



CASE STUDY: GREATER WASHINGTON DC REGION

Creating a Safe Routes to School action plan Washington, DC

The District Department of Transportation Safe Routes to School coordinator works with committees at individual schools to create Safe Routes to School action plans. The school and coordinator then implement the plan's school-based strategies. In partnership with the local bicycle organization, schools with action plans have access to pedestrian and bicycle education, International Walk to School Day and National Bike to School Day planning assistance and incentives for the students.

Background

The District Department of Transportation (DDOT) Safe Routes to School program started in 2005 when the first federal Safe Routes to School grant program was created. For the purpose of the Safe Routes to School federal grant program, D.C. receives funding as a state. When a second federal program, American Reinvestment and Recovery Act, more commonly known as stimulus funds, were awarded to the District in 2009, the Department Director immediately agreed with the request of the Safe Routes to School coordinator to dedicated 3 percent of that funding to Safe Routes to School activities.

The program has a full time coordinator. The coordinator has a six-step Action Planning process. Each year a Call for Participants is issued and eligible schools may choose to enroll in the program.

Students are encouraged to walk and bike to school in the District of Columbia Public Schools. The Local Wellness Policy 2011, Section 1 under Physical Activity states that pedestrian safety is incorporated into 2nd grade Health and Physical Education curriculum.

Program Implementation

When the program started, a committee with representation from elected officials, schools, parents and the community formed. This committee helped to design the process for how the program would operate including the DDOT application process for school crossing guards.

Any school with K-8 students is eligible to participate in the Safe Routes to School program. A Call for Participants is issues annually. The participating schools are responsible for convening a committee of interested parents, teachers, staff and the principal in the action planning process. The Safe Routes to School coordinator leads the committee through the action planning process. Since the committee is involved at the beginning, they have ownership of the

action plan and are more likely to implement the plan. Once the action plan is complete, it guides the implementation of a comprehensive Safe Routes to School program for that school.

DDOT Safe Routes to School Action Planning process includes the following steps:

- Kick-off meeting with the Safe Routes to School committee to introduce the Five E's of Safe Routes to School and the Action Planning process.
- Engineering meeting discusses the committee's concerns related to students walking and bicycling to school and the infrastructure problems that create barriers to safe walking and bicycling. The Coordinator and the committee observe pick-up or drop-off and traffic around the school and meet up to discuss what was observed.
- Education, Encouragement, Enforcement and Evaluation meeting presents a menu of options for each of the Five E's. The menu promotes brainstorming and helps the committee decide which activities are best for their school.
- Plan Review meeting presents the final plan (completed by the Coordinator) with all Five E's addressed and allows the committee an opportunity to make comments
- Implementation meetings occur as needed in order to help the committee implement the non-infrastructure portions of the plan and to get help from DDOT on implementation of the Engineering recommendations from the plan. The DDOT Safe Routes to School coordinator continues to provide technical assistance and answer questions. When available, the coordinator can also provide trinkets and incentives for the students to support encouragement programs.

The DDOT Safe Routes to School program contracts with the Washington Area Bicyclist Association (WABA) for pedestrian and bicycle education. Students in grades 3-8 participate in bicycle education and students in grades K-2 received pedestrian education. When schools express a traffic safety issue, the Safe Routes to School coordinator reaches out to the Metropolitan Police Department which then responds with extra enforcement in school zones.

Once a school completes an action plan, they are eligible to apply for Safe Routes to School infrastructure funds. Infrastructure funding applications are released every other year. In some cases, the infrastructure projects are able completed with DDOT funds through regularly scheduled work or maintenance. Support does not go away after the action plan is finalized. The coordinator is always available for technical assistance and helps to supply incentives for International Walk to School Day and National Bike to School Day.

In celebration of the first National Bike to School Day event in May of 2012, the DC Safe Routes to School program launched the Golden Bicycle Contest. Schools were invited to participate in National Bike to School Day and to report back a tally of the number of students who biked that day. The school with the highest percentage of bicyclists received the Golden Bicycle Award (a child's bike spray painted very, very gold). Seventeen schools participated in the competition and the participating schools had as many as 22% of their students bicycle on that day! It is hoped that this will be an annual competition and that a similar award will be created for Walk to School Day.

The coordinator encourages all schools to complete the National Center for Safe Routes to School student tally in the fall and spring.

Sustainability

The action plan is a document that stays with the school and continues to be implemented by the committee. The hope is that with a supportive in-school champion and PTA, that the plan will be passed down and Safe Routes to School activities will continue even after the original committee members' children have left the school.

Each year for International Walk to School Day, DDOT Safe Routes to School partners with Children's National Medical Center, the Washington Bicyclist Association, Safe Kids DC and sometimes Safe Kids Worldwide. Walk to School Day events have included DC Fire Department trucks, National Children's Museum exhibits and a bike rodeo. Students who walk or bicycle to school receive snacks, stickers and reflectors. This is a team effort and the planning is shared across the participating organizations.

Next Steps

Charter Schools are growing in number in Washington DC. Schools face several factors when looking for a building and location, one factor is transportation. All students will access the school by walking, bicycling, public transportation or parent vehicles. Location is an important, but one of many factors when choosing a school site.

The coordinator has worked with a number of Charter schools which were eager to adopt Safe Routes to School and make their sites safer for students to access. But sometimes due to location and surrounding land use, the situation was not ideal. The coordinator has also been contacted by Charter Schools asking for input on their location choices. Proactively, the coordinator decided to develop a list of transportation items to think about when choosing a location. When finished, the document will be made available to Charter Schools and aid them in thinking about how students will travel to their new site.

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