestrians and are at greater risk of obesity.⁶

Humboldt County has a diversity of land uses, and schools are located in urban contexts and very rural areas. Students in low-income urban areas of the county may encounter neighborhood barriers to physical activity, such as higher numbers of busy through-streets and poor pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure. Students in low-income rural communities are faced with challenges such as distance to school and a shortage of sidewalks and safe places to walk or bicycle. Given the risks to families with low income, it is important to identify and support schools that have a high percentage of low-income students.

The Prioritization Tool does not use spatial data that tracks low-income school-aged populations near the schools for two primary reasons:

- Many schools in Humboldt County have open enrollment. Students may not be attending their neighborhood school and thus population characteristics directly adjacent to the school were not accurate.
- Rural schools draw from large areas. A sufficient analysis would require a school-by-school assessment of individual catchment areas. This was not efficient and or easily replicable in the future.

In the education system, family income is used to qualify for free and reduced prices in the Federal School Lunch Program. Free or reduced lunches 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 free and reduced school lunch. In this analysis, the schools are not classified as low or high income; rather, points are allocated based on the percentage of students eligible for free and reduced lunch.

The Free and Reduced Lunch eligibility criterion uses a broader range of scores to reflect the equity focus of this Tool. The intention is for schools with a higher socio-economic need to be fully considered for SR2S projects. The latest evaluation criteria for California State SR2S proposals focus on equity.

School free and reduced lunch statistics can be found at [Ed-Data](http://www.ed-data.k12.ca.us) (<http://www.ed-data.k12.ca.us>).

⁵ McDonald, N. Critical Factors for Active Transportation to School Among Low-Income and Minority Students: Evidence from the 2001 National Household Travel Survey. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 34.4 (2008): 341-344.

⁶ Low Income Resource Guide. Safe Routes to School National Center <http://www.saferoutespartnership.org/resourcecenter/publications/low-income-guide>

Table 9: Free and Reduced Lunch Eligibility

Percentage of students eligible for Free and Reduced Lunch	80-100% = 8
	60-79% = 6
	40-59% = 4
	20-39% = 2
	0-19% = 0

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

The FITNESSGRAM® uses Healthy Fitness Zones to evaluate fitness performance. These zones, established by The Cooper Institute of Dallas, Texas, represent minimum levels of fitness that can protect against the diseases caused by sedentary living. The California Department of Education considers a student who meets or exceeds a Healthy Fitness Zone as meeting the desired performance goal.

Recent studies have found that walking to school is associated with higher overall physical activity throughout the day.⁷ Additional research has shown that children who walk or bicycle to school are more likely than children who are driven to school to walk or bicycle to other places in their neighborhood. There are many potential benefits of increased physical activity for students, including:

- To control weight and blood pressure
- To maintain bone, muscle, and joint health
- To reduce in the risk of diabetes
- To improve psychological welfare

The Tool gives higher scores to schools with a low percentage of students meeting the basic Health Fitness Zone standards received higher scores. The intent is to identify those school populations that may benefit the most from increased physical activity from walking and biking to school.

Some schools did not have Healthy Fitness Zone results publicly available, either because of the desire to preserve anonymity in schools with small enrollment or because they did not participate in the testing. The Task Force decided this criterion was still important to include in the Tool. We developed an algorithm so schools without Healthy Fitness Zone data would still be competitive in the overall scoring.

School results for the Healthy Fitness Zone testing are located at <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tg/pf/pftresults.asp>.

⁷ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The Importance of Regular Physical Activity for Children. Accessed 9/16/05 at http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/kidswalk/health_benefits.htm and Cooper et al., Commuting to school: Are children who walk more physically active? American Journal of Preventative Medicine 2003: vol 25 no. 4.

Table 10: Healthy Fitness Zone Scores

Percentage of students achieving the benchmark fitness level	70-100% = 0
	40-70% = 3
	0-40% = 5

Internal Need Indicator 3: Student Enrollment

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

This indicator supports schools with larger populations that could potentially walk or bike to school. This indicator was not 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 be lower.

School enrollment statistics can be found at [Ed-Data](http://www.ed-data.k12.ca.us) (<http://www.ed-data.k12.ca.us>).

Table 11: Student Enrollment

Total Student Enrollment	Above 300 = 5
	101-300 = 3
	Under 100 = 1

Secondary Criteria

The Tool includes secondary criteria that are given a numeric value. The purpose of the secondary criteria is to distinguish between high-ranking schools and determine where improvements and programs are most likely to have the desired impact. Each year, HCAOG and member jurisdictions will have only limited funding for Safe Routes projects. The secondary analysis adds information to deliver targeted support to schools. Table 12 outlines the Prioritization Tool secondary criteria.

Table 12: Secondary Prioritization Tool Criteria

Question?	Answer	Outcome	Notes
Has there been a previous walking audit at the school within 7 years?	Yes	Select another school for walk audit support. Also determine if anything was done as a result of the audit.	A previous audit does not mean that the school will never receive additional SR2S support - it just provides some context for providing geographic equity
	No	A good candidate for safe routes support	
Has the school been awarded a SR2S grant or had recent pedestrian safety improvements?	Yes	Consider selecting another high ranking school	If yes, and improvements have been made at the school, consider selecting another high ranking school. If no, the school may be good candidate to apply for funding on the basis of a walk audit. Determine what specific support the school will need from program staff
	No	A good candidate for safe routes support	

Many schools may rank high in the primary criteria, indicating both a need and readiness for Safe Routes to School support. The secondary criteria help define specific support needed at an individual school. For example, the first criterion notes whether there has been a walkability audit within 7 years. If a high ranked school has had a recent walkability audit they may be ready to apply for a grant for infrastructure improvements and walkability audit support can be provided to another school. A high-ranking school may have had recent improvements; these schools can be monitored for improvement and another high ranking school selected for funding.

Field Testing the Tool: Humboldt’s Pilot Prioritization

HCAOG and member jurisdictions will be able to use this Prioritization Tool to determine which schools in their jurisdiction are best poised for an SR2S project or program. To recap, the Prioritization Tool is based in an Excel spreadsheet, with a GIS component supporting the spatial criteria of the Tool. The spatial component of the Tool and detailed instructions for updating this component are included in Appendix D. The complete inventory of SR2S data relating to each Tool criteria was gathered for each school before scoring began.

The Tool testing iterations were utilized to select schools for the two walkability audits conducted through this project. Task Force members and the HCAOG TAC helped assess whether the scoring reflected what they saw as appropriate priorities. The scoring results demonstrated that many schools scored similarly to one another. The secondary criteria assessed which schools already had a walkability audit or previous SR2S award. The highest ranking school in a city jurisdiction that had not had a walkability audit or SR2S award was Toddy Thomas Middle School in Fortuna. Redwood Preparatory Charter School, located a half-mile from Toddy Thomas, also ranked high. Thus these two schools were selected for a joint walkability audit.

Next, the project team assessed which school in an unincorporated area to select for the second walkability audit. Orick School and Weitchpec School both scored high. Project staff contacted each school to gauge their interest in a walkability audit. We learned that Orick recently had a walkability audit near the school. After we talked to Weitchpec School, we determined that the school's location, up a steep driveway off Highway 96, was infeasible for a successful walkability audit. The next highest ranking school in the unincorporated area was Dow's Prairie Elementary School. The principal was very receptive to having a walkability audit. The Fortuna and Dow's Prairie walkability audits are described further in the section below.

After the testing iterations were performed and the Task Force and TAC approved the draft Tool, a pilot ranking of schools with the Prioritization Tool was conducted.

In the pilot ranking of schools, Grant Elementary and Alice Birney Elementary were the highest ranking schools. As Grant Elementary was recently awarded a Cycle 10 SR2S award, this Tool accurately reflects schools that will be most competitive for funding. The Tool demonstrates that Alice Birney Elementary should be the priority school for the City of Eureka and HCAOG to implement SR2S improvements and promote SR2S programs.

Many schools in the City of Fortuna also ranked highly overall: South Fortuna Elementary, Toddy Thomas Middle School, Ambrosini Elementary and Redwood Preparatory Charter School. The City of Fortuna should prioritize improvements at South Fortuna Elementary and Redwood Preparatory Charter School and Toddy Thomas Middle School, where the walkability audits were recently completed.

There were many schools in the unincorporated County that scored highly; Freshwater School and Hoopa Elementary School ranked as priorities. Freshwater School had a SR2S award several years ago to improve Freshwater Road, though the school remains concerned about traffic speeds. The Hoopa Tribe, in partnership with the County, has been planning pedestrian improvements near the Hoopa Valley schools. Lafayette Elementary School in Myrtle town also scored highly and has had clear recommendations developed following a walkability audit.

The City of Blue Lake has only one public school, which did rank relatively high by the Prioritization Tool. The City recently implemented crosswalk and sidewalk improvements near the school.

The City of Arcata has supported many SR2S programs at schools within its jurisdiction. Jacoby Creek Charter School continues to rank the highest of schools within the city limits and has many motivated SR2S champions. Additionally, Coastal Grove Charter School also scored highly. It is located on a campus with other schools, which means SR2S improvements there would impact multiple student bodies.

The City of Trinidad also has only one school, and the City recently found another funding source to implement SR2S-like improvements near the school.

The City of Rio Dell has two public schools within its jurisdiction and recently received a Cycle 10 SR2S award for improvements to benefit both schools. The proximity of Eagle Prairie Elementary and Monument Middle School makes these improvements have a double impact.

SR2S encouragement programs at the schools could complement this recent SR2S infrastructure grant.

The City of Ferndale's two schools did not score highly by the Tool. Both schools have well-connected sidewalks in a walkable section of the city, and they did not express many safety concerns. SR2S encouragement programs could benefit these schools to take full advantage of the city's well-connected sidewalks.

For a complete scoring of schools please see Appendix C. Individual jurisdictions should review the school SR2S inventory summaries and SR2S parent survey results for the schools within their jurisdiction to be more informed of the challenges and opportunities at each school.

6. Pilot School Walkability Audits

Neighborhoods and school sites need to be safe and comfortable to foster vibrant communities and walking and biking to school. Walkability Audits are a powerful workshop tool used for redesigning school zones and envisioning communities to be safe and inviting for pedestrians and bicyclists. They are a fun, healthy, democratic, and inspirational way for communities to assess safety conditions around walking and bicycling and provide an opportunity for the public to participate in planning neighborhood improvements. Walkability Audits not only analyze safety conditions around a school, often they can also help garner further support for SR2S programs at a school, inspire additional SR2S champions in the community and make future SR2S funding applications more competitive.

Walkability Audits in Humboldt County

Many Walkability Audits have been successfully conducted throughout Humboldt County in the past five years, particularly around school communities. Many of these workshops have resulted in lasting improvements for the school and surrounding community. The Humboldt County Department of Health and Human Services Public Health Branch (DHHS, PHB), and the Humboldt Partnership for Active Living (HumPAL) have spearheaded efforts since 2005 to observe the walking and bicycling environments in Eureka, Arcata, Rio Dell, Manila, McKinleyville, Hoopa, and Redway. Walkability Audits helps makes grants more competitive by showing that local agencies and the public have collectively identified safety concerns and brainstormed potential solutions. The most recent Walkability Audits, prior to this project, were held at Lafayette and Grant Elementary Schools in Eureka. As a result, Grant Elementary received a \$5000 community grant to begin an education and encouragement program around walking to school and a \$300,000 Cycle 10 Safe Routes to Schools grant to install pedestrian safety improvements and traffic calming measures in the Grant neighborhood.

Recognizing the benefits of Walkability Audits, HCAOG included two Walkability Audits as part of this project, selecting one school within a city jurisdiction and one school in the unincorporated County. The draft Prioritization Tool criteria were tested initially to select the schools for the walkability audit. In testing the tool, schools were run through the criteria and those that received the highest scores were prioritized as pilot schools for Walkability Audits. As described in above, secondary criteria were established for the tool to determine whether or not schools have previously received SR2S funding or had a prior Walkability Audit within the past five years.



Walkability Audit participants work together to identify priorities and recommendations

Fortuna Walkability Audit

Redwood Preparatory Charter School and Toddy Thomas Middle School are located within a half mile of each other and also in proximity to two private schools and another charter school. This area of Fortuna is a prime location for a Walkability Audit as many students and families will benefit from the event. The need for improvements was particularly evident by the lack of pedestrian and bicycle facilities on the 40 mph road on which Redwood Preparatory Charter School is located.

In preparation of the Walkability Audit, flyers and invitations were sent home to with students at both schools (see Appendix E). Additional invitations were sent out to the County-wide Safe Routes to Schools Task Force, Fortuna police department, Fortuna City Planners and City Engineers. A press release was distributed to local papers and PSAs were sent to local radio stations.

The audit was conducted on Monday, June 4, 2012 and began at Redwood Prep. The Walkability Audit then proceeded to Toddy Thomas, approximately a half-mile away in a residential neighborhood in which many students already walk and bike to school on a regular basis.

Many local officials, school staff and parents attended the Walkability Audit. (For a complete list of attendees please refer to the Fortuna Walkability Audit Report in Appendix E). The Audit helped forge strong relationships between city staff, school district personnel and community members.

At the beginning of the workshop, participants shared their visions for the workshop and the outcomes they wanted. Priorities included working with parents, safer routes for kids, improving the walking environment to reduce obesity rates and improve health, slowing traffic, reducing the number of private vehicles during arrival and dismissal, partnering and expanding relationships, and working together to make the best use of shrinking resources. The project team gave participants clipboards, pens, and Walkability Audit worksheets (see example in Appendix E) to take notes during the walk, and told participants what to look for during the walk.

As with most Walkability Audits, it was scheduled to take place during the morning arrival time so participants could observe the conditions students encounter when arriving at school. Most students arrived to Redwood Prep by private vehicle. The group then walked out to the road and along a route leading to Toddy Thomas Middle School, observing high rates of speed by vehicles, a lack of connected sidewalks, insufficient crosswalks, as well as sidewalk obstructions and out-of-date signage.

After the walk, participants returned to the classroom and learned strategies to slow traffic, educate students, parents, and community members, and involve law enforcement to make the streets safer for pedestrians and bicyclists. At that point, small groups worked with large maps on which they drew their suggestions for improvements around these Fortuna schools. Groups reported out on what concerns they identified and which engineering, enforcement, education, and encouragement strategies they propose to solve the issues. The workshop participants then worked together to categorize short term, mid term and long term recommendations.

Participants committed to take on short term recommendations to improve safety at the two schools.

Maps of suggested walking routes have been created for each school so that parents can choose the safest, most convenient way for their children to get to school. Additional maps highlighting the recommended safety improvements were also created for each school. These recommendation maps will be very useful to include with future grant applications for safety improvements.

Since the completion of the Walkability Audit, the Fortuna City Council adopted a programmatic School Speed Zone policy establishing 25 mph and 15 mph zones within 500 feet of all Fortuna schools. Fortuna City staff also acted quickly on the quick-fix solutions. Within a couple of weeks, City staff had removed out of date signage, extended a no-parking red curb zone to improve visibility, and removed encroaching vegetation from a sidewalk. For details of the Fortuna Walkability Audit Report see Appendix E.

Dow's Prairie Walkability Audit

The Dow's Prairie Elementary Walkability Audit took place on Thursday, September 20, 2012. The preparations, invites and workshop were conducted as described above for the Fortuna Walkability Audit. The Dow's Prairie Walkability Audit was led by project team members Emily Sinkhorn and Jenny Weiss of RCAA. A list of workshop participants is given in the Dow's Prairie Walkability Audit Report in Appendix E.



Participants of the Dow's Prairie Walkability Audit discuss crosswalk placement

During workshop visioning, participants established a desire to work with parents and community members to achieve the safety outcomes, and be competitive for grants. Participants also want neighborhood kids to be able to safely walk and bike, as many of the participants did when they were kids. The group also prioritized education, in particular to encourage safe bicycling behavior as well as parents and adults modeling good behavior as pedestrians, bicyclists and motorists.

This Walkability Audit took place in the afternoon to observe peak dismissal time. Participants shared initial safety issues they have observed near the school and discussed possible solutions. Many participants remarked about the congestion caused by parents dropping off their children in the morning. The parents who line up to drop children off in the morning often end up in a line of vehicles that wraps around the corner of Dow's Prairie Road onto Grange Road. The cars end up blocking the crosswalks on the corner and in the parking lot loading zone. Parents also remarked that motorists in the queue are in such a hurry that they do not follow drop-off protocol or consider the dangerous conditions created by their unsafe practices. Similar behavior is observed in the afternoon when parents pick-up their children. A courtesy and safety education campaign aimed at parents was among the top priorities following the field exercise. This campaign could focus on teaching parents time management techniques, a parking lot drop off protocol, being a good role model, as well as the health benefits of walking

and bicycling. The campaign could entail working with the PTO, involving kids in a slogan campaign, adding to the parent handbook, and encouraging carpooling and busing. The workshop participants also recommend a positive incentive campaign. Rewarding parents who exhibit good behavior with a raffle ticket for a prize could be a great way to encourage good driver behavior. Better yet, parents could be rewarded for good behavior by scoring “points” for their child’s classroom, turning it into a classroom competition that involves good parent behavior in order for classrooms to win!

Engineering suggestions resulting from the Walkability Audit ranged from quick fix /short-term solutions to mid and longer-term projects. Short-term recommendations such as painting both sides of the parking lot with a red curb in front of the office would help dissuade parking and improve visibility; it could possibly be done at no or low cost by the school district. The County Public Works Department will review an old traffic study on Dow’s Prairie Road to try and justify placing a stop sign at the corner of Grange Road. The County will also investigate whether or not they can mow vegetation to improve visibility along a segment of Dow’s Prairie Road that lacks a sidewalk. A letter to parents about parking procedures and common courtesy will be sent out with the hopes that a gentle safety reminder will be the impetus for improved behavior during drop-off and dismissal times.

Mid- to long-term recommendations include installing better signage in the parking lot, shifting the center line west on Dow’s Prairie Road to allow more room on the east side, and filling in a crucial sidewalk gap on Dow’s Prairie Road (which has been recommended on a past SR2S application). For more details of the recommendations, please refer to the Dow’s Prairie Walkability Audit Report in Appendix E.

7. Sustainability of the Regional SR2S Prioritization Tool

Updating the Sustaining the Prioritization Tool through HCAOG

This Regional SR2S Prioritization Tool was developed in order to ensure coordination of SR2S programs across Humboldt County, increase capacity for Safe Routes to Schools programs at schools throughout Humboldt County, and increase competitiveness across the region for scarce SR2S funding. The Prioritization Tool was developed to be easily utilized and updated to guide evaluation of potential SR2S projects and programs into the future.

HCAOG, as the regional transportation planning agency for Humboldt County jurisdictions, is well positioned to sustain the SR2S Tool and carry forward the recommendations from this Tool Report. As the Tool was originally intended, HCAOG jurisdictions would utilize the Tool in order to decide which schools and local jurisdictions would apply for SR2S funding. As SR2S funding opportunities have shifted at the Federal level, this Prioritization Tool will remain crucial in equitably allocating funding for bicycle and pedestrian improvement projects around schools and neighboring communities.

The HCAOG Board and Technical Advisory Committee will be able to utilize the Regional SR2S Prioritization Tool in years to come in order to advise which schools would be most competitive for SR2S and other relevant funding sources. However, the Tool will need to be periodically updated in cooperation with HCAOG in order for the Tool to be sustained and relevant to the changing needs and capacity across all Humboldt County schools. Updates to the Tool will include the following:

- School internal need/demographic data via online, public data sources
- School external need data via the spatial database as school locations, road speed limits, collision data and Census data change
- School readiness data via school SR2S inventory calls

Fortunately, the school internal need data and spatial database are easily updateable through publicly available data sources. The spatial data comprised in the Tool will not change very often, and can be updated by a GIS specialist through HCAOG or individual jurisdictions.

As this online and GIS-based data are easily updateable, we recommend HCAOG staff undertake updating these components every fall by allocating funds in the Overall Work Plan to support a continued focus on SR2S in the region. HCAOG's website currently serves as the clearinghouse for local SR2S data and information (<http://www.hcaog.net/documents/safe-routes-school-whats-happening-humboldt>). This online clearinghouse could be expanded to include more SR2S contact lists, helpful tools developed throughout the region, and the Regional SR2S Prioritization Tool itself. Including updates to the school need components of the Prioritization Tool would fit within the scope of HCAOG serving as the SR2S clearinghouse for all of Humboldt County.

Conducting the school SR2S inventory calls for this project was very thorough and time-intensive. The communications revealed valuable information specific to each school and helped promote SR2S programs. Sustaining this level of SR2S inventory across all public and charter schools in Humboldt County will be challenging. The benefit of this ongoing inventory

will be stronger relationships with school administrators and school SR2S champions, and having current information regarding school safety concerns and SR2S capacity and need.

It should be a priority to sustain these school SR2S inventories into the future as these are the data which will change the most frequently (e.g. school contacts, champions, school infrastructure needs, etc). Fortunately, Public Health and RCAA have funds to reinitiate these calls in 2013 via the SR2S-funded Redwood Crossing Guard Program. Beyond 2013, the school SR2S inventory calls could be more easily undertaken by adapting a subset of the original questions on the School SR2S Inventory Survey. HCAOG staff could then send these shortened surveys to schools via email and follow up via targeted phone calls. HCAOG could recommend school administrators must complete these questions and respond to a phone interview in order for HCAOG staff to lend support to that school for SR2S applications. As transportation decisions can affect safety concerns around schools, it would be proactive to encourage school administrators to connect with HCAOG.

Sustainability of Humboldt County SR2S Task Force and SR2S Parent Surveys

Although the Humboldt County SR2S Task Force was specifically formed ad-hoc to help create the Tool, the Task Force has interest and momentum to continue meeting about county-wide SR2S issues. The broad membership of the Task Force, which includes school administrators, law enforcement personnel, public works staff, Caltrans staff and more, will continue to closely coordinate SR2S issues across disciplines.

Supporting the Task Force through HCAOG is currently not feasible past November 2012, so other options for sustaining the Task Force were examined. Fortunately, the Humboldt County Department of Health and Human Services Public Health Branch has funding available through their Community Transformation Grant (CTG) to continue to coordinate the Humboldt County SR2S Task Force through 2013. The Task Force will continue to meet to support and expand ongoing SR2S programs and Walking Wednesdays programs coordinated through the CTG effort. Meeting frequency and times for the Task Force will be reevaluated after the HCAOG project concludes.

The Greater Eureka SR2S Task Force has continued to focus on SR2S issues specific to Eureka beyond its initial SR2S project. The meetings have been sustained through in-kind support from many organizations and by rotating meeting facilitators. One idea arose during this Tool project to perhaps combine the Humboldt County SR2S Task Force and Greater Eureka Task Force as a way to further streamline SR2S coordination. The two SR2S Task Forces will discuss the possibility of combining meetings to focus county-wide for the first half of the meeting and then issues specific to Eureka for the second half of the meeting. Ongoing coordination of SR2S efforts through these Task Forces is vital to sustaining the energy and capacity for SR2S programs in Humboldt County.

Local SR2S advocates and the local Task Forces will continue to help distribute and complete the SR2S parent surveys as long as the National Center for SR2S maintains their survey data processing role. The parent surveys have been crucial to understand specific SR2S issues at

participating schools, encourage parent involvement in SR2S programs, and increase competitiveness in SR2S grant programs.

Recommendations for the Future of the Prioritization Tool

This project has greatly advanced the capacity for SR2S programs at many area schools through the SR2S inventory conversations, county-wide Task Force and sponsored walkability audits. In addition, the Prioritization Tool itself, while still in draft form, received much praise by the State of California SR2S oversight committee. The committee hopes to incorporate some of the Tool components into evaluating SR2S programs at the State level.

SR2S advocates throughout the country recognize that the funding sources for SR2S-specific projects will be evolving with the newly authorized Federal Transportation Bill, which went into effect on October 1, 2012. Under the new Federal Bill, SR2S is no longer a specific federal funding source. In the new bill, nearly all funding for bicycle and pedestrian projects is clustered under the Transportation Alternatives (TA) program (besides the Recreational Trail Program, which is not particularly relevant for SR2S projects). The TA program updated eligibility requirements from the previous Transportation Enhancements program and SR2S program. Fortunately, as of this publication date, Caltrans plans to retain a SR2S-specific funding program through State funds from the federal TA funding stream.

We recommend HCAOG jurisdictions think regionally with SR2S grants submitted to the State and utilize this Tool to determine which jurisdiction/school should apply and be put forward from our region, which will lend additional credibility to the proposals. We also recommend prioritized schools and their associated jurisdictions could receive HCAOG staff assistance in developing their SR2S grant applications.

As limited funding will continue to require coordinating SR2S activities and information, we recommend HCAOG include one SR2S element in its Overall Work Plan (OWP). This element will allow HCAOG to sustain the Tool and coordinate regional SR2S information. HCAOG staff will be able to update the clearinghouse of SR2S information on the HCAOG website and coordinate updates to the spatial and matrix components of the Prioritization Tool. In addition, HCAOG staff could solicit a modified SR2S inventory to all school contacts to streamline the update of the school readiness criteria portion of the Tool.

HCAOG will retain local control of up to 50% of the Transportation Alternative funds available to Humboldt County jurisdictions, while decisions at the State level will allocate the remaining potential Transportation Alternative funds. HCAOG should recognize the importance of its decision-making to fund pedestrian and bicycle projects, particularly around schools and town centers. In order to meet the need and sustain the capacity across Humboldt County for SR2S projects and programs, we recommend HCAOG fully consider SR2S-related projects in deciding local TA allocations. HCAOG could also dedicate a small portion of local TA funds for pedestrian and bicycle improvement projects in the vicinity of schools. Such an allocation would be similar to that recently adopted by HCAOG that sets aside 2% of the region's Local Transportation Funds (LTF) portion of Transportation Development Act (TDA) funds for bicycle and pedestrian projects. The Prioritization Tool developed here is a robust decision-making tool that considers

school need, readiness and equity – in contrast to more informal evaluative processes often utilized for local TA funding decisions.

The Regional SR2S Prioritization Tool has enabled a broader conversation around SR2S to emerge across the county and has created a robust mechanism with which to evaluate future projects. Sustaining the Tool will ensure continued coordination of SR2S programs and projects throughout the region.