

# safe routes to school hand- book



Bringing together  
community and health.



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# A Comprehensive Approach to Safe Routes to School

This guide will help you create and implement a complete plan to increase the number of kids walking and bicycling to your school.

## What is Safe Routes to School?

Safe Routes to School (SRTS) helps kids walk and bicycle to school more often through infrastructure improvements, education and promotional activities. SRTS is more than just a program, it is a comprehensive strategy to instill life-long habits that support physical activity and health. Walking and bicycling to school helps families stay active and healthy, and kids arrive focused and ready to learn. A comprehensive and effective SRTS initiative can help create a healthier community for generations to come.



# The Benefits:

## Kids are more active

SRTS programs help kids get more physical activity. Children are recommended to get 60 minutes of physical activity a day. A 15-minute trip one-way helps children to meet that goal.

## Students arrive ready to learn

Research has shown that SRTS helps kids arrive to school focused and ready to learn. Getting activity through walking and bicycling helps reduce behavior problems and helps kids settle in for learning during the school day.

## Communities become more connected and safer for all

Because schools are often located at the center of communities, safety improvements benefit people of all ages. Seniors particularly benefit from improvements that slow traffic and make streets safer and can also benefit by volunteering to support educational and promotional activities.

## Families are more active, too

SRTS programs have been found to increase bicycling and walking for not only kids, but for the whole family.

# The Basiss

 **Assemble  
a team**

 **Assess the  
situation**

 **Determine  
your goals**

 **Identify  
action steps**

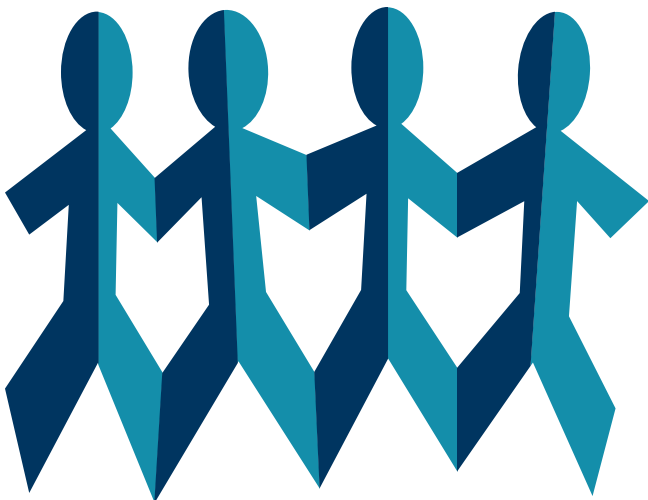
 **Track your  
progress**

 **Remember  
to have fun!**

# Assemble a team

Your SRTS team should start with anyone who is interested in increasing bicycling and walking to your school and community. The most important thing is to have a core team of people who are passionate about the work and who see opportunities for improvement.

At a later stage, when you've started to identify your goals and action steps, you may want to add to your team. To make sure you have a well-rounded team, ask yourself if you have the people with the knowledge, skills and experience to implement the elements of SRTS described later in this booklet.





The below checklist is a sample of the kinds of people who are interested in and have knowledge related to SRTS. As long as you engage all your important partners, they don't necessarily have to be on your core action team.

As you review this checklist, think about the specific person you would like to involve. If you don't know that person, identify the best path to make an introduction and have a discussion about SRTS.

## Core team:

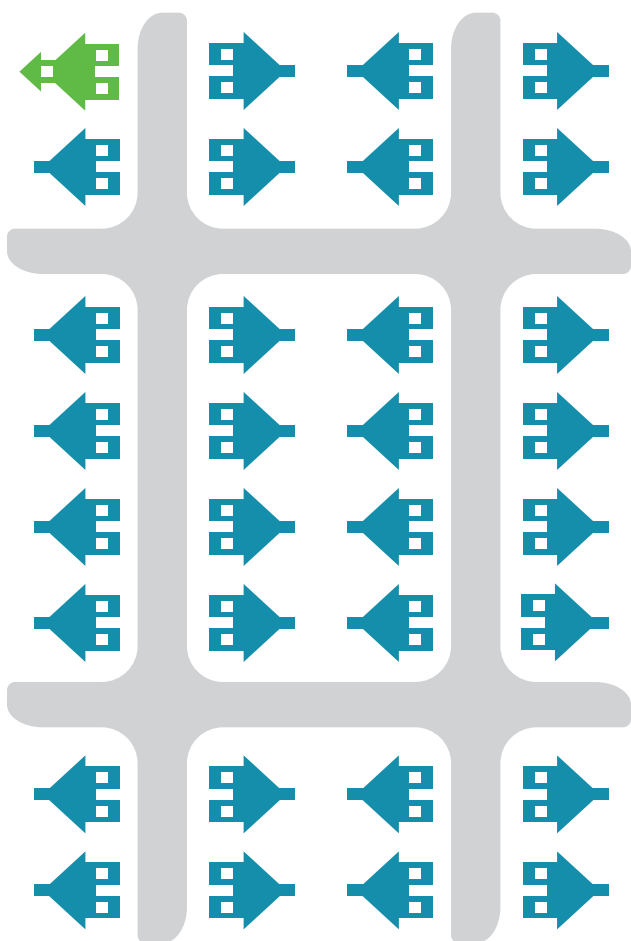
- School principal or assistant principal
- Parents
- Community volunteer(s)
- Students
- Teacher(s)
- Law enforcement officer
- Local road authority (department of public works, county engineer, MnDOT)

## Expanded team:

- District-level school personnel  
(superintendent, district transportation director)
- City or regional planner
- City or town manager
- City council member or other elected official
- City or county recreation specialist
- City or county public health official or educator
- Bicycling or walking group representative
- Other local non-profit agency
- Neighborhood association or block club member
- Faith-based group

# Assess the situation

Before you choose activities to implement, it's important to understand existing behavior and attitudes in your school, look for barriers and opportunities for walking and bicycling to school, and see if there are existing policies or programs that support your work.



Here are some basic data about the school, neighborhood and community that will be helpful to collect:

- The boundaries of the school walk zone and how many students live in the walk zone
- The number of students who currently walk or bicycle to school
- An assessment of the physical environment around the school, including any barriers
- An assessment of the drop-off and pick-up zone, including buses and parent vehicles
- Whether there are bike racks and if there is enough space in the racks
- Whether there are school patrol guards and where they are posted
- Parent and student attitudes about walking and bicycling to school – major reasons people do or don't walk and bicycle, which routes they use, what concerns they have
- Existing school policies, such as a school wellness policy, that support or could support SRTS
- Existing city policies, such as Complete Streets, active living resolution, comprehensive plans and area plans or transportation plans, that support or could support SRTS

#### Resource Materials:

- National Center for Safe Routes to School Parent Survey
- National Center for Safe Routes to School Student In-Class Travel Tally
- School Walkability and Bikeability Checklist
- Sample Safe Routes to School map – Albany Area Schools

Available at [www.health.state.mn.us/srts](http://www.health.state.mn.us/srts)

# Determine your vision and goals

## Vision

A vision statement describes what your community will look like after you have achieved success. A vision statement is usually one to five sentences long and written in the present tense.

To set a vision for your SRTS program, gather your core action team and ask them to envision what the community will look like after success has been achieved. You can decide how far into the future to go; five to 20 years is a good time range to choose from.

You can ask your team to verbally share their vision or ask people to write down their thoughts. Look for common themes that the group agrees upon. Then have one person refine the statement for the group to approve.

Good vision statements are:

- Attractive
- Bold
- Compelling
- Doable
- Energizing

# Goals

Goals project out one to three years and describe specific changes that will help realize your vision. To set your goals, look back through the results of your assessment to identify your community's greatest barriers and opportunities for bicycling and walking to school.

## These questions can help guide your goal-setting:

- What are the biggest barriers to walking and bicycling to school (physical barriers, attitudes, information, etc.)?
- Are there areas of the community where walking and bicycling is particularly difficult? What would make it safer and easier?
- What are the biggest opportunities for walking and bicycling to school (partnerships, physical assets, etc.)?
- Are there areas of the community that are relatively safe and convenient for walking and bicycling?
- What would encourage more people to walk and bicycle in these areas?

After you've summarized your community assessment, identify three to seven goals that address your community's unique situation and that will help achieve your vision. The more specific and measurable your goals, the better.

Resource materials:

- Goal and action steps worksheets

Available at [www.health.state.mn.us/srts](http://www.health.state.mn.us/srts)

# Identify action steps

For each goal, identify a number of action steps that will help you achieve the goal. To make sure you have a well-rounded approach, be sure to consider the six Es – engineering, education, encouragement, enforcement, evaluation, and equity – in your action plan. Details about the six Es are on the following pages.

Remember to keep it simple, especially when you are first starting out. You don't have to cover all of the six Es for each goal but across your goals and action steps you want to have a balance between the different Es.

A well-balanced and comprehensive strategy will make your program more sustainable. SRTS projects that have focused only on one E have struggled to become a lasting part of how the school or community functions. One example is when a community makes an infrastructure improvement but has not incorporated any safety education for students and parents.

Resource materials:

- Goal and action steps worksheets available at [www.health.state.mn.us/srts](http://www.health.state.mn.us/srts)

**e**ngagement

**e**valuation

**e**quity

**e**ngineering

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# evaluation

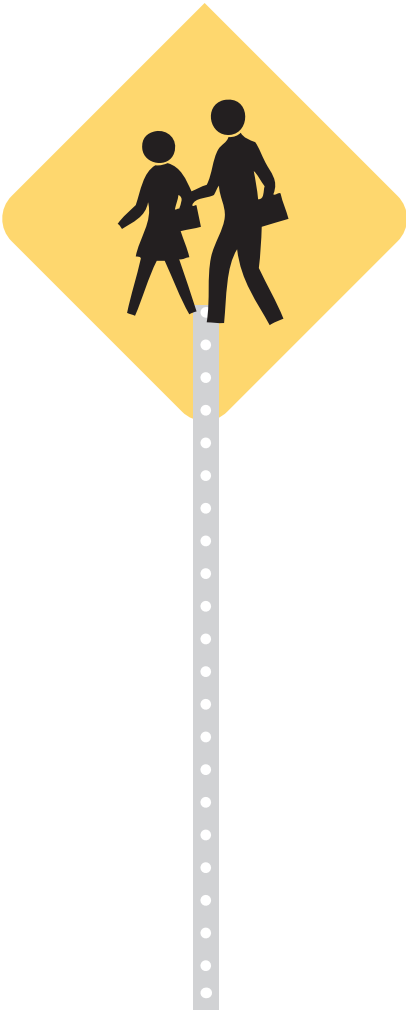
Evaluation is very important to a successful SRTS initiative and should be considered from the very beginning of planning. Ask yourself, how do we define success for our efforts and how can we measure or document our progress? Evaluation will likely include a combination of quantitative information, such as counts of how many children are walking and bicycling, and more qualitative information, such as success stories from families who have chosen to walk and bicycle more.

Examples include:

- A school walking and bicycling audit and a school travel plan that includes specific goals
- Bicycle and pedestrian counts that show bicycling and walking rates over time
- Data about vehicle crashes near the school, traffic speeds or traffic volumes



# eengagement



Examples include:

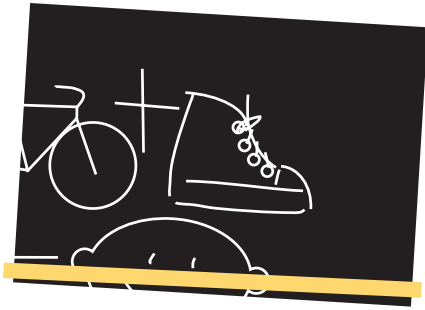


# e ncouragement

Encouragement is closely tied to education strategies, but is more focused on getting people to try walking and bicycling to school and celebrating and rewarding people for their efforts. Encouragement activities are more effective if the physical environment works for walking and bicycling to school.

Examples include:

- Organizing events such as “Walk and Bike to School Day” to encourage families to try walking and bicycling to school
- Creating walking school buses that allow kids to walk together with adult volunteers
- Utilizing contests or incentives to encourage walking and bicycling to school

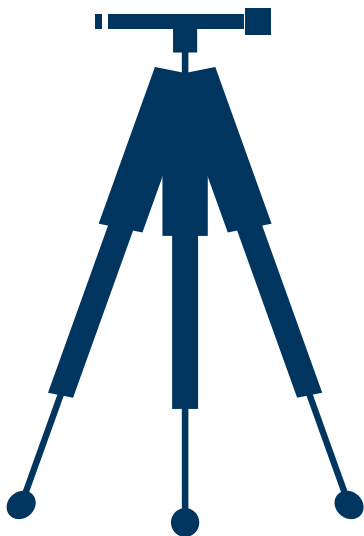


# e ducation

Providing education about SRTS helps build support among kids, parents, teachers and community members. To craft education messages, first identify your goals and audiences. You might want to start with a survey of parents to see if there are informational barriers to overcome before more families choose to walk or bicycle. Do people need to know more about the benefits of walking or bicycling? Would maps of routes to the school help more people walk or bicycle? Would walking or bicycling safety information get kids and parents more excited about walking and bicycling?

Examples include:

- SRTS maps that show suggested routes to walk and bicycle to school
- School bicycle rodeo that teaches safe bicycling skills
- Curriculum focused on the benefits of walking and bicycling
- Seminars or events that educate parents about the benefits of walking and bicycling
- Traffic safety education
- Public education for safety improvements

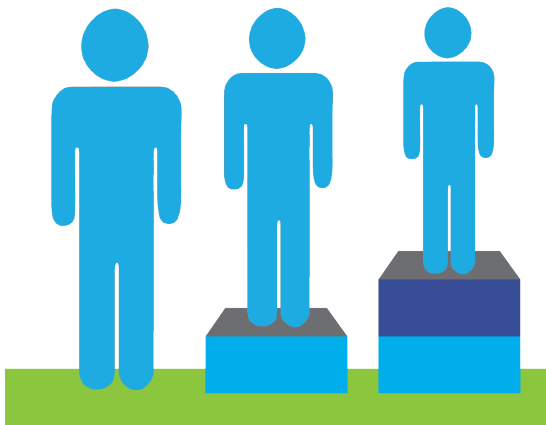


# eengineering

Engineering strategies including planning and implementing physical improvements that make it safer and more attractive to walk and bicycle to school. Assessments such as a walking workshop will help identify physical barriers and opportunities for improvement. Engaging planners and engineers is crucial to successfully implementing safety improvements. It's also important to reach out to the community to educate neighbors about the benefits and importance of any proposed improvements.

Examples include:

- Completing a school walking and bicycling audit and a school travel plan
- Adding traffic calming, crosswalks, sidewalks, bicycle lanes or other infrastructure that improves safety for walking and bicycling
- Installing bike racks at schools



## equity

Equity, in the context of Safe Routes to School, aims to ensure that communities disproportionately impacted by safety, health or transportation access are provided appropriate resources to address their individual needs. Sometimes that requires allocating more resources to a community experiencing greater issues. An approach to ensuring Equity should intertwined in each of the other 5E's.

Examples include:

- Evaluation and Engineering: Using demographic and safety data to identify schools or neighborhoods with the most need for infrastructure improvements
- Education: Providing educational materials in multiple languages, or doing outreach and engagement in nontraditional settings.
- Encouragement: Providing more support for walking school buses and educational campaigns in neighborhoods with fewer resources and higher need

# Track your progress

Evaluation is built into the six Es, but is also an important step in planning for SRTS. In order to track your progress, take a look at each of your goals and determine the best way to measure each goal. Here are some questions to guide the development of your evaluation plan:

- What numbers (quantitative information) do we want to collect?
- What stories (qualitative information) do we want to collect?
- What are the best collection methods for our community? (parent or student surveys, walking or bicycling counts, using the results of encouragement strategies, etc.)
- How often should we measure our progress?
- How will we keep track of and communicate our progress?

Look through your goal and action steps worksheets to make sure each one includes appropriate action steps.

Resource Materials:

- National Center for Safe Routes to School Parent Survey
- National Center for Safe Routes to School Student In-Class Travel Tally
- School Walkability and Bikeability Checklist

Available at [www.health.state.mn.us/srts](http://www.health.state.mn.us/srts)

# Remember to have fun!

While SRTS is challenging work, it's important to remember to have fun. Here are some ideas of fun ways to engage your community and celebrate your successes:

- Host a bike and walk to school day event to reward families for walking and bicycling to school
- Host a walking workshop to identify opportunities and challenges around your school
- Have students create "traffic signs" for the school and their neighborhood
- Have weekly "Walking Wednesdays"
- Work with your city planners and engineers to solve safety concerns. Make sure kids are involved in the ribbon cutting
- Interview students or parents to hear how your efforts are affecting them
- Reach out to community groups, businesses or other partners to get more people involved.
- Write a press release or hold a press conference to highlight your successes

# Resources

The Minnesota Safe Routes to School Resource Center also has everything you need to know about SRTS funding, how to start a SRTS plan or program, how to organize SRTS events, and more! Visit [www.mnsaferoutestoschool.org](http://www.mnsaferoutestoschool.org)

Additional resources are available at [www.health.state.mn.us/srts](http://www.health.state.mn.us/srts) to help complete and implement your action steps identified in this handbook:

- Goal and action step worksheets
- Parent survey
- Classroom behavior tally
- School walkability and bikability assessment
- Sample Safe Routes to School map

For more information about SRTS, contact:

Minnesota Department of Health  
[health.activeliving@state.mn.us](mailto:health.activeliving@state.mn.us)  
<http://www.health.state.mn.us/srts>

Minnesota Department of Transportation  
[saferoutes.dot@state.mn.us](mailto:saferoutes.dot@state.mn.us)  
<http://www.dot.state.mn.us/saferoutes>

Blue Cross Blue Shield of Minnesota  
[jill\\_n\\_chamberlain@bluecrossmn.com](mailto:jill_n_chamberlain@bluecrossmn.com)  
[http://www.preventionminnesota.com/active\\_living.cfm](http://www.preventionminnesota.com/active_living.cfm)

National Safe Routes to School Partnership  
<http://www.saferoutespartnership.org>  
National Center for Safe Routes to School  
<http://www.saferoutesinfo.org/>





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