



Safe Routes to School National Partnership Final Position Paper on Students with Disabilities

November 4, 2009

About the Safe Routes to School National Partnership

The Safe Routes to School National Partnership is a fast-growing network of more than 400 organizations and professional groups working to set goals, share best practices, secure funding and inform agencies that implement Safe Routes to School programs. The Safe Routes to School National Partnership's mission is to serve a diverse national community of organizations that advocates for and promotes the practice of safe bicycling and walking to and from schools throughout the United States. The Partnership is hosted by Bikes Belong Foundation, a 501 (c)(3) non-profit, which is a sister organization to the Bikes Belong Coalition. For more information, visit www.saferoutespartnership.org.

Members of the Students with Disabilities Working Group

This paper was compiled by the Safe Routes to School National Partnership's Diverse Communities Committee working group on Students with Disabilities. The working group held a national conference call with more than 50 participants, and also reached out to federal agencies including the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the National Council on Disability for their input on this paper. Participants on the working group included:

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- ✓ Michigan Fitness Foundation: Mary Grill, Mike Maisner and Lee Kokinakis
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Disclaimer: Members of the Students with Disabilities working group participated in several conference calls to develop these recommendations. The information presented in this memo is a collaborative product of the working group. Individual participants in the working group and other reviewing agencies do not necessarily provide a blanket endorsement for recommendation presented within.

Contact

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Serving Students with Disabilities Through Safe Routes to School Programs

Introduction

The Safe Routes to School National Partnership (the Partnership) has produced this paper to apprise Congress, the U.S. Department of Transportation, and the National Center for Safe Routes to School (the Clearinghouse) about what we consider to be the top four non-infrastructure initiatives needed to meet stated goal in section 1404 of SAFETEA-LU of serving students with disabilities through Safe Routes to School programs. This paper is organized to address background and need, challenges and benefits, and four recommendations which focus on training and curricula; outreach to parents and students; pilot programs; and evaluation of the inclusion efforts for students with disabilities in Safe Routes to School programs. Please note that this paper does not specifically address infrastructure, community design, connectivity or ADA construction issues, which are also needed to ensure accessibility and safety for all travelers.

Background and Need

In 2005, the federal Safe Routes to School Program was established by PL 109-59 through the federal transportation bill, Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU) to enable and encourage children, including those with disabilities, to walk and bicycle to school. This program is important because current guidelines for healthy living recommend that children participate in at least 60 minutes of moderate physical activity on most days of the week¹ – a level many children, and particularly children with a disability, do not meet.² The Safe Routes to School funding program supports both infrastructure projects (sidewalks, pathways, street crossings, etc) and non-infrastructure programs (education, encouragement and law enforcement). The subject of this paper relates to non-infrastructure program needs.

Legislative Update: As Congress sets the course for the future of the Safe Routes to School program, improving the inclusion of students with disabilities in the program is under consideration. In May 2009, Senate bill S. 1156, the Safe Routes to School Program Reauthorization Act, was introduced (and as of November 2009 had 17 co-sponsors), and in June 2009, the House Transportation & Infrastructure Subcommittee on Highways and Transit passed the Surface Transportation Authorization Act to authorize surface transportation programs. Language in both of these bills focuses on the need for increased resources for students with disabilities:

¹ Department of Health and Human Services and Department of Agriculture, 2005. Dietary guidelines for Americans. [retrieved August 28, 2009 from <http://www.healthierus.gov/dietaryguidelines/>].

² A. Hogan, L. McLellan and A. Bauman, Health promotion needs of young people with disabilities: a population study, *Disability Rehabilitation* 22(2000), pp. 352-357.

- ✓ House Surface Transportation Authorization Act: Requires the Safe Routes to School Clearinghouse “to develop and disseminate best practices to include children with disabilities in State safe routes to school programs, particularly with respect to non-infrastructure-related activities.”
- ✓ S. 1156: Requires the Safe Routes to School Clearinghouse “to provide technical assistance and disseminate techniques and strategies used for successful safe routes to school programs, including of children with disabilities,” and “to collect data relating to the purposes of this program, including information on the prevalence of inclusion of children with disabilities.”

While the new legislation referenced above includes additional requirements for serving students with disabilities, the recommendations included within this document need not wait for the proposed Congressional action. The existing law, SAFETEA-LU, clearly states that Safe Routes to School should serve students with disabilities.

Although the Safe Routes to School movement has been growing steadily across the United States, creating new transportation options for future generations while improving health, safety, and independence, the attention to resources needed for ensuring equal opportunities for the involvement of students with disabilities has been extremely limited.

Prevalence and Health Needs: Over six million (13.6%) school-aged children receive special education services.³ Health disparities between students with and without disabilities are significant. Youth with disabilities are not achieving the recommended amount of daily physical activity and are significantly less active and more obese than their non-disabled peers.⁴ Another study reported that students with disabilities were more socially isolated at school and spent more time engaging in sedentary activities than their peers without disabilities.⁵ A main goal of Healthy People 2010 (a statement of national health objectives) is to eliminate health disparities. The Healthy People 2010 Goal 6-12 aims to eliminate disparities by reducing the proportion of people with disabilities experiencing barriers to participation in home, school, work, or community activities.⁶ To achieve a healthier life, attitudinal and programmatic barriers must be addressed. Schools can positively affect students with disabilities’ health by creating inclusive active transportation programs that improve opportunities for physical activity.

³ Office of Special Education Programs, U.S. Department of Education, 2007, Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Data, (Retrieved October 29, 2009 from <https://www.ideadata.org/PartBTrendDataFiles.asp>).

⁴ Physical Activity and Youth with Disabilities. Rimmer JH, Rowland J. Physical activity for youth with disabilities: A critical need in an underserved population. *Dev Neurorehabil* 2007;11(2): 1751-8431.

⁵ Hogan, A., McLellan, L, Bauman, A. Health promotion needs of young people with disabilities – a population study. *Disability and Rehabilitation* 2000; 22:352-357.

⁶ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Chapter 6: Disability and Secondary Conditions. Healthy People 2010. Retrieved August 27, 2009 from <http://www.healthypeople.gov/document/HTML/Volume1/06Disability.htm>

Challenges and Benefits

Guidance and Knowledge: The Americans with Disability Act (ADA), its accompanying federal regulations, standards, enforcement provisions, and technical assistance materials help to ensure that infrastructure projects include certain accessibility and reasonable accommodation requirements for individuals with disabilities. Yet non-infrastructure projects do not necessarily benefit from the same level of federal requirements and guidance. As more and more schools across the country implement Safe Routes to School educational and encouragement programs that inspire safe and active student travel, models, techniques and guidelines for the inclusion of students with disabilities are not still readily available.

This lack of information and knowledge has created a barrier for individuals with disabilities participating in Safe Routes to School programs. Generally, the planning and development of programs and projects do not consider how the needs of individuals with disabilities will be addressed. There are no resources to assist schools in accommodating the needs of all students in Safe Routes to School programs.

Diversity and Public Perception: The development of these resources is complicated by public misconception about the diversity of needs. The tendency to consider individuals with a disability as a homogenous group is common across the general public, and sometimes among special education staff and advocacy groups. This issue presents challenges that can and need to be addressed. One challenge is to broaden the image of students with disabilities beyond one's personal experience and/or training limitations. Another challenge is that some students with disabilities are transported longer distances than their non-disabled peers without a disability to receive special education and related services that meet their needs. Where busing of some students with disabilities to different parts of school districts or to educational facilities several miles away from their homes occurs, the opportunity for the typical benefits of an active transportation trip to or from school is eliminated.

Lifespan Benefits: Despite these challenges, many other students with disabilities stand to benefit greatly from inclusion in Safe Routes to School programs and activities. Issues impacting the benefit potential include, but might not be limited to health, independence and equity. More specifically, the issues of transportation independence and equity profoundly impact the disability community across all ages. Personal mobility, including walking and bicycling, is a chief determinant of a person with a disability's level of independence and opportunity to lead a community integrated lifestyle. The Council on Children with Disabilities of the American Academy of Pediatrics published a report in September 2008 titled, "Promoting the Participation of Children with Disabilities in Sports, Recreation, and Physical Activities." Among the recommendations in the report were that (1) pediatricians, parents, educators, and other professionals should give high priority to addressing the growing prevalence of physical inactivity among children with disabilities; and (2) barriers to participation need to be identified and addressed directly in the context of local, state and federal laws.

Meeting the diverse needs of students with disabilities can feel overwhelming for schools in general, so it is important to make technical assistance widely available to better simplify and demystify processes. The development, evaluation, and dissemination of model programs, best practices, techniques, resources, trainings and data collection processes can lead to a focus on some of the unique needs of students with disabilities. This can enable expansion of the Safe Routes to School program to students who may benefit significantly from active transportation as a lifelong activity – turning healthy children into healthy adults. Through the intentional inclusion of students with disabilities in non-infrastructure programs, the Safe Routes to School movement will have a role in promoting an equitable transportation system for all. The availability of such transportation is a goal supported by the research and policy work of other national entities, including an independent federal agency, the National Council on Disability in its report *The Current State of Transportation for Persons with a Disability in the United States*.⁷

Recommendations for Action

This section of the paper includes descriptions of four proposed initiatives pertaining to training and curricula, outreach to parents and students, pilot programs, and evaluation. Each initiative is needed and feasible under the existing SAFETEA-LU legislation to meet the goal of including students with disabilities in the Safe Routes to School services and programs.

I. Training and Curricula

Students with Disabilities in National Center for SRTS Materials: The low level of awareness demonstrated among parents, students, volunteers, school staff and others about the wide variety of disabilities is a common concern. Generalized training and resources that utilize the principles of universal design⁸ (the design of products and environments to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design) can raise awareness among stakeholders regarding the importance of making Safe Routes to School programs accessible to as many students as possible.

Recommendation 1a: *We recommend that training and online resources produced by the National Center for Safe Routes to School, including photo libraries, be enhanced to include content addressing the inclusion of students with disabilities. We further recommend that, wherever reasonable, these enhancements should not take the*

⁷ National Council on Disability. *The Current State of Transportation for People with Disabilities in the U.S.* (2005). [retrieved August 28, 2009 from http://www.ncd.gov/newsroom/publications/2005/pdf/current_state.pdf]

⁸ Universal Design Definition and Principles, Version 2.0 4/1/97. Compiled by Bettye Rose Connell, Mike Jones, Ron Mace, Jim Mueller, Abir Mullick, Elaine Ostroff, Jon Sanford, Ed Steinfeld, Molly Story, & Gregg Vanderheiden. Major funding provided by the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research, U.S. Department of Education. [retrieved August 28, 2009 from http://www.design.ncsu.edu/cud/about_ud/principlestext.htm]

form of additional modules that may serve to segregate students with disabilities as a separate population or consideration, but that content addressing students with disabilities should be integrated throughout the existing course. Images used on the website and in publications and training materials should also be reviewed to better depict individuals with a variety of disabilities. In addition, training materials and resources are needed for parent team leaders and schools for working effectively with students with disabilities and their parents. These training and on-line resources should be developed by July 2010 for use in the pilot program sites detailed in recommendation 3.

Specialized Curricula and Trainings for Educators: For the inclusion of students with disabilities in Safe Routes to School programs to be truly successful, educational professionals must be in possession of the necessary knowledge and experience to teach the appropriate active transportation skills, and build these goals into educational planning processes. Special education teachers, related service providers, classroom teachers, and other school staff are in need of professional development opportunities in the area of active transportation across disability types. This requires a more intense commitment to disability inclusive curriculum development and training.

Recommendation 1b: *We recommend that the National Center for Safe Routes to School develop a professional Safe Routes to School curriculum product and companion training program designed specifically for special and regular educators, therapists, teaching/classroom aides, school nurses, Safe Routes to School parent team leaders, professionals in related areas, and others (e.g., school administrators, school counselors, social workers, and so forth). These curriculum and training resources should be developed by July 2010 for use in the pilot program sites detailed in recommendation 3.*

II. Outreach to Parents and Students

The active involvement of parents is essential in all SRTS programs, but may be especially important when working with students with disabilities. While parents of students with disabilities might spend many years acting as their child's primary educational advocate, they may be unaware of the various unique benefits that active transportation may afford their child. Such benefits may include the potential to increase future mobility independence, improve community integration, increase physical activity and integrate therapy or educational goals. The development of disability sensitive, appropriate, and accessible outreach resources will increase the involvement of parents.

Likewise, based on opportunities and training afforded them, many students with disabilities are accomplished self-advocates. They are integral partners in educational planning processes and, ultimately, in their own self-determination.

Recommendation 2: *We recommend the development of relevant and accessible outreach materials for multiple users among students with disabilities and their*

parents, as well as disability advocacy organizations and community groups. The materials should provide information on the benefits of active transportation as a strategy for improving independent living, and point to the additional resources that will be developed including training and curricula. These outreach materials should be developed by July 2010 for use in the pilot program sites detailed in recommendation 3.

III. Pilot Programs

The successes of Safe Routes to School demonstration programs during the late 1990's, and during the 2000-2001 school year, helped build the national Safe Routes to School program. Similarly, pilot programs for students with disabilities can produce winning strategies for disabled student accommodation, support, resources, and educational techniques that may be replicated and disseminated.

The chief goal for these pilot projects will be to demonstrate how to increase the number of students with disabilities that are able to walk, bicycle or use wheelchairs or other self-powered means of transportation to travel to and from school, and provide a means to have students incorporate these skills into their daily lifestyles. The knowledge acquired during these pilot projects will allow for the refinement of technical resources and best practices that could be disseminated widely through the National Center for Safe Routes to School. In addition to resources recommended in terms of training, curriculum and outreach to parents and students, it is expected that these pilot programs, executed during the 2010-2011 school year, also will be used to develop additional resources.

It is recommended that a secondary goal for the pilot programs should be to experiment with the inclusion of mobility training as part of Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) and transition plans, and to create an analysis of the potential for national sample resources on IEPs that would include, where appropriate, sample goals and objectives for active transportation across different ages and disability types.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA 04, <http://idea.ed.gov/>) mandates the creation of an IEP for every public school student meeting the requirements for special education and related services. IEPs are tailored to meet the unique educational needs of an individual student with a disability, and may include academic as well as functional and developmental goals. The IEP provides an opportunity for parents, students and educators to work toward specific individual personal mobility, and to be included in school-wide SRTS activities. The inclusion of mobility training and Safe Routes to School in the IEP is another layer of support addressing the skills students with disabilities may need to strengthen their independent traveling skills.

The importance of independent travel intensifies as students with disabilities grow older. The ability to achieve independent travel is often essential in order for individuals with disabilities to access jobs and post-secondary education, shop, socialize, live independently and generally live a full, community-integrated life. Since many of these

students, as a consequence of their particular disability may not be capable of driving, other modes of travel, including bicycling walking, and transit become much more crucial.

IDEA 04 requires that in the first IEP that will be in effect when the student turns 16 years of age, his/her annual IEP must include a discussion about transition from secondary (high) school to post secondary service needs. IDEA 04 also requires that a statement of the student's transition goals and services be included in the transition plan. Schools must report to parents on the student's progress toward meeting his transition goals. A good transition plan includes a statement of services needed in order for the student to achieve adult living objectives, which may include independent travel training. As such, transition planning provides a unique opportunity to include Safe Routes to School by addressing, for example, bicycle, pedestrian and transit-use training.

An important consideration in the selection of the pilot communities is where students receive their education. Based on determination by the IEP team for each individual, a number of students with disabilities might receive special education and related service in the general education graded program (e.g., first through 12th grades), or in alternative curricular programs that do not have grade level designations. While many students receive special education and related services in their neighborhood schools, other students do not. Some students also are not in their local school districts, if the IEP requires being bused to receive special education and related services at other schools. An example is receiving special education and related services in a public school designated for students who are blind and/or deaf. The selection of the pilot programs should serve students enrolled in all of these different types of educational settings.

Recommendation 3: *We recommend that the National Center for Safe Routes to School lead a process during early 2010 to select, test resources for and evaluate pilot programs for inclusively serving students with disabilities, to demonstrate how to use mobility education to increase independent living.*

- a) At least three State-level Departments of Transportation should use part of their existing allocations of Safe Routes to School funding to initiate pilot programs at the local level for the 2010-2011 school year. This program should include a memorandum of understanding signed by participating state DOTs, local sites and the National Center to ensure agreements about pilot program goals, activities, resources to be created, and evaluation techniques and timelines.*
- b) The local education agencies participating in the pilot program will beta-test the resources recommended in 1a and 1b (training), 2 (outreach) during the 2010-2011 school year, and work with the National Center to identify and develop other necessary resources (including IEP goals) to establish and evaluate inclusive SRTS programs, specifically addressing the non-infrastructure needs of students with disabilities.*
- c) The National Center for Safe Routes to School should consider providing additional funding to ensure that there are enough resources for the pilot programs; monitor the process, and help initiate and evaluate the sites at the same time. The National Center also should create a mechanism for regular*

information sharing and goal setting among the participating State Departments of Transportation and implementation sites.

- d) In addition to the development of local resources and processes, an additional outcome should be information to teach other State DOTs how to proactively address and prioritize funding programs that serve students with disabilities.*
- e) The conclusion of the pilot program process should include a report with findings from the pilots, refined resources, and recommendations for new resources that should be developed and processes that should be put into place to inclusively serve students with disabilities. This report and the beta-tested resources should be completed before the end of 2011. Additional needed resources identified in the report should be completed by summer 2012 before the start of the 2012-2013 school year.*

IV. Evaluation

To determine the involvement of students with disabilities in Safe Routes to School Programs, data regarding participation and program success needs to be acquired. There are currently no reliable statistics identifying the number of students with disabilities who currently use active transportation to travel to school or participate in Safe Routes to School activities. There is also not yet an evaluation of how programs serve and include students with disabilities. The pilot programs would provide a good opportunity to augment national data collection methods.

Recommendation 4: *We recommend that the participation and travel modes of students with disabilities be tracked through existing evaluations and data collection tools in a sensitive manner. Both existing national- and state-level measurement tools should be improved to capture this data. In addition, there should be an implementation analysis of how Safe Routes to School programs are serving students with disabilities. The analysis should incorporate quantitative and qualitative strategies such as involving interviews with students and parents, focus groups, and other data collection methods along with additional stakeholders, including teachers, related service providers, the school administration, and Safe Routes to School team leaders.*

Conclusion

It is clear that Congress intended for the federal Safe Routes to School program to serve students with disabilities, but thus far few resources have been created to serve this important need. The Safe Routes to School National Partnership looks forward to working with the Federal Highway Administration, the U.S. Department of Education, the National Council on Disability, relevant programs at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the National Center for Safe Routes to School to advance these Safe Routes to School non-infrastructure recommendations as soon as possible. We also look forward to working with State agencies, local agencies, and local schools participating in the proposed pilot programs to serve the needs of students with disabilities within Safe Routes to School programs.