



Safe Routes efforts in Minneapolis Public Schools

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*Promoting student walking and biking in
three pilot schools*



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Safe Routes efforts in Minneapolis Public Schools

Background

Over the past 40 years, the number of students who walk or bike to school has decreased dramatically. According to the Safe Routes to School National Partnership, approximately 50 percent of children walked or biked to school in 1969, with 87 percent of children living within one mile of school walking or bicycling. Today, fewer than 15 percent of schoolchildren walk or bike to school. Minnesota Student Survey data from 2010 also indicates that few students are getting 60 minutes of physical activity daily, as recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Approximately half (45-55%) of boys and somewhat fewer girls (29-43%) in 6th, 9th, and 12th grade reported engaging in vigorous physical activity on at least five of the past seven days.

The History of Safe Routes to School

Safe Routes to School (SRTS) efforts describe collaborative partnerships between schools, cities, policy makers, residents, community businesses, and health advocates to create a safe infrastructure to support and encourage students walking and biking to school. The first SRTS pilot programs in the United States began in 1997. Since then, interest in and support for SRTS efforts has increased across the country and Safe Routes programs are now in place in all 50 states. In Minnesota, 76 communities, including Minneapolis, have received federal funding administered by the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) since the first grant funding was distributed in 2006.

About Safe Routes in Minneapolis Public Schools: Healthy Kids Focused Students

Safe Routes efforts in Minneapolis Public Schools have been supported in a number of ways. Through MnDOT, the City of Minneapolis received Safe Routes to School awards in 2006, 2007, and 2009 to work on infrastructure and non-infrastructure enhancements. In addition, 14 Minneapolis schools received small grants through the city in 2008 to begin Safe Routes work ranging from



purchasing bike racks to establishing programs to encourage student walking. That same year, a Safe Routes Strategic Plan was developed for the city with input from local stakeholders and community residents. Currently, Bike Walk Twin Cities, funded through federal dollars, works to increase bicycling and walking in Minneapolis and surrounding communities. This initiative, as well as other efforts by the city and district to make enhancements to traffic control measures, paths, and intersections, have led to changes that improve safety and create a physical environment that supports student walking and biking.

Currently, Minneapolis Public Schools has implemented Safe Routes programming with support from a grant from the Minneapolis Department of Health and Family Support through the Statewide Health Improvement Program (SHIP). Safe Routes programming aligns with the school district's Wellness Policy to build an environment that supports and develops healthy learners by promoting healthy eating and physical activity. Safe Routes also complements the district's Changing School Options plan, which allows more students to attend schools closer to home and reduces transportation costs.

The goals of Safe Routes within the district are to:

- 1) encourage healthy living and combat childhood obesity;
- 2) increase knowledge of pedestrian and bicycle safety;
- 3) strengthen neighborhoods and communities; and
- 4) support "green" environmental efforts. During the past two years, district Safe Routes staff have provided technical assistance to 21 of the district's 52 schools.

The Safe Routes efforts made by the district have the potential to encourage physical activity among many students. In Minneapolis, approximately 6,000 students (17% of all students in the district) live in their school's designated walk zone. While the impact of Safe Routes is not limited only to students who live in close proximity to their school, they are most likely to directly benefit from improved routes and other infrastructure enhancements that encourage walking and biking.

About the evaluation

The Minneapolis Public Schools District contracted with Wilder Research to conduct a two-year evaluation to describe the district's efforts to support Safe Routes programming and identify lessons learned about Safe

Routes implementation and sustainability at three pilot schools: Lyndale Community School, Nellie Stone Johnson Community School, and Seward Montessori School. Brief interviews were also conducted with representatives from Armatage Montessori School, Burroughs Community School, and Waite Park Community School, three schools in Minneapolis that have also worked to support student walking and biking.

The evaluation of Safe Routes included the following data collection activities:

- Key informant interviews were conducted with system-level stakeholders representing the school district, City of Minneapolis, and law enforcement to discuss the efforts of the district's Safe Routes workgroup, including lessons learned about building and maintaining multidisciplinary partnerships and plans for sustaining and expanding Safe Routes efforts.
- Key informant interviews were also conducted with up to two representatives of each pilot school to discuss their Safe Routes efforts, including recent challenges, accomplishments, lessons learned, and plans for sustainability.
- Parent focus groups were conducted at the three pilot schools in the first year of the evaluation and at Lyndale and Seward in the second year of the evaluation. At Lyndale, the focus groups were conducted in Spanish, Somali, and English to meet the linguistic needs of parents, while focus groups at the other schools were conducted only in English. A parent focus group could not be convened at Nellie Stone during the second year of the evaluation, as the school was forced to close when a tornado caused significant damage to the neighborhood where the school is located and the focus group could not be rescheduled.
- Case studies, describing how Safe Routes efforts have impacted three families, were written, based on information gathered through brief interviews with the child, as well as his/her caregiver and a representative of the school.
- Brief semi-structured interviews were also conducted with up to two representatives of three additional schools implementing Safe Routes activities: Armatage Montessori School, Burroughs Community School, and Waite Park Community School.
- Reviews of district and school websites were conducted to gather information about current Safe Routes to School efforts.



About the report

This report summarizes information gathered throughout the two-year evaluation of Safe Routes efforts supported by the district at three Minneapolis schools. More specifically, it describes the planning, coordination, and implementation efforts that district staff and the Safe Routes workgroup have focused on and highlights the efforts of the three pilot schools. It then summarizes the lessons learned across the pilot schools and offers recommendations to sustain, improve, and expand Safe Routes programming to additional schools.

Safe Routes in Minneapolis Public schools: Efforts made by the Safe Routes work group to support walking and biking at local schools

The Safe Routes implementation approach promoted by Minneapolis Public Schools encourages collaborative parent-led, community-based, school-supported efforts. Safe Routes programming is developed locally at individual school sites to enhance student safety when walking and biking, and supported by the technical assistance and supported offered by the Safe Routes to School work group, which is facilitated by district Safe Routes staff, and includes representatives from a variety of district and

city departments, as well as other community partners. The work group meets monthly to identify strategies to support Safe Routes activities at individual schools and the district and consider how to best align their efforts.

Members of the work group bring unique expertise and perspectives to discussions about promoting Safe Routes across the district. For example, the district's Office of Emergency Management, Safety, and Security works closely with district Safe Routes staff to assess ways to improve student safety, particularly during arrival and dismissal times, and improve the practices of school crossing guards. The district's Transportation Analyst provides maps that depict the school's walk zones and areas where large concentrations of students live. This information can be used by lead Safe Routes staff to identify appropriate walking and biking routes for students, and is useful for city staff when considering the need for additional signage or signals at key intersections or other traffic control measures and infrastructure enhancements. Representatives from the city's Department of Public Works offer expertise in identifying and addressing infrastructure gaps, while Minneapolis Police Department representatives consider changes in patrol or other efforts to enhance student safety. As appropriate, the workgroup has engaged other community stakeholders to partner with them in order to address community safety concerns at specific school sites.

Supporting local Safe Routes efforts

The work group representatives who participated in key informant interviews all felt there was great value in having opportunities to meet regularly and discuss ways to assist local schools in identifying potential concerns and considering strategies to address these problems. Examples of the types of support and technical assistance individual schools across the district have received from the Safe Routes work group include:

- **Maps of primary walking and biking routes.** A number of Minneapolis schools have requested support from the district in mapping primary walking and biking routes that can then be shared with parents and students. A preliminary map is prepared with input from key work groups members, which allows the police and



the Department of Public Works to recommend any changes to the map, based on their knowledge of crime in the area or planned changes to streets in the neighborhood. In some situations, the police department has requested additional patrols from local precincts to respond to school safety concerns. The system-level discussions that take place as route maps are discussed and finalized helps ensure that the primary walking and biking routes follow streets with controlled intersections and will be consistent from year to year.

■ **Observational assessments of student arrival and dismissal patterns.**

The Safe Routes work group established a standardized process to assess school arrival and dismissal patterns and provide recommendations to support student walking and biking. During the past two years, a number of schools have contacted the district, requesting consultation on Safe Routes. Initially a full cross-agency team went to the school to observe arrival and dismissal patterns. However, as more requests for technical assistance came in, the process was refined so that an initial site visit was conducted by a Safe Routes staff member and, after identifying the school's primary concerns, the appropriate district and city staff members were contacted to begin working with the school. The process became more efficient, and, because the consultation focused on the areas identified by the school as primary concerns rather than concerns identified during an initial assessment, it helped build trust and relationships with school staff.

■ **Written resources.** During the past two years, Safe Routes staff led the development of a tool kit that describes how local schools can assess their own infrastructure needs and make programmatic and policy changes to encourage students walking and biking. This resource, as well as other written materials, are posted on the district's *Healthy Kids Focused Students* website. Safe Routes staff also developed a safety curriculum focused on student walking and biking that has been incorporated into the district's Transportation Safety Week, an expansion of the district's former "Bus Safety Week" efforts.

The district is also expanding its success with Safe Routes to consider other ways to promote physical activity among students and school staff, such as mapping indoor walking routes for staff to walk before and after school. In addition, just as Safe Routes has led to greater education of students about safe walking and biking behavior, the district has begun to work with school bus drivers and students to promote positive student behavior during arrival and dismissal times.

The school plays a key role in putting into place some of the elements that encourage walking and biking, but the school can't do it by itself, nor should it.

Healthy Kids Focused Students: A holistic approach to promote student wellness

Safe Routes is one component of the district's *Healthy Kids Focused Students* initiative. This initiative strives to improve student engagement and attendance by creating school environments where students can be more focused in their learning because they can be physically active and eat healthy, nutritious foods. In addition to Safe Routes, the district is also promoting Active Recess, where playground supervisors encourage students to participate in active games, and increased access to healthy foods through changes in the food options available to students for meals and as classroom awards.

More about the connection between nutrition, exercise, and improved students outcomes:

- Participation in breakfast programs is associated with improved attendance, decreased tardiness and discipline referral. (Source: Discover School Breakfast Toolkit, United States Department of Agriculture and Congressional Hunger Center; <http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/breakfast/toolkit/>).
- Numerous studies have found that children who are more physical perform better academically. Adolescents participating in physical education and team sports, or playing sports with their parents, were 20% more likely than their sedentary peers to earn an "A" grade in math or English. (Source: Tost, S.G. (2007). Active Education: Physical Education, Physical Activity, and Academic Performance. Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, Research Brief. Retrieved from http://www.activelivingresearch.org/files/Active_Ed.pdf)

Safe Routes efforts at three pilot schools: Seward Montessori School, Lyndale Community School, and Nellie Stone Johnson Community School

During this two year period, district Safe Routes staff and a variety of district, city, and community partners have supported the efforts of a number of schools in the district. This report highlights the Safe Routes efforts made by three pilot schools: Seward Montessori School, Lyndale Community School, and Nellie Stone Johnson Community School. The approaches used by the three schools were similar in a number of key ways. First, all schools received support and technical assistance from district Safe Routes staff and city/school/community partners. Second, the Safe Routes efforts at each school were led primarily by a strong parent advocate or champion with interest in promoting student wellness through increased walking or biking. Third, all schools incorporated contests, events, or distribution of materials as ways to engage students and parents in Safe Routes and expand or maintain momentum for their efforts. Finally, all schools provided support for Safe Routes by communicating information to parents and students, or supporting the efforts of the parent champions in other ways.

Despite these similarities, the Safe Routes efforts at each pilot school were designed to address the infrastructure needs of each school site, the physical environment of the school grounds and its surrounding neighborhood, and the concerns of parents in the community. As a result, each of the pilot sites approached their work to increase student walking and biking differently. The following case studies describe the major Safe Routes activities at each site, summarize recent accomplishments and implementation challenges, identify plans for sustainability, and offer recommendations for each site to consider when working to enhance or expand their current Safe Routes efforts.

Case Study 1 - Increased student biking at Seward Montessori School

Seward Montessori School is a PreK-8 public school in south Minneapolis with an enrollment of approximately 870 students in the 2010-11 school year.

Safe Routes efforts at Seward Montessori have been led and coordinated primarily by a strong parent champion, Kathy Kurdelmeier. In 2008, Kurdelmeier led efforts resulting in Seward Montessori receiving one of 14 mini-grants to implement Safe Routes programming. With the grant funding, nine initiatives were implemented, including offering incentives to students who walk or bike to school on designated days, a bike safety event with stations, including stations about the importance of wearing helmets and how to properly fit and wear helmets. The school also offered reduced price bike locks and helmets for students to purchase, and identified a few days when bike mechanics could do safety checks and minor repairs on the bikes.

In the 2009-10 school year, Seward Montessori's Safe Routes activities expanded through partnerships with local community businesses. Seward's parent champion reached out to a number of local businesses and organizations to create a network of companies that understand and support Safe Routes efforts. Employees from Free Wheel and The Hub bike shop have donated time to provide free bicycle inspections and small repairs, while Seward ReDesign has donated money for the school to use for incentives and prizes for students who walk and bike to school. The school has also received generous support from Dero Bike Rack Company, which donated bikes, bike racks, and a solar powered system (the Boltage system) used to track the number of students who bike to school each day and the number of miles students bike when traveling to and from school.

The school has also tried to consider ways to create opportunities for all students to safely walk and bike to school. In addition to working with partners to offer low-cost locks and helmets and provide free maintenance to bikes, the school gave bikes to 65 students during the past school year. Because not all children can afford bike locks, the school also allows students to leave their bike in a courtyard area, protected from people who pass by the school.

Despite the parent champion having less volunteer time available to work on Safe Routes efforts, momentum around student biking continued to build during the 2010-11 school year. The school maintained partnerships with local businesses and continued to support student walking and biking through promotional and educational events.

Safe Routes efforts at Seward have been recognized by the City of Minneapolis, as well as the Minneapolis Public School District. Although the district provided some funds to construct the cement pads for the donated bike racks, most of the work done to implement Safe Routes activities at Seward has been led and coordinated by their parent champion.

Promoting Safe Routes

Student challenges and incentives have been used regularly at Seward as a way to engage students in walking and biking, and to build and maintain their excitement. Data gathered using the Boltage system has been used to track the number of miles students walk or bike to school and create friendly competitions between walkers and bikers.

A number of communication strategies were used to disseminate information about Safe Routes to parents and students. The school's parent champion has made efforts to attend parent events to talk formally and informally with other parents about walking and biking, while the school has supported these efforts by sending fliers home with students, including information about Safe Routes in the school's newsletter and promoting Safe Routes at other school events. Word of mouth among students and parents is also another important way that is used to promote Safe Routes. As more families become involved and aware of Safe Routes, interest and participation grows.

Accomplishments

Growing participation. Just a few years ago, Seward didn't have any bike racks at the school for students to use. Since that time, the number of students who bike to school has increased. In spring 2010, Seward's principal estimated approximately 120 students walk or bike each day. Beginning in mid-October, registered students biked or walked 2,080 miles during the 2010-11 school year.

Local recognition. In 2009, Seward's parent champion was awarded the Mayor's Healthy City Award for her work in establishing Safe Routes activities, establishing partnerships with local businesses, and developing school events around bike safety. Biking at Seward has also been highlighted by local media in a number of stories about student health over the past two years.

Expanding partnerships. School staff and parents noted Seward is located in a neighborhood with strong resident support for biking and walking. There are also a number of bike shops and other businesses that support biking and have been willing to donate time, resources, and money to the school in support of its Safe Routes efforts. The parent champion noted that while it took considerable time to contact potential community partners and describe ways they can support Safe Routes at Seward, many business owners were interested in findings was to support the school's activities to promote walking and biking.

Challenges

Communication. Despite efforts to share information with parents of all students who attend Seward Montessori, some are not aware of local biking routes or the resources that are available to students (e.g., low cost helmets, free bikes for homeless students). Additional efforts are also needed to ensure parents who speak or read languages other than English receive information about student walking and biking.

Safety. Although Seward Montessori is located in a neighborhood with connections to major bike paths, some students do need to cross busy intersections when biking or walking to school. In addition, the streets leading directly to the school do not have bike lanes to better separate bicyclists, motorists, and pedestrians. Although all students are dismissed from school at the same time, buses wait 15 minutes before leaving, which allows students who bike or walk home from school to have more time to leave the school grounds before the buses leave the school. Parents who participated in a focus group in 2011 suggested adding more signage to alert residents to bicyclists in the neighborhood or extending the range of school crossing guards to help ensure safety at key intersections.



Time. The Safe Routes activities at Seward have been largely led and coordinated by a strong parent champion. Although parent interest in Safe Routes has grown and the school is a strong supporter of student walking and biking, the success of the initiative is largely dependent on the volunteer time of a single parent. The support of additional parents and involvement of school staff will likely be needed to maintain or expand Safe Routes efforts at the school.

Sustainability

As Seward, biking has gained momentum under the leadership of a parent champion who, with school support, worked to forge local partnerships, develop student events, and inform parents about the benefits of students walking and biking to school. As a result of the efforts of the parent champion, there is now a strong network of community businesses that support Seward's Safe Routes activities. However, to maintain these efforts over time, Safe Routes leadership and responsibilities must be spread to a larger group of parents and school staff who are invested in continuing to encourage and expand students biking.

Impact

Parents and school staff identified a number of benefits that result from greater students walking and biking. Parents of students valued the time they were able to spend talking to their child when walking to and from school, while parents of older students felt it provided a chance for their children to gain independence and

socialize with their peers. Some parents described the day their children became responsible for their own bike lock or rode their bike to school with friends as a “rite of passage” and something their children took pride in. In addition to noting the physical health benefits that result from walking and biking, some parents felt their children were more alert when they arrived at school after being outside. A few parents also felt that students who regularly walk or bike school might be more willing to be active outside during recess during winter months, because they may be more likely to wear heavier outerwear than students who take the bus or ride in a car.

Expanding Safe Routes at Seward

Overall, Safe Routes efforts at Seward have continued to move forward and gain momentum. The Boltage system, which provides the school with data to track and promote student walking and biking, has been an important asset. Despite having less volunteer time available, Seward's parent champion continues to engage community partners in Safe Routes, provide parents with information about walking and biking, and create student competitions or other promotional activities. The following suggestions were made by school staff and parents as ways to further expand Safe Routes efforts at Seward Montessori:

- Consider establishing partnerships with local biking groups and explore possible partnerships between the district and bike retailers
- Seek ongoing dedicated funding from community partners, grant resources, or the school's operating budget to support Safe Routes activities
- Work with city and district staff to identify and address intersections of concern and create safe bike lanes along key biking routes
- Assess the need for additional signs to heighten awareness of drivers to students who may be walking or biking to school
- Expand classroom activities to promote student walking/biking (e.g., walking tours for class field trips, math lessons using Boltage data)
- Explore parent interest in developing a Walking School Bus or forming a larger parent committee to support Safe Routes efforts



Case Study 2 - Walking School Buses at Lyndale Community School

Lyndale Community School is a PreK-5 public school in south Minneapolis with an enrollment of approximately 400 students in the 2010-11 school year.

Safe Routes at Lyndale began in the 2009-10 school year through the interest of a few parents who regularly walked with their children and were interested in supporting other students interested in walking to school. These parents worked with the district to learn more about Safe Routes and applied for a mini-grant from the National Center for Safe Routes to School to establish four “Walking School Buses.” These are parent-led student walking groups that follow a mapped route with designated stops and pick-up times at key intersections along the way to school. Lyndale was one of only 25 schools across the nation to receive a mini-grant, which they used to plan the routes as well as to purchase safety equipment (e.g., stop paddles and vests) and participation incentives for students (e.g., t-shirts).

Before the launch of the Walking School Buses, a parent leader, Scott Bordon, mapped the four routes and did a practice run at each stop to ensure that adequate time was allowed at each designated stop. He also called every family within Lyndale’s walk zone to tell them about the Walking School Buses and invite them to participate. The school supported his efforts to promote the new walking groups by distributing participation forms and maps of the walking routes to students and parents.

Over the past two years, a number of partners have supported the Safe Routes efforts at Lyndale. The school promotes the efforts of parents through events, such as Walk/Bike to School Days, and by including information about walking and biking safety in physical education curricula. School staff also tell prospective parents about the Walking School Bus and respond to questions parents have throughout the year about these walking routes. According to one of the parent leaders, the size of the school patrol has increased during the past year, making their walking routes to school safer for students. The District has supported Lyndale’s Safe Routes efforts by creating a map that identifies where students live so that they can plan future routes. Lyndale Neighborhood Association has also helped promote a safe neighborhood for walkers and bikers by advocating for lower speed limits around the school and helping parents seek resources for Safe Routes programming.



Waite Park Community School

The Walking School Bus used by students at Waite Park Community School started informally by two parents who were interested in walking their child to school and who were aware of Walking School Buses being used by students at Lyndale. They knew that other parents in their neighborhood were also interested in encouraging their children to walk to school, but didn't have the time to walk with their child each day. Interest in the Walking School Bus grew throughout the year, with up to 21 students walking together to school this spring.

Parent leadership has been critical to the success of the Walking School Bus at Waite Park. Students can meet at the home of the parent leaders to start the walk to school or join the group at designated times at one of three intersections. The school administration supports the Walking School Bus by including information about the walking route in the school newsletter. Other students and parents have learned about the Walking School Bus by word of mouth or by simply seeing the group walking to school. The school also supports student walking and biking by having a strong student school patrol program, where 4th and 5th grade students act as trained crossing guards to help other students cross busy intersections.

Although the school did not have grant money during the 2010-11 school year to support Safe Routes, student interest in walking to school has grown, as has interest among other policy makers and schools interested in encouraging student walking and biking. Lyndale has hosted legislators who want to learn more about their work and have been contacted by representatives of schools in Minnesota and across the nation who are interested in Safe Routes programming. As a result of this growing interest, the school has been more strategic in how they supervise students as they come to school and mindful of ways to promote walking and biking as ways to encourage student health and community building.

Promoting Safe Routes

Safe Routes activities at Lyndale Community School are parent-driven initiatives, not a project administered by the school. However, the school does a number of things to support the work of parents and encourage student walking and biking. For example, to celebrate International Walk/Bike to School Day on October 6th, 2010, parents who walked with their children were treated to coffee and doughnuts and greeted by Lyndale staff. All students who walked/biked to school could enter a drawing for prizes, and students who completed an assignment where they could write about the benefits of walking/biking to school received free tickets for the school carnival. Approximately 200 students and their families walked or biked to school that day, and reporters from a local television station and Minnesota Public Radio reported on the event.

The school supports student walking and biking in a number of other formal and informal ways. The school promotes walking and biking in school newsletters, as well as through Walk to School Days, physical education curricula, and special projects in other classes. Students

who read morning announcements also encourage student walking and biking, reminding their peers that maps of primary walking and biking routes are available in the school office. Information about Safe Routes is also posted on the school website.

The Walking School Buses themselves are a form of advertising, as other parents and students see groups walking through the neighborhood or arriving at school together. Parents have given participation t-shirts to students to promote the Walking School Bus, and they also received “I Walked to School” stickers from the City of Minneapolis Bike/Walk Ambassador that are regularly given to students.

Accomplishments

Strong parent involvement. The parents who initiated Safe Routes efforts at Lyndale have continued to drive this work, by coordinating with the school and engaging other parents interested in encouraging students to walk and bike to school. During the past two years, parent leadership has remained strong and dedicated to supporting and expanding their Safe Routes activities. The school recognizes, values, and supports the involvement of parents in leading these efforts.

Growing participation. Because of the work of parents and support from the school, the number of students who walk or bike to school has increased. Lyndale installed two new bike racks in the past year to better accommodate the growing number of students who bike to school. When Lyndale launched Safe Routes during an event in spring 2010, 65 students and their families walked or biked to school. In October, this grew to approximately 200 students and their families who walked or biked to school on International Walk/Bike to School Day. During the 2010-11 school year, district staff estimated students who used the Walking School Bus to travel to school walked a combined 3,200 miles.

Local and national recognition. Lyndale’s Safe Routes programming has received positive local and national recognition. In addition to responding to questions from other schools and hosting legislators interested in learning more about their work, local television and radio stations have covered the school’s walking/biking events. In



2010, district Safe Routes staff and Scott Bordon appeared on *School Matters*, the district's school news program. The National Center for Safe Routes to School has also recognized Bordon's work to implement Safe Routes in a webinar highlighting the accomplishments of a few mini-grant recipients.

Challenges

Safety concerns. School staff have noted some safety concerns along the designated walking route, particularly drivers exceeding the speed limits or rolling through stop signs. Parents who participated in a series of focus groups also were concerned about traffic not obeying stop signs or yielding to pedestrians and felt more stoplights and school crossing signage would be helpful. A few parents also noted concerns about their children encountering strangers or unfriendly animals, particularly if walking alone.

Parents, particularly parents of younger children, felt adult supervision along walking routes was critical and would alleviate many of their concerns. In that regard, the Walking School Buses are an effective approach in addressing the concerns of many parents. However, although some of the Walking School Bus routes are only available to students twice a week, some students walk every day. The school plans to continue working with the school resource officer and local precinct to help improve safety along walking routes on days when fewer adults may be present.

Weather challenges. Parents and school staff both identified winter weather as a potential barrier to student walking and biking. Their key concerns were student safety along routes if sidewalks were not shoveled, as it can sometimes result in students walking in the street. A few parents noted that their own physical health made it difficult to accompany their child to school, particularly in winter months when sidewalks may be slippery. Although most parents noted the health benefits of their children walking to school, a few were concerned about their children becoming ill more often if walking in cold or rainy weather.

Communication. Ongoing communication using multiple formats (e.g., newsletters, online resources, printed maps, informal verbal communication) is needed to inform parents about the Walking School Bus options available

at Lyndale. Some of the parents who participated in the focus groups were not aware that the option was available through the school and were interested in learning more. In addition, the school and parent leaders have learned that extra efforts are needed to inform Somali and Spanish-speaking parents of the Walking School Bus routes and to discuss their concerns about student safety. To assist in these efforts, bilingual school staff have translated materials and called parents to share information about nearby walking routes. Parents are also engaged in contacting other parents within their cultural community who may be interested in walking/biking.

Meeting growing demand. Growing student interest in walking to school also means there is a need to expand routes into different neighborhoods. Despite strong support among parents for student walking and requests by parents for routes through their neighborhoods, it can be challenging to find enough parents who are willing and able to supervise the Walking School Bus once or twice a week.

Sustainability

School staff have found promotion of Safe Routes requires few school resources. The school plans to continue promoting Safe Routes in newsletters and other communication to parents, as well as through other classroom activities and school events. Ongoing efforts are needed to inform parents about Walking School Buses in their neighborhoods and increase the number of parent volunteers to expand the accessibility of safe walking routes. Assuming strong parent involvement continues, school representatives did not anticipate any threats to sustainability. However, without the ongoing leadership of committed parents, sustainability could be threatened.

Impact

Stronger school community. Through Safe Routes, parents and students have gotten to know one another in a way that may not have occurred otherwise. Parents who walk with the children to school spend time talking with one another, leading to a positive school climate. A culturally diverse group of students and their parents have embraced walking to school. Students who walk to school reflect



Armatage Montessori School

Armatage Montessori began to work on Safe Routes efforts in order to determine the best ways for all students to get to school, regardless of whether they bus, are dropped-off by car, walk, or bike. School staff and parents had a number of safety concerns to address. With about 100 cars that pull up each morning to drop off students, as well as bikers and walkers coming from all directions, traffic congestion in the morning could be chaotic. In addition, there are a few busy streets surrounding the school, which was also a concern for many parents.

Over the past year, Armatage made a number of enhancements to address these concerns and provide options for students to safely get to school in any way they choose. Parents received information about the location of school patrol along busy intersections near the school. Students who choose to bike to school are asked to register at the school office where they receive a map that shows them how to best get to school without crossing paths taken most often by buses, cars, and students who walk. To ease traffic congestion, the school drop-off area was moved to a parking lot where cars are greeted by staff who open doors for students and guide them to use the sidewalk. With the new system for arrival and dismissal, cars are not going to the same place as buses and walkers are not going to the same place as bikers. It has created safe options for families to get to school. There is interest in exploring the use of Walking School Buses or increasing the number of bike racks to further encourage student walking and biking.

the cultural diversity of the student body, which includes Somali, African-American, Hispanic, and White families. Parents, across cultures, are interested in encouraging their children to walk to school when they feel comfortable their children will be safe and supervised.

Improved student health, other benefits. A number of parents who participated in the parent focus groups stated that their child had started to walk or bike to school because they lived too close for the child to ride the bus, while others chose to walk or bike over other transportation options. Regardless of why the parents began to encourage their child to walk or bike to school, all felt this additional exercise was important for their child(ren). A few parents noted the morning walk helped their child feel energized, rather than sluggish, when they started class. In addition, a number of parents noted they valued the time they could spend talking with their child when they walked or biked to school. A few also felt their child may be less likely to be exposed to bad language or experience bullying when walking or biking to school.

Promotion of school values. According to one school representative, “[Safe Routes] has worked its way into many areas I certainly wouldn’t have thought possible.” Parents and school staff alike encouraged walking and biking, not only because it encouraged exercise, but also because it is environmentally responsible and promotes community involvement.

Expanding Safe Routes at Lyndale

Overall, Safe Routes efforts at Lyndale have continued to move forward and gain momentum. Although the school now has four established Walking School Bus routes, there is interest among parents to increase the number of walking routes for students. The following suggestions were made by school staff and parents as ways to further expand Safe Routes efforts at Lyndale Community School:

- Work with city staff to identify pedestrian safety issues and potential traffic control measures
- Continue to communicate regularly with parents about Safe Routes efforts and encourage volunteers to lead Walking School Buses along other routes
- Partner with neighborhood groups or block clubs to address traffic safety concerns
- Encourage residents who live along walking routes to maintain their sidewalks
- Consider ways to provide low-income students with bike locks

Case Study 3 – Expanding Safe Routes efforts at Nellie Stone Johnson

Nellie Stone Johnson Community School is a PreK-8 public school in north Minneapolis with an enrollment of approximately 650 students during the 2010-11 school year.

Safe Routes at Nellie Stone Johnson began during the 2007-08 school year as an effort to not only encourage physical activity among students, but also to build upon the school's larger efforts to create a safe school neighborhood and promote safe and respectful student behavior.

Safe Routes efforts have been led primarily by the school's Community Liaison and parent, Nicole Randolph. Over time, a number of activities have been implemented to promote Safe Routes and promote walking and biking among students. Walk or Bike to School Days are used to inform students, parents, school staff, and community members about Safe Routes and encourage walking and biking. In addition, student poster/writing contests have been used to encourage students to create messages about safety in their community. The school has also administered parent surveys and convened focus groups to identify parent concerns about student walking and biking and ways the school or City could work to address these issues. Outside of their Safe Routes efforts, school staff have also been working to increase student physical activity through promotion of active recess, which provides students with opportunities for exercise through more structured playground games and activities.

Partnerships

Nellie Stone Johnson staff have worked with a number of community organizations and school district staff to promote Safe Routes. The school's community liaison and school principal regularly attend meetings with a neighborhood community group, the Hawthorne Huddle, where they have opportunities to share information from the school, including their Safe Routes efforts. The school also plans to share primary walk and bike routes taken by students with law enforcement to assist their efforts to promote student and community safety.

Accomplishments

Development of Walk-Bike Maps. "Walk-Bike" maps were developed as a tool for families to highlight primary biking and walking routes, including the location of traffic signals and marked crossings. Nellie Stone Johnson plans to share these maps with families in fall 2011. There is interest in enhancing the map to include the locations of safe places, such as churches or community recreation centers, where students can go if they need help on their way to or from school.

National recognition. The work Nellie Stone Johnson has done to include parents in identifying barriers to students walking to school was highlighted as a Promising Partnership Practice by Johns Hopkins University's National Network of Partnership Schools (NNPS) in 2010. The school was one of 107 examples of school, family, and community partnerships described as creating a welcoming school climate and supporting student success.

Challenges

Safety concerns. Among parents and school staff, the safety of children who walk or bike to school is a primary concern. One parent noted the importance of encouraging students not to cut through alleys and felt a greater presence of law enforcement and parents in the neighborhood during arrival and dismissal times would address some parent concerns.

Staff time. During the past year, the community liaison at Nellie Stone became involved with a growing number of initiatives, limiting the amount of time available to work on Safe Routes efforts. In addition, due to time limitations, the school did not submit a proposal for ongoing funding for their Safe Routes efforts. While the parent liaison noted that many Safe Routes efforts do not require significant funds, some financial support is used to purchase incentives for students who walk or bike to school on designated days or to support other promotional activities.

Maintaining parent and student involvement. Although parents have participated in focus groups and surveys to share information about the concerns they have about their children walking or biking to school and suggestions for addressing these changes and volunteered their time

to help coordinate Walk/Bike to School days, it has been difficult to maintain parent involvement throughout the school year.

Communication. Nellie Stone Johnson serves a diverse student population, including a number of Hmong and Spanish-speaking families. Translated materials or interpreters are needed to share information directly with parents.

Impact

The school's community liaison has used focus groups and surveys to understand the needs and concerns of parents who living near Nellie Stone. In addition, the events and student activities used to encourage student walking and biking have been well-attended. However, there need to be additional efforts made to work in partnership with local law enforcement and community stakeholders to consider ways in which to address safety concerns within the neighborhood and to develop further initiatives to support student walking and biking throughout the school year.

Sustainability

The limited availability of the school's community liaison to focus on Safe Routes activities was a significant challenge to maintaining and expanding the school's work to encourage student walking and biking in the 2010-11 school year. The school plans to distribute maps of identified walking and biking routes to parents next fall and will continue to hold Walk and Bike to School Days and other student activities. Dedicating school staff time to work on these efforts and identifying strategies to

engage parents in year-round efforts to support students walking and biking to school are two important steps needed to ensure sustainability of Safe Routes efforts.

Expanding Safe Routes at Nellie Stone Johnson

Since receiving grant funding, staff at Nellie Stone Johnson have developed ways to hear directly about the concerns regarding students walking and biking to school and have coordinated five separate Walk and Bike to School events that have promoted walking. Despite these early gains, efforts at Nellie Stone Johnson were stalled during the past year, due to the parent liaison's growing responsibility for initiatives outside of Safe Routes. Planned Safe Routes events for spring 2011 were also cancelled, due to a tornado inflicting significant damage in north Minneapolis and neighborhoods surrounding the school. The following actions may be helpful for Nellie Stone to use to expand their Safe Routes activities:

- Identify parents, community residents, and local business owners interested in working with school staff to identify ways to support students who walk and bike to school.
- Partner with district and city staff to identify environmental changes needed to support safe walking and biking, such as traffic control measures.
- Consider opportunities to engage community residents in efforts to increase the presence of adults along key routes before and after school.
- Continue to work with local law enforcement to identify safety concerns and consider ways to increase the presence of adults along key walking and biking routes.
- Consider the need for low- or no-cost bike locks and safe storage areas for low-income students who bike to school.
- Encourage residents who live along key walking routes to maintain their sidewalks.

What I hope is that, during this time, we build a commitment to work on these issues — that these are seen as quality of life issues for the city and a regular part of people's jobs.



Lessons learned and next steps

Through the evaluation, a number of common accomplishments, challenges, and lessons learned were noted at both the district/system level and locally at individual school sites. Overall, Safe Routes efforts in the Minneapolis Public Schools District have increased over time, with activities occurring at a larger number of individual school sites and a stronger infrastructure in place to support schools in their planning and implementation efforts. However, individual schools and system partners identified challenges to maintaining current efforts or to expanding Safe Routes to new schools.

Key accomplishments

A common accomplishment across the three pilot sites was simply the successful implementation of Safe Routes efforts over the past two years. To varying degrees, each school describes ways in which their efforts have led to increased student awareness of the benefits of walking and biking, greater interest among parents and students in walking and biking, improved partnerships with community businesses and organizations, and perceptions of increased numbers of students walking or biking to school. The experiences of the three pilot schools also demonstrate the impact parents can have on changing the school climate to support walking and biking. It is critical to note that while these efforts were often led by parents, they were supported by school administrators willing to support Safe Routes promotional events and communicate information to students and their parents.

Minneapolis Public Schools Safe Routes work group participants and other local stakeholders identified a number of notable district/system-level accomplishments that have taken place during the past two years as a result of their efforts.

Expansion of Safe Routes efforts

During the past two years, 21 schools received individualized technical support from Safe Routes staff and the district, city, and community partners who comprise the workgroup or support Safe Routes in other ways. A number of schools have requested observational

assessments to help them identify safety concerns during arrival and dismissal times and have been working with district staff to develop recommended walking and biking routes. Because of the high-level partnerships in place between the district, city, and other community partners, issues identified as concerns at individual schools could be addressed relatively quickly. For example, a number of schools have been able to work in partnership with the district and city to install bike racks to meet the needs of students.

Development of resources, effective planning approaches

A number of written materials, including a Safe Routes toolkit and student activity handouts, were developed by Safe Routes staff with input from other stakeholders. These resources provide schools with information to help them plan and implement Safe Routes efforts. Although the Safe Routes efforts vary, based on identified needs and safety concerns at each school, the Safe Routes work group has developed effective and efficient ways to conduct observational assessments and work with schools and parent groups to address safety concerns.

Improved partnerships and coordination

As a result of their ongoing participation in the Safe Routes work group, representatives from city and district departments and community organizations were able to work in partnership on a number of activities that directly supported Safe Routes efforts, as well as on activities that more indirectly supported student safety. For example, as a result of record-setting snowfall in the winter of 2010-11, streets near some schools had only narrow paths for buses and cars to drive on, causing safety concerns. When this came to the attention of city staff, they were able to work quickly to plow the streets from curb to curb in key areas to allow adequate room for traffic.

Shared, holistic understanding of Safe Routes

Representatives of local schools and larger systems all agreed that, through their involvement with Safe Routes, their understanding of these efforts had broadened from initially focusing solely on the routes students can travel to and from school, to thinking more broadly about



neighborhood safety and infrastructure needs. Although the district has played a key role in providing staff to coordinate Safe Routes efforts and creating a network of partners, stakeholders felt all partners played key roles in supporting Safe Routes. Over time, efforts to encourage student walking and biking were seen less as a school- or district-based program, and instead, as a series of collaborative approaches to promote physical activity among students.

Common challenges

A number of common challenges also emerged through the key informant interviews conducted with local school staff and system representatives and from parents who participated in a series of focus groups.

Safety concerns

The safety concerns of parents, both real and perceived, are key barriers to students walking and biking to school. Parents, particularly parents of younger students, were concerned about their children crossing busy streets. A number of parents identified adult supervision along walking/biking routes, traffic control measures and signage, an increased law enforcement presence, and increasing the number of intersections along key walking/biking routes where school patrol/crossing guards are posted as strategies to address these concerns. Fewer parents had concerns about their child walking in poor weather or being approached by strangers or unleashed pets.

Limited time, financial resources

Representatives of the three pilot schools all noted that a considerable amount of work can be done with limited financial resources. Often, the work of parents to implement Safe Routes efforts focused heavily on building relationships with community organizations or sharing information with parents, which are low-cost activities, but require considerable time. Similarly, at a systems level, stakeholders face competing demands for their time. While some funding was available through SHIP and other sources to support the work of district Safe Routes staff and some stakeholders, many of the work group representatives offered in-kind support to

the initiative. In order for Safe Routes to be sustainable as financial supports become less readily available, stakeholders at the school, community, and system-level will need to consider ways to integrate a “Safe Routes perspective” into their ongoing roles and responsibilities.

Ongoing communication needs

In addition to implementing strategies to improve the neighborhood infrastructure and school policies to encourage students to walk and bike to school, ongoing efforts are needed to share information regularly with parents. While some of the parents who participated in the focus groups at the pilot schools were aware of, or involved with, Safe Routes efforts, some parents did not know walking/biking maps were available from the school. School representatives also noted that ongoing efforts are needed to remind parents who drive their children to school of changes made to improve safety at school drop-off zones. A number of stakeholders noted the need to provide communication using a variety of methods and in multiple languages. At the pilot schools, parents did individual outreach with other parents to encourage them to consider allowing their child to walk or bike to school. However, schools can expand on these efforts by also allocating time for bi-lingual school staff to reach out to parents with phone calls or by translating information that can be sent to parents, posting resources on their website, including Safe Routes updates in parent newsletters, or sharing information verbally during various school events. Some stakeholders also suggested a need for greater citywide communication so that neighborhood residents are more aware of students who may be walking or biking to school when driving and can help to create safe walking and biking routes by shoveling snow from their sidewalks in winter months. A few stakeholders also felt it would be helpful to have access to more information that describes how healthy behavior, particularly physical activity, is tied to improved student achievement.

Meeting growing demand

As interest in Safe Routes grows, local schools and system stakeholders must find ways to meet growing demands for services and support. A representative from Lyndale Community School, for example, noted that they were



receiving requests from parents interested in having Walking School Buses in their neighborhoods. However, without parents willing to volunteer their time to walk with students, the requests of parents cannot be met. Similarly, as more schools are interested in working on Safe Routes efforts, the district, city, and community stakeholders need to think strategically about the level of support they can provide for individual schools.

Maintaining momentum among Safe Routes leaders and advocates

Although the case studies of the three pilot schools demonstrated that important changes can be made when an involved parent champion has the support of school administrators, Safe Routes efforts can fade over time if parent champions have less time available to promote these efforts. Although the three pilot schools did continue their Safe Routes efforts into Year 2 of this funded initiative, efforts at two of the sites began to diminish when the parents had less time available. At a system level, sustainability of Safe Routes will occur if stakeholders incorporate Safe Routes efforts into their ongoing job responsibilities. As SHIP funding ends, a challenge for the Safe Routes work group will be finding ways to maintain regular communication and responsiveness to requests with less dedicated district staff time available to coordinate these efforts.

Key findings and potential action steps

Based on the information gathered through this evaluation, a number of key lessons emerged that describe how stakeholders in Minneapolis have successfully supported students walking and biking to school and identify challenges that have impacted their work. The action steps following each lesson learned offer suggestions for parents, school staff, and system-level representatives to consider when working to build or expand Safe Routes efforts.

Multi-disciplinary relationships are critical to the success of Safe Routes efforts. Although many Safe Routes efforts focus on engaging students and making infrastructure changes on the school grounds, safe walking and biking requires broader community-level approaches. It is critical for Safe Routes efforts to involve key city representatives (e.g., public works, transportation, city planning, law enforcement), district staff (e.g., transportation, safety and security), local school staff (e.g., principals, school nurses, teachers, bus drivers), neighborhood organizations, community businesses, and parents and students, in order to determine ways to support student safety through a variety of approaches. Safe Routes planning and implementation is enhanced when stakeholders with different perspectives and areas of expertise can work collaboratively to address areas of concern.

Burroughs Community School

Safe Routes efforts at Burroughs began soon after district-level changes in busing led to a dramatic increase in the number of students driven by car to school. Increased congestion in the school drop-off led to the school exploring a number of options with the school's Site Council, a group of parents who meet regularly to discuss school policies and other issues. The council developed a number of ways to increase safety at the drop-off area, and the school principal began standing outside each morning to monitor the area.

The school's Site Council worked closely with the school principal to develop ways to encourage more students to walk and bike to school. Additional bike racks were installed at the school, and the district assisted the school in developing maps that showed safe biking lanes, encouraging students to take routes where crossing guards were present. Maps were sent to students and parents with reminders about bike safety and the importance of wearing helmets. These changes resulted in increased interest in student walking and biking; currently, approximately 150 students walk/bike to school each day.

The Site Council has been vital to the success of walking and biking to Burroughs. They have guided decisions on ways to increase student safety when walking and biking, organized walking and biking events, and held an auction to raise money for the schools' initiative. The city has also supported Safe Routes efforts at Burroughs by providing new signage to direct traffic flow near the drop-off area.

Action steps for district-level efforts:

- Continue holding ongoing meetings with a broad array of stakeholders to sustain partnerships over time.
- Consider strategies to engage parents more directly in district-level planning efforts.
- Maintain funding to support district Safe Routes staff to provide technical assistance and facilitate connections to complementary initiatives.

Action steps for local schools

- Identify neighborhood organizations and community businesses that may be interested in offering financial resources or helping the school identify volunteers to support Safe Routes efforts.
- Communicate parent concerns and neighborhood safety problems to district staff and city representatives.
- Request technical assistance and resources from the district or city (e.g., maps with identified walking/ biking routes) to support Safe Routes efforts.
- Consider reaching out to nearby charter, alternative, and private schools to streamline Safe Routes activities in key neighborhoods.

Parent-led efforts do require school support. The experiences of the three pilot schools highlighted in this report demonstrate that significant change can occur with the involvement of a small number of committed parents. However, when the involvement of individual parents is reduced, due to changes in their availability or as a result of their child transferring to a different school, Safe Routes efforts can also be impacted significantly. In addition, as interest in Safe Routes activities expands within individual schools, parent leadership may need to be expanded to meet growing demands. School site councils or parent advisory groups may be well-positioned to support Safe Routes efforts or the work of individual parent champions.

Action steps for district-level efforts:

- Consider establishing parent leadership training opportunities to help parents who are interested in Safe Routes to enhance their skills to plan events, prepare grant proposals, learn successful community fundraising strategies, and engage other parents in their work.
- Create opportunities for parent champions in schools across the district to share their work on Safe Routes with one another and build relationships.

Action steps for school-level efforts:

- Identify school staff members who can work directly with parents to discuss ways the school can help support or sustain their efforts.
- Provide information about Safe Routes to parent advisory councils and support efforts to identify and address local concerns.

Frequent communication is needed at multiple levels to expand and sustain Safe Routes efforts. Parents of students at any school may have varied opinions about the value of students walking and biking to school and different concerns about neighborhood safety, based on where they live. Schools and parent champions need to be aware of the concerns of parents and consider how to validate and address legitimate issues, while developing messages to raise awareness or change misperceptions about community safety. Further, when infrastructure changes are made, parents need to be informed about new resources available to them (e.g., low-cost helmets and bike locks, Walking School Bus routes, expansion of school patrol crossing guards to new intersections). A variety of communication approaches (e.g., written newsletters, direct telephone calls, information posted to school websites) are likely needed to ensure information is available to all parents. Special efforts are likely needed to communicate information to specific cultural groups, particularly to parents who need information available to them in languages other than English.

Safe Routes is not a program — it is a range of things that can be done to enhance safe walking and biking to school.

However, communication regarding Safe Routes cannot stop with informing parents and families. Community residents in neighborhoods surrounding the school benefit from knowing how their individual actions (e.g., shoveling snow from their sidewalks) can encourage or deter students walking and biking to school. Similarly, community businesses and neighborhood groups may be interested in receiving information about steps they can take to encourage students to be healthy.

Sharing information about the impact of Safe Routes is another important communications component. Tracking the total number of students who walk or bike to school is one way to demonstrate how these efforts lead to changes in student physical activity. However, Safe Routes efforts can have a number of other benefits. Safe Routes can lead to a broader understanding of the ways the physical environment of a neighborhood can support or discourage walking and biking and lead to proactive efforts to address potential issues. Improved relationships among schools, district staff, city officials, community residents, parents, and students can result in more timely responses to safety concerns on or near school grounds. Although this report shares lessons learned from three pilot schools, there are a number of schools encouraging student walking and biking throughout the district but not tracking or reporting their progress in consistent ways. Although anecdotal information from parents and school staff suggest youth who walk and bike to school are more focused and ready to learn, a challenge for Safe Routes work is determining ways to assess the impact of increased activity on health, classroom engagement, or academic progress without placing high levels of data collection burden on school staff. However, developing consistent ways for schools in the district to easily track key process and outcome measures can help further demonstrate the impact of this work and encourage greater participation.

Action items for district-level efforts:

- Develop talking points and fact sheets that local schools can use to inform parents, community members, and funders about the connection between physical activity and improved student outcomes.
- Continue to work with law enforcement and other community stakeholders to provide accurate data to schools about local crime rates and frequency of accidents at key intersections.

- Consider ways to work with key stakeholders to create a citywide communication campaign to expand neighborhood support for Safe Routes activities and remind motorists to yield to pedestrians and bicyclists.
- Work collaboratively with Minneapolis Department of Health and Family Support to identify meaningful ways to measure the impact of efforts to encourage walking and biking of all residents, including students.
- Provide schools with recommended approaches to track changes in student walking and biking, as well as other impacts that result from Safe Routes efforts.

Action items for school-level efforts:

- Provide information to parents and students about local Safe Routes resources (e.g., maps with recommended walking/biking routes, Walking School Bus options)
- Consider specific strategies to gather feedback from parents about the concerns they have about their children walking and biking to school, including parents from key neighborhoods and specific cultural communities.
- Identify community liaisons who can help parent champions and school staff reach out to parents from all cultural groups.
- Establish opportunities for parents who are proponents of walking and biking to share their experiences with parents who have safety concerns or other reservations.
- Encourage school staff to encourage student walking and biking during informal conversations with parents.
- Track and report implementation of Safe Routes efforts, participation in walk to school activities, and changes in student walking and biking behavior in communications with parents and community partners.



Incorporate events and promotions into Safe Routes efforts, but focus efforts on system-level changes. All three pilot schools used a variety of events or initiatives to build student and parent interest in walking and biking. Walk/Bike to School Days, student poster contests, and other activities are effective ways to inform parents of new resources available to them or to encourage families to try walking or biking as an alternative to driving to school. However, much of the work done to implement Safe Routes at the district- or school-level are “behind the scenes” efforts to create an infrastructure that better supports student walking and biking. It is important for schools to clearly identify local safety concerns and better prioritize how to focus their efforts on changes that can encourage student activity. Observational assessments of the school grounds during arrival/dismissal times, as well as walking/biking audits along key routes from neighborhoods to the school, are both ways to identify and prioritize needs for environmental changes.

Action items for district-level efforts:

- Consider ways to use the assessment process to engage parents and students in Safe Routes activities and facilitate relationships between stakeholder groups (e.g., parents, school staff and administrators, district staff, community partners, city staff).
- Consider developing “tip sheets” schools can use when planning events and promotions to help them be more efficient in using their time and resources for these one-time events and be better able to focus efforts on broader infrastructure changes.

Action items for school-level efforts:

- Engage students and parents in activities to identify safety concerns or gaps in infrastructure.
- Consider opportunities for walking and biking as part of classroom field trips or student homework assignments.

For more information about Safe Routes

Minneapolis Public Schools:

Healthy Kids Focused Students

<http://sss.mpls.k12.mn.us/hkfs.html>

Minnesota Department of Transportation:

Safe Routes to School Program

<http://www.dot.state.mn.us/saferoutes/index.html>

National Center for Safe Routes to School

<http://www.saferoutesinfo.org/>

Safe Routes to School National Partnership

<http://www.saferoutespartnership.org/>



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