

THE SAFE ROUTES TO SCHOOL PROGRAM CENSUS PROJECT



2019 National Program Assessment Report



**Safe
Routes
PARTNERSHIP**



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Introduction

Safe Routes to School programs are one of the most effective and practical methods available for improving children's health, the safety of our communities, and the sustainability of our transportation system. Studies show that Safe Routes to School programs enable children to get vital physical activity and build healthy life habits. To assess progress in supporting Safe Routes to School, the Safe Routes Partnership conducted a survey of Safe Routes to School programs across the country, exploring policies, practices, and funding for programmatic activities. This report provides an overview of the state of Safe Routes to School programming in the United States and a high-level assessment of challenges, innovations, and opportunities for Safe Routes to School programs.

What did we learn from the program census? In response to the survey, hundreds of Safe Routes to School programs from around the country shared their program activities, stories, and struggles. As their responses showed, these programs are at the forefront of essential change on the ground across the United States. A principal finding is the immense variation in program structure and scale. Some programs are focused on a single school, changing the lives of a handful of children by inspiring a lifelong love for active transportation through walking school buses and bicycle repair classes. Other programs are creating regional structures that facilitate the replication of walk and bike to school efforts from school to school and district to district, literally changing the blueprints for school design and revolutionizing communities' transportation culture so that elementary schoolers, teens, parents, and older adults can safely walk, roll, and bicycle.

Key lessons of the Safe Routes to School Program Census

The census provided many insights into Safe Routes to School programs, with key findings including:

- Varied and diverse Safe Routes to School programs are present in almost every state across the nation.
- Safe Routes to School programs have far too few resources to effectively reach all the children or schools in their regions. As a result, they may be forced to choose between having a strong and real impact on a few young people and having a very minor impact on many young people.
- The absence of a centralized national initiative and dedicated funding for Safe Routes to School has not stopped or slowed Safe Routes to School programming efforts. But it has led to inefficiencies, programs running entirely through volunteer efforts, a range of structures and focuses, and variable effectiveness.
- There is a sizeable Safe Routes to School presence in rural areas, with program numbers roughly proportional to the rural population.
- New programs are regularly emerging, and older programs are continuing and expanding; just under half of programs are less than 5 years old, while 30 percent have been in operation for 5 to 10 years, and 20 percent have been effecting change for more than 10 years.
- Programs struggle to find the consistent funding they need to employ staff and develop strong and effective operations. A key challenge involves obtaining the support and coordination needed from school districts, towns and cities, and state governments to generate real benefits for children and communities.

Why a Safe Routes to School Program Census?

The Safe Routes to School Program Census Project was inspired by the need to know what is working for Safe Routes to School programs in the United States and what may additionally be required. Because Safe Routes to School programs are not regulated or funded through a centralized process, there is no easy way to answer basic questions about the state of Safe Routes to School: how many programs there are in the United States, where they are, or how many children and communities they are benefiting. Without this information, it is difficult to track trends and progress in the Safe Routes to School movement, provide targeted support and resources to local communities, or identify what programs need to be successful in reaching students across the country. This project was conceived to begin the work of filling in those gaps.

Project Summary

The Safe Routes to School Program Census Project and this report were funded by the Center for Disease Prevention and Control's Department of Nutrition, Physical Activity, and Obesity, and developed by the Safe Routes Partnership in partnership with YMCA of the USA. The lack of any kind of comprehensive inventory of Safe Routes to School programs has created challenges for program support, public health, policy change, and research. In response, the Safe Routes Partnership developed the Safe Routes to School Program Census Project to identify as many Safe Routes to School programs as possible and capture key data. The Safe Routes Partnership developed and piloted a survey instrument and collected data on a national basis in spring and summer 2019. Through the Safe Routes to School Program Census Project, we gathered detailed information about Safe Routes to School programs around the nation, their longevity, the types of programming they offer, their funding, and the key challenges they face. Because the universe of Safe Routes to School programs is not fully known, we were not able to collect a representative sample of programs. However, the data gathered enabled us to develop a better understanding of Safe Routes to School programs, identifying strengths, challenges, and underinvested areas, and determining how to better support this work.



Why Does Safe Routes to School Matter for the United States?

The trip to school is a crucial opportunity for children and youth to get regular physical activity by walking or bicycling. Not only does walking and bicycling create healthier students, but it also supports focused learning and academic performance. But in order to achieve these benefits, walking and biking to school need to be convenient, comfortable, and safe. Safe Routes to School is a movement that allows students to get regular physical activity by making it safer and easier to walk and bike to school. Safe Routes to School street improvements address problems like broken or missing sidewalks, faded crosswalks, and lack of safe bike lanes. Safe Routes to School programs get more students walking and biking by bringing together partners to create culture change regarding student transportation in schools and communities. These programs also provide skills and safety education for children, create encouragement activities that get kids moving together, and build enthusiasm and support among families, teachers, school administrators, and local government officials.

Physical activity is a fundamental building block for good health. Benefits of regular physical activity for children and youth include improved bone health, cardiorespiratory and muscular fitness, improved cognition, and decreased risk of depression.¹ Adults experience many of these same benefits, as well as lower risk of type 2 diabetes, hypertension, dementia, and many kinds of cancers.² The national Physical Activity Guidelines, 2nd edition, set out recommended daily levels of physical activity for children and adults.³ But most Americans are not meeting these guidelines: just over half of American adults are meeting the aerobic component of the physical activity guidelines and only 24 percent are meeting the recommended levels of overall physical activity.⁴ More than 75 percent of schoolchildren are failing to meet the recommended levels of daily physical activity to support their health.⁵

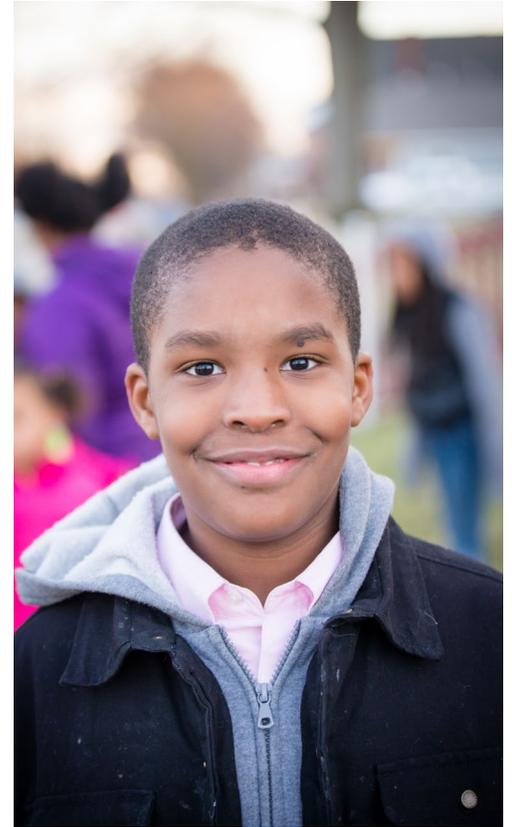


Physical inactivity is also a significant contributor to obesity.⁶ The most recent data show that 39.6 percent of American adults are obese,⁷ which also increases the risk of stroke, heart disease, diabetes, and other dangerous health conditions.⁸ Almost 19 percent of youth ages 2 to 19 years are obese.⁹ Black and Latinx youth have higher rates of obesity than white and Asian American youth.¹⁰

In addition to high physical inactivity, obesity, and chronic disease rates, there is a strong need for safer conditions for walking and bicycling nationally. Deaths of people walking have been rising for the last decade, even as motor vehicle deaths have declined, with a 35 percent increase in pedestrian death rates from 2008 to 2018.¹¹ People on foot accounted for 16 percent of the fatalities resulting from traffic crashes; people biking accounted for 2.1 percent. Motor vehicle crashes are a leading cause of death for children, whether as passengers or outside the vehicle.¹² Nineteen percent of children ages 14 and younger who died due to motor vehicle crashes in 2017 were walking and 5 percent were biking.¹³



Our decades of street design and transportation investments oriented toward motor vehicles have, unsurprisingly, led to fewer and fewer trips by foot or bicycle. But when communities commit to Safe Routes to School, these numbers turn around. More than a decade after the federal Safe Routes to School program was created, the Safe Routes to School movement has helped build greater collaboration between local governments and school systems to address safety issues around schools affecting rates of walking and bicycling to school. Studies of Safe Routes to School initiatives have found increases in walking and bicycling to school between 31 and 43 percent,^{14,15} and reductions in pedestrian injuries of 44 percent.¹⁶ Safe Routes to School provides a wide array of additional benefits as well (see Benefits of Safe Routes to School infographic on page 5).





Benefits of Safe Routes to School

Safe Routes to School improves sidewalks and street crossings and creates safe, convenient, and fun opportunities for children to bicycle and walk to and from school. The CDC has recognized Safe Routes to School as one of a handful of programs that are cost-effective and show significant population health impacts within five years. saferoutespartnership.org

COST SAVINGS

- Household savings from reduced gas & car use
- Education budget savings through reduced student busing costs



TRAFFIC SAFETY

- Reduced traffic injuries & dangers for students and community members at arrival & dismissal through street improvements near schools
- More chances to learn & practice road safety for students



CLIMATE BENEFITS AND CLEANER AIR

- Fewer student asthma attacks due to less driving & reduced air pollution results
- Cleaner air & reduced greenhouse gas emissions



SAFETY FROM CRIME

- Increased safety from crime & violence due to more people on the streets, good lighting & better street design
- Less harassment, bullying, or violence when students walk or bike together or with adults



COMMUNITY CONNECTEDNESS

- Stronger student friendships & relationships through walking & biking together
- Positive social connections for families & neighbors



HEALTHIER STUDENTS

- Better health & stronger bones, muscles & joints through more walking & biking
- Reduced risk of chronic disease, diabetes, & obesity



SCHOOL TRANSPORTATION FIXES

- Solutions to reduced or non-existent bus service through Safe Routes to School
- Reduced traffic congestion at pick-up/drop-off times



BETTER ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

- Better focus, improved concentration & less distraction for students who are active before school
- Fewer absences and less tardiness when students walk or bike in groups



SCHOOL



How do Local Safe Routes to School Programs Work?

Local Safe Routes to School initiatives bring together a number of approaches to create an environment that encourages and creates safer conditions for walking and bicycling to school. Safe Routes to School uses a framework called the Six Es to describe the key components of these efforts: education, encouragement, engineering, enforcement, evaluation, and equity. Some Safe Routes to School efforts focus primarily on one or two of the Es, but studies have shown that more comprehensive efforts make Safe Routes to School more effective in accomplishing safety and mode shift goals.¹⁷ Schools, nonprofits, or volunteers may run education and encouragement programs and push for strong municipal and district policies to support safe walking and bicycling. Cities and counties often take the lead on making Safe Routes to School infrastructure improvements near schools and on school routes. As our survey results describe, sometimes Safe Routes to School programs spring up at a single school due to a committed parent or teacher. Other times, a regional effort leads to a supportive structure that identifies leaders at the school, district, or city level and provides funding and support for the development of new initiatives.

The Six E's provide a framework for ensuring that Safe Routes to School efforts take a comprehensive approach:



EDUCATION

Providing students and the community with the skills to walk and bicycle safely, educating them about benefits of walking and bicycling, and teaching them about the broad range of transportation choices.



ENGINEERING

Creating physical improvements to streets and neighborhoods that make walking and bicycling safer, more comfortable, and more convenient.



EVALUATION

Assessing which approaches are more or less successful, ensuring that programs and initiatives are leading to equitable outcomes, and identifying unintended consequences or opportunities to improve the effectiveness of each approach.



ENCOURAGEMENT

Generating enthusiasm and increased walking and bicycling for students through events, activities, and programs.



ENFORCEMENT

Deterring unsafe traffic behaviors and encouraging safe habits by people walking, bicycling, and driving in school neighborhoods and along school routes.



EQUITY

Ensuring that Safe Routes to School initiatives are benefiting all demographic groups, with particular attention to ensuring safe, healthy, and fair outcomes for low-income students, students of color, students of all genders, students with disabilities, and others.

IV History and Structure of Safe Routes to School in the United States

Funding Safe Routes to School

The first federally funded Safe Routes to School program was created in 2005, and has since undergone several legislative and policy transformations. In 2012, Congress created the Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) by merging together three previous programs that funded active transportation. In 2015, Congress authorized TAP for an additional five years, through 2020.



The Safe Routes to School movement was launched nationally in the United States in 2005, in response to decreasing rates of physical activity and a precipitous drop in the numbers of students walking and bicycling to school. Rates of students walking and bicycling to school had decreased from 49 percent to less than 15 percent over a 30 year period. Meanwhile, childhood obesity rates had tripled, and rates of diabetes and other chronic diseases were growing.

Alarmed by these trends, Congress authorized the first federally funded Safe Routes to School program. From 2005 to 2012, Safe Routes to School initiatives were funded through a standalone federal Safe Routes to School program and each state had a Safe Routes to School coordinator tasked with supporting local and state level Safe Routes to School initiatives. This program provided more than \$1 billion in funding in all states to support infrastructure improvements and programming to make it safer for children to walk and bicycle to and from school.

In 2012, the standalone program was merged with several other programs into the Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP), and the requirement for a state coordinator was eliminated. Safe Routes to School projects were made specifically eligible for TAP, but no minimum funding level was required. This funding stream was locked in for five additional years— with some changes—when Congress passed a new transportation law, the

FAST Act, in December 2015. See the Federal Funding for Safe Routes to School infographic for an overview of the evolution of Safe Routes to School funding through the three transportation bills since 2005.

Since 2012, state departments of transportation have received TAP federal funds and have awarded money by selecting Safe Routes to School non-infrastructure and infrastructure projects through a competitive process open to local governments and school systems. States can run one big TAP competition for Safe Routes to School and other walking and bicycling projects, or can choose to separate out Safe Routes to School as a separate competition. Larger metropolitan planning organizations, a type of regional transportation planning agency, also receive TAP funds to distribute.



Federal Funding for Safe Routes to School: Evolution Through Three Transportation Bills

2005-2012

A New Program: Stand-Alone SRTS Funding

SAFETEA-LU (Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act—A Legacy for Users)



New program provided more than \$1 billion to all states over 7 years



Funding to states for SRTS infrastructure & non-infrastructure grants to local schools and communities



Each state Department of Transportation had state-level SRTS coordinator

2012-2015

Combined Funding for SRTS, Walking, and Biking

MAP-21 (Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act)



Infrastructure Projects:

Projects improving streets and routes, such as sidewalks, bike lanes, trails, lane narrowing, crosswalks, and other intersection improvements



Non-Infrastructure Projects:

Education, encouragement, and enforcement programs to support safe walking and bicycling, through efforts such as teaching kids safe walking skills, improving driver behaviors, and activities to get more kids and families walking

Eliminated stand-alone federal funding stream for SRTS



Combined federal SRTS program and other bicycling and walking programs into Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP)

30%
less
funding



Overall 30% reduction in federal funding for SRTS, walking, and bicycling

2015-2020

Continuation of Combined Funding for SRTS, Walking, and Biking

FAST Act (Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act)



The funding is still known as the Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP), although official name changed to "Surface Transportation Program Setaside"

The FAST Act retained most of MAP-21's TAP features, with a few changes, such as making nonprofits eligible for the funding & modestly increasing the total amount of TAP funding per year

Key features of current TAP funding:

- Funding can be used for walking, biking, and SRTS
- No dedicated funding specifically for SRTS
- Funding is less than total for SRTS, walking, and biking when they were separate programs
- All TAP dollars are awarded through a competitive process by the state or regional bodies (metropolitan planning organizations), with local governments, school districts, and nonprofits eligible to apply
- State or funding recipient must provide a match of up to 20% of federal funds
- Funding can be used for Safe Routes to School infrastructure and non-infrastructure projects, including state and local Safe Routes to School coordinators
- States are permitted to transfer up to 50% of these funds to highway uses



Transportation Alternatives Program Federal Funding Flow

Under the federal FAST (Fixing America's Surface Transportation) Act, the Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) is the major source of federal funding for walking, bicycling, Safe Routes to School, and trails. Each year, more than \$800 million in TAP funds is divided among all state Departments of Transportation (DOT). **Thanks to TAP funding, communities enjoy safer, more convenient places to walk, bike, and be physically active, and kids are able to safely walk and bike to school.**



TAP funds can be used for: Sidewalks, crosswalks, bike lanes, and trails, as well as Safe Routes to School projects. Under TAP, Safe Routes to School projects enjoy benefits that regular walking, bicycling, and trail projects do not – funding can be used for not only infrastructure (physical improvements to streets and sidewalks), but also non-infrastructure (such as education and encouragement programs). TAP can also fund Safe Routes to School coordinators, both at the state level and locally.



Examples of TAP-funded projects: Facilities for walking, biking, and other non-motorized forms of transportation, Safe Routes to School education programs, school sidewalk improvements, streetscape improvements, and recreational trails.



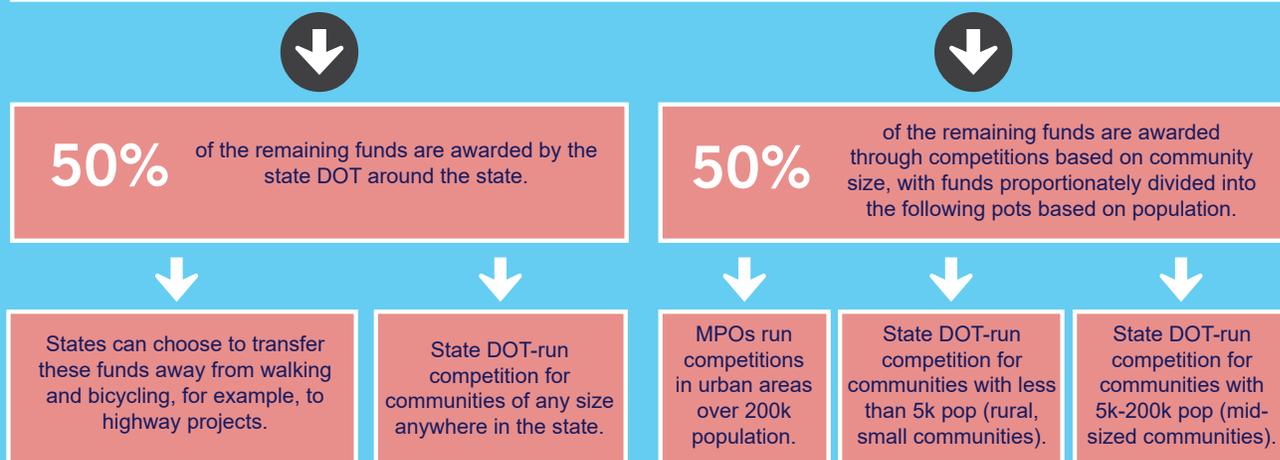
Funding is competitively awarded to eligible applicants: Local governments, regional transportation authorities, transit agencies, natural resource or public land agencies, school districts and local education agencies, tribal governments, other local and governmental entities with oversight of transportation or recreational trails, nonprofit organizations.

What Happens to a State's Transportation Alternatives Program Funds?

Recreational Trails Set-Aside

Funding comes off the top of each state's TAP funds to "develop and maintain recreational trails and trail-related facilities for both nonmotorized and motorized recreational trail uses." These funds cannot be transferred to other uses.

After taking out the Recreational Trails Set-Aside, the remaining TAP funds are divided within a state according to a funding formula that is set out in the FAST Act. The money is divided up this way to give communities of all sizes a chance to compete for TAP money.



Projects must be awarded through a competitive process. Most TAP projects require a 20 percent match from the applicant, though in certain states, the match is lower.



State DOTs can run one competition for all their pots of TAP money, as long as they make sure that the right percent of funds go to smaller communities.



State DOTs and MPOs can run one big competition for all TAP projects or can choose to have a separate Safe Routes to School competition.

Ways that state DOTs and MPOs can support Safe Routes to School:

- Set-aside a percentage of the TAP funds specifically for Safe Routes to School. Suggested: 18% (roughly the percentage of federal active transportation funding that went to Safe Routes to School under the old federal transportation bill, before it was combined with other walking, bicycling, and trails programs).
- Hold a separate competition for Safe Routes to School programs from the rest of the TAP funds.
- Prioritize Safe Routes to School projects and programs in application scoring.
- Prioritize funding for Safe Routes to School projects and programs in communities with significant concentrations of people with low-income, communities of color, and communities with high bicycle and pedestrian injury and fatality rates.
- Host pre-application workshops to build capacity of communities to develop successful applications.
- If state funds are available, waive matching requirement for low-income communities.



V National Policy Environment for Safe Routes to School and Active Transportation

While most Safe Routes to School programs that directly serve schools and students operate at a local (school, school district, city or county) or regional level, a crucial part of the overall ability to create an environment that is safe and supportive for students walking and bicycling to school is the state policy environment. The [Safe Routes Partnership's Making Strides: 2018 State Report Cards on Support for Walking, Biking, and Active Kids and Communities](#) provide an overview of each state's general policy landscape and commitment to Safe Routes to School and active transportation, and give us an understanding of the policy environment for Safe Routes to School nationally.

A. Complete Streets and Active Transportation Policies, Planning, and Design

A Complete Streets policy is a policy that sets out a state's commitment to routinely design, build, and operate all streets to enable safe use by everyone, regardless of age, ability, or mode of transportation. The Complete Streets indicator in the State Report Cards looks at whether the state is taking appropriate action to support a safe and robust walking and biking network, with particular emphasis on the quality of the state's Complete Streets policy. Overall, 34 states have some form of Complete Streets policy in place. Of these 34 states, the majority include mandatory requirements (30 states). However, nearly half of these 30 states have policies that could be improved in terms of demonstrating clear action or intent. In addition, only 26 states include language that meaningfully addresses how cities and counties support Complete Streets, rather than just focusing on state DOT in their approaches. Twenty-five states address implementation, but of these, only nine demonstrate two or more clear actionable steps to support implementation.



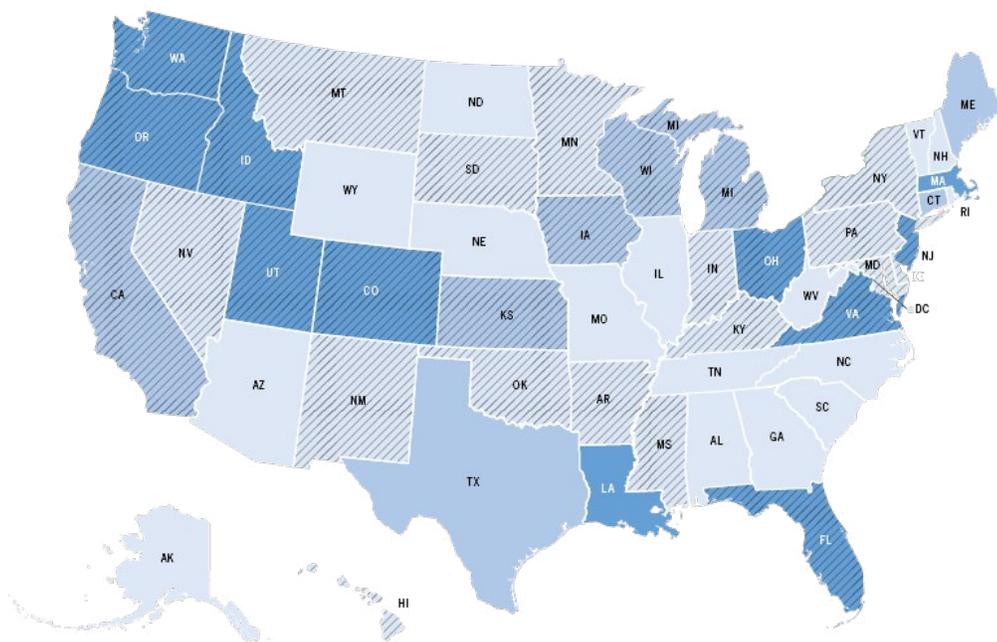
B. Safe Routes to School and Active Transportation Funding

The Safe Routes to School and Active Transportation Funding indicators look at how much money a state is making available to local jurisdictions for projects and programs that support safe walking and bicycling, and how the state is prioritizing high-need communities and Safe Routes to School projects. This includes federal funds that the state is charged with administering (TAP funding) as well as state funding.

Generally, more states are using the federal funding they have to make change on the ground for children and adults walking and biking. A significant number of states made real progress between 2016 and 2018, with considerably higher rates of obligation of federal TAP funding and more states having held competitions to award funds. Higher rates of TAP competitions and obligation mean that instead of federal money for walking and biking stagnating, money is moving and being used as intended, to build sidewalks, bike lanes, and safe routes to school.

However, only a few states are providing funding for Safe Routes to School specifically. As of 2019, only five states appear to provide state funding dedicated to Safe Routes to School. Additionally, only one-third of states prioritize Safe Routes to School in awarding TAP funding (by setting aside a share of TAP dollars for Safe Routes to School or providing Safe Routes to School projects with extra points in funding competitions). Of great concern is the fact that almost half of the states do not allow TAP funding to be used to support Safe Routes to School programming, despite the fact that this funding is specifically permitted by the federal government to be used for the purpose. Instead, these states restrict TAP dollars only to infrastructure projects. TAP is one of the largest sources of funding for local Safe Routes to School initiatives; restricting access to this resource is deeply harmful to programs.

Active Transportation Funding: Special Consideration for Safe Routes to School and Non-Infrastructure Funding

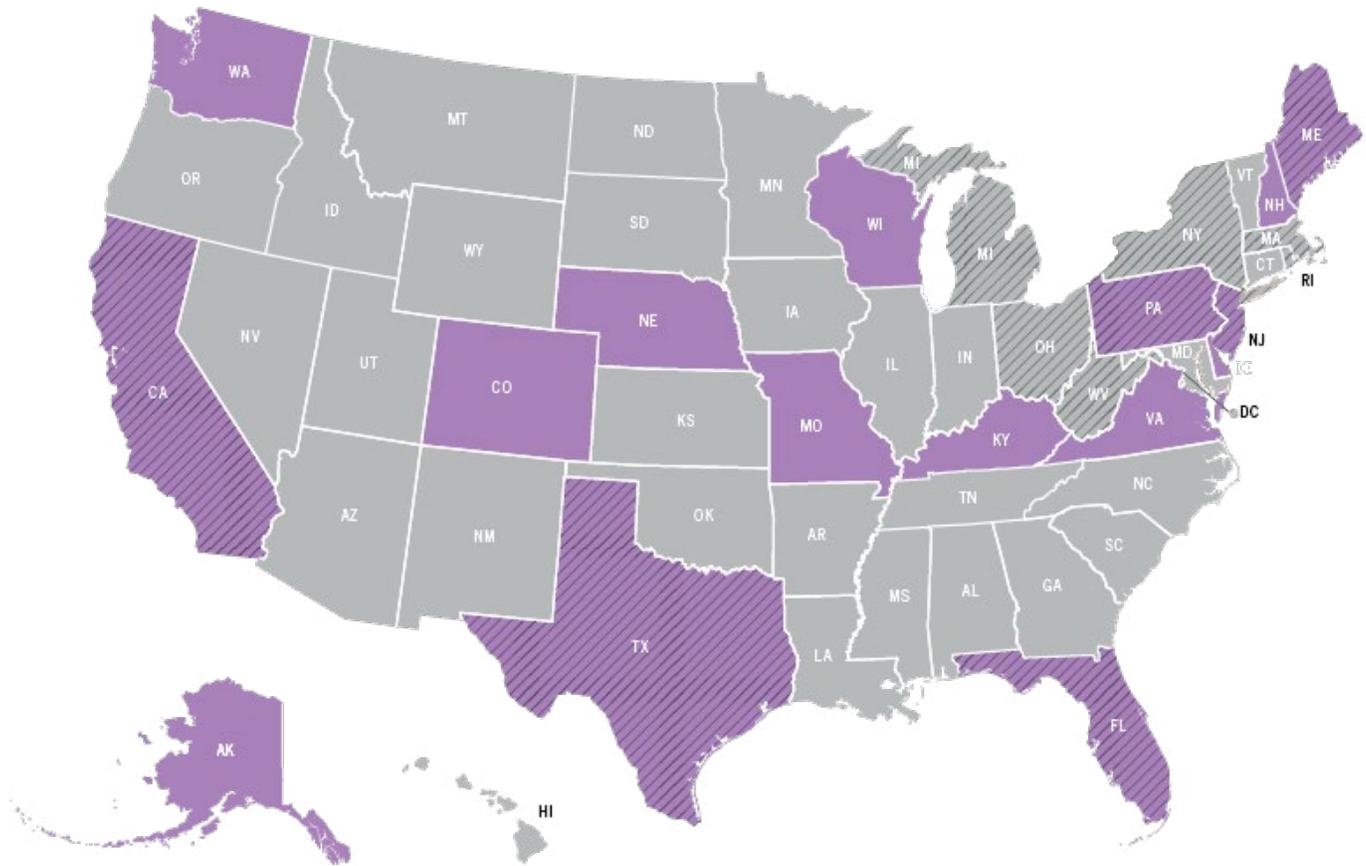


Scoring Key:

Provides special consideration for SRTS projects	Funds Safe Routes to School non-infrastructure projects
0 points	yes
3 points	no (has no pattern)
5 points	

When it comes to funding active transportation in an equitable fashion, the majority of states fall short. Looking across the states, 16 states provide for some type of extra points in scoring or a set aside of funding for disadvantaged or high-needs communities in their statewide TAP competitions, while the remainder gave communities no additional consideration in their applications based on overall community need.

Active Transportation Funding: Special Consideration and Matching Funds for High-Need Communities



Scoring Key:

Provides special consideration for high-need communities

 yes

 no

Provides matching funds for high-need communities

 yes

 no (has no pattern)

C. Safe Routes to School Supportive Practices

The Safe Routes to School Supportive Practices indicators look at what state DOTs are providing in terms of support and technical assistance to schools and local governments to further advance Safe Routes to School initiatives, beyond funding. Since 2012, states have not been required to have a dedicated Safe Routes to School coordinator and the number of coordinators has declined over the years. As of 2018, only 10 states have retained a coordinator who focuses exclusively on Safe Routes to School. Twenty-four states have retained a coordinator but added other non-Safe Routes to School duties. An additional eight states eliminated the coordinator position, but added the duties to another position.

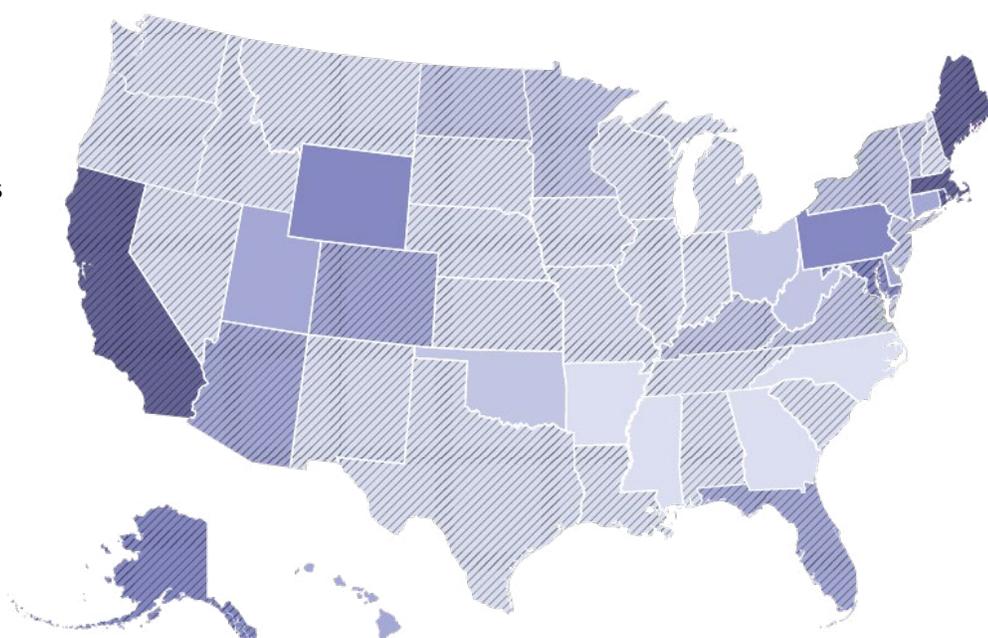
The State Report Cards also look at what technical or funding application assistance the states provide to local communities, helping them start, sustain, or improve their practices. Twenty states provide in depth technical assistance through DOT staff, consultants, or a statewide resource center. An additional 14 states provide a lesser level of assistance through application workshops or assistance to grant applicants.

D. School Siting and Design

The School Siting and Design indicators look at state policies and guidance regarding where schools are located, and if and how they are designed to support students safely walking and bicycling to school. The State Report Cards looked at large minimum acreage requirements in state school siting guidelines. These are negative requirements that make it hard for school districts to locate new schools within walking distance of students' homes. Thirteen states include large minimum acreage requirements.

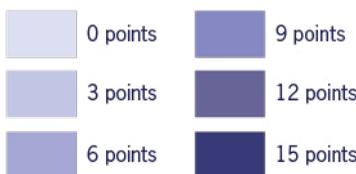
In contrast, half of the states have some type of positive school siting consideration in their state guidelines. Fourteen states encourage consideration of walking, biking, or Safe Routes to School, while seven encourage schools to be located near parks or other community facilities. Thirteen states encourage schools to have sites provide a minimum amount of recreational space, but only four states have any limitations on how large a school site can be.

School Siting: Supportive Guidelines and Minimum Acreage Requirements

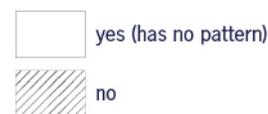


Scoring Key:

Supports walking, bicycling & physical activity in school siting & design guidelines



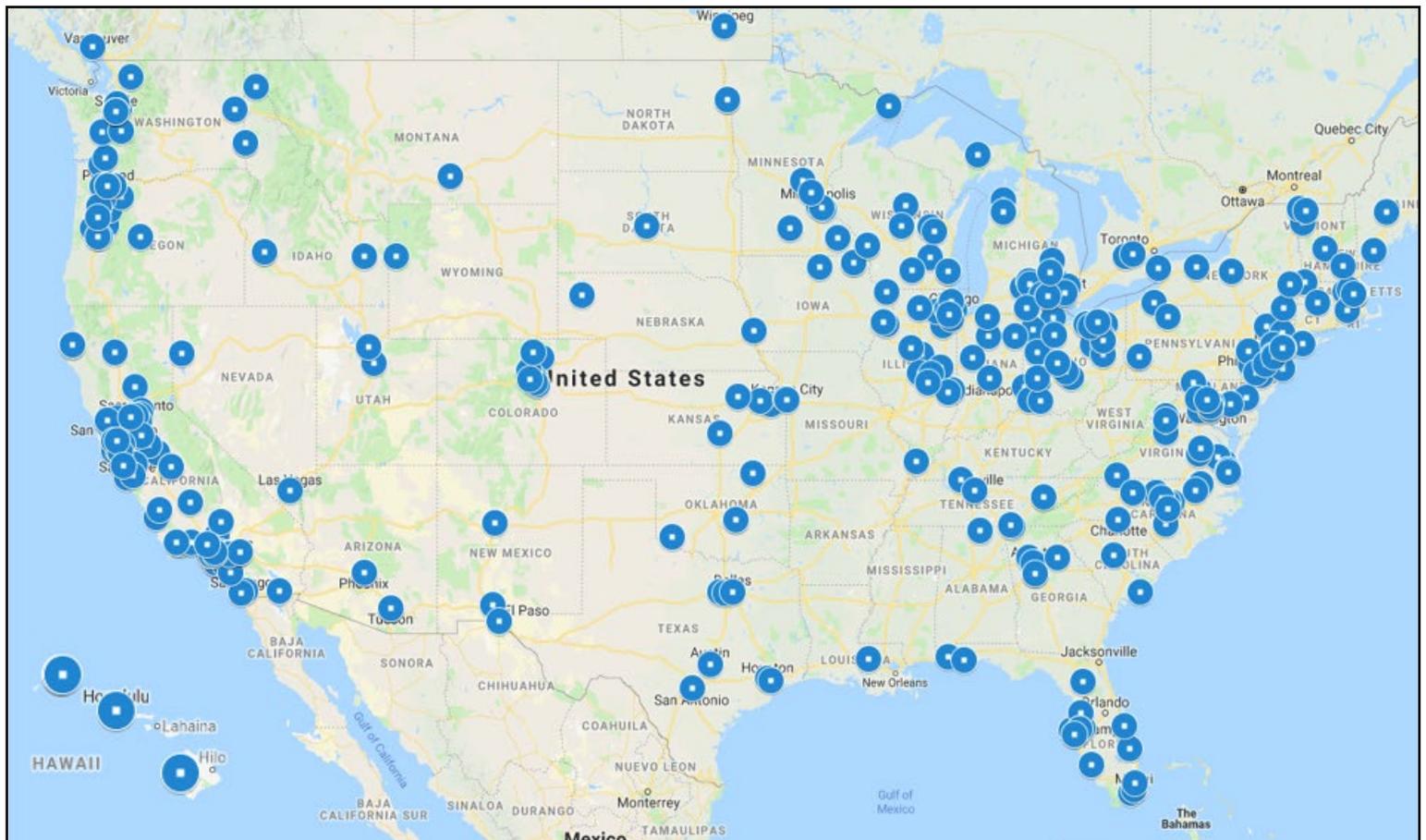
Requires large school sites (minimum acreage guidelines)



VI

Census Results: National Safe Routes to School Program Landscape

The 2019 Safe Routes to School Program Census provided tremendous insight into the state of Safe Routes to School programming across the United States. The census identified hundreds of Safe Routes to School programs present in almost all of the states. Additionally, the census revealed great variation in the strength and comprehensiveness of Safe Routes to School programs, with many programs focusing on lower-impact single day events, while many others conduct far more intensive and consistent activities. Overall the census demonstrates that there are many Safe Routes to School programs nationally, with many strong supportive structures and effective activities, but that additional resources and commitment at every level of government would support more programs with more comprehensive activities, greater reach, and more sustainability.



Program Assessment Methodology

Information about Safe Routes to School programs in each state was primarily collected through an online survey conducted March, April, May, and August of 2019. The survey instrument can be reviewed here. Surveys were collected through a combination of purposive sampling and a snowball approach. The survey link was disseminated nationally to people and organizations affiliated with Safe Routes to School initiatives through a wide range of direct and indirect outreach including: email from the Safe Routes Partnership, the Safe Routes Partnership and partner organization's newsletters, direct contact by state departments of transportation and health, webpage postings, and social media. Respondents were encouraged to forward the survey to peers or other interested parties. Additional information about existing Safe Routes to School programs as well as state practices and support was gathered through conversations with state department of transportation staff. Following initial data collection using the survey tool, the Safe Routes Partnership conducted follow up with individual program contacts as needed to clarify or obtain additional information. Data were compiled and analyzed to identify trends, program commonalities and differences, and to assess program characteristics. Although the programs surveyed are not scientifically representative, this report includes an analysis of collected data in order to provide a broad brush overview of trends in the nation.

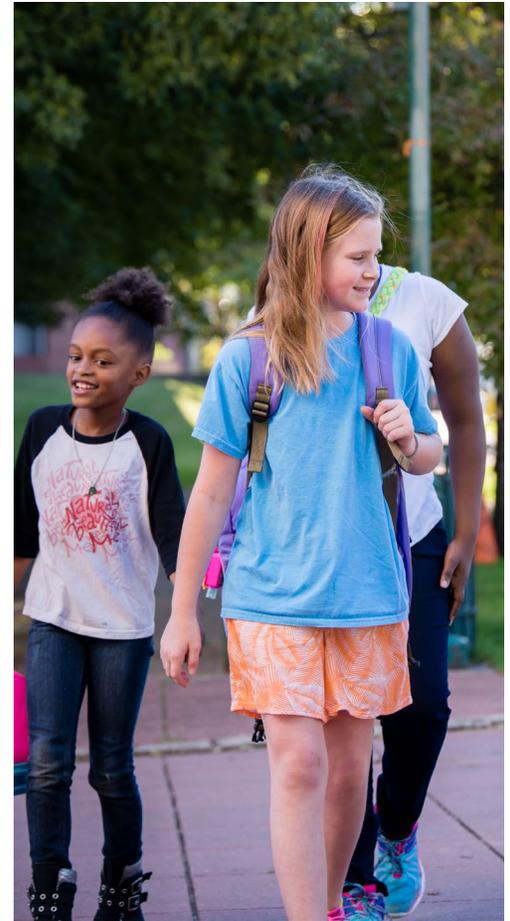
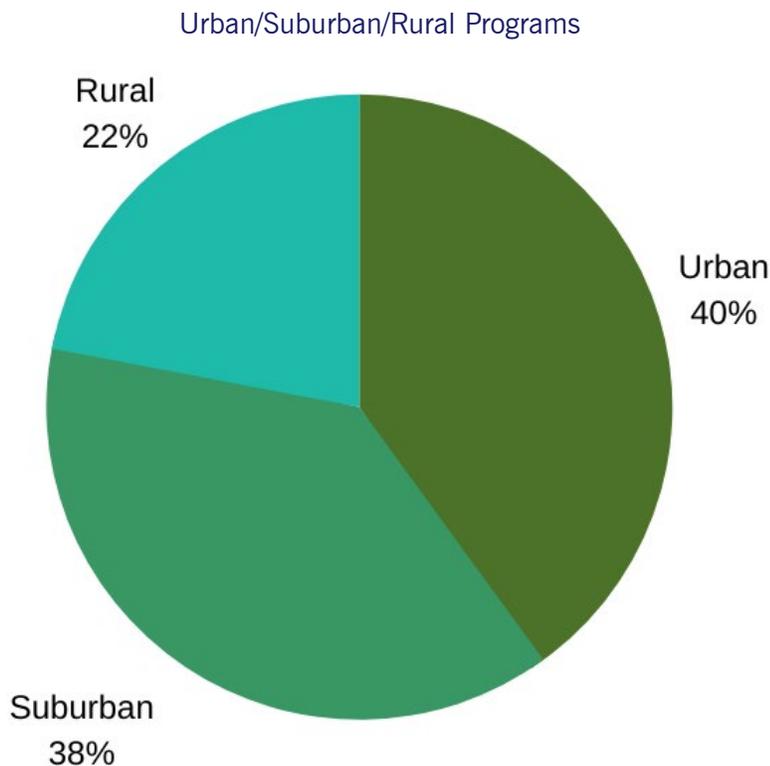
Summary of Survey Responses

- In total, the 2019 Safe Routes to School Program Census Survey received 511 submissions. Of these, 426 submissions met our criteria for final inclusion. Most exclusions were duplicates from the same program or reflected programs that had previously existed or were planned but did not currently exist. Fifteen surveys were from statewide programs, which were included in our overall tabulations, but not considered for many of the local and regional analyses that follow.
- Program respondents submitted surveys from 44 states and Washington DC. The states with the most respondents included: California, Illinois, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio, Oregon, and Virginia, all states with relatively strong state support for Safe Routes to School programs and fairly strong policy environments as reflected by their Safe Routes to School-related State Report Card scores.
- The six states where no program surveys were received were Alaska, Arkansas, Mississippi, Kentucky, West Virginia, and Connecticut. We are aware of a few programs in these states, but based upon our relationships, policy analysis, and follow up with stakeholders, the failure to submit surveys accurately reflects low levels of engagement with Safe Routes to School programming in those states.
- The distribution of program respondents nationally is similar to the US population density map, reflecting where most people live in the United States.
- Safe Routes to School programs are present in rural areas, with program numbers at about 20 percent of programs, roughly proportional to the rural population.
- New programs are regularly emerging, and older programs are continuing and expanding. Just under half of programs are less than 5 years old, while 30 percent have been in operation for 5 to 10 years, and 20 percent have been effecting change for more than 10 years.
- Funding and budgets: 18 percent of local programs¹⁸ reported having no funding; others had budgets ranging from \$100 up to \$2.5 million.
- Respondents indicated that just over a third of programs had a full time coordinator, a similar number had a part time coordinator, 17 percent had an unpaid coordinator, and 22 percent had no coordinator or staff.

A. Basic Characteristics of Local Programs

Census results provided a new understanding of the basic contours of local Safe Routes to School programs.

Urban/rural nature: Some observers wonder whether Safe Routes to School programs can work in rural areas. 22 percent of respondents indicated that their Safe Routes to School programs were in rural areas; this is proportional to population rates, as just under 20 percent of Americans live in rural areas.¹⁹ 40 percent of respondents reported their program was in a predominantly urban area and 38 percent, a suburban area.

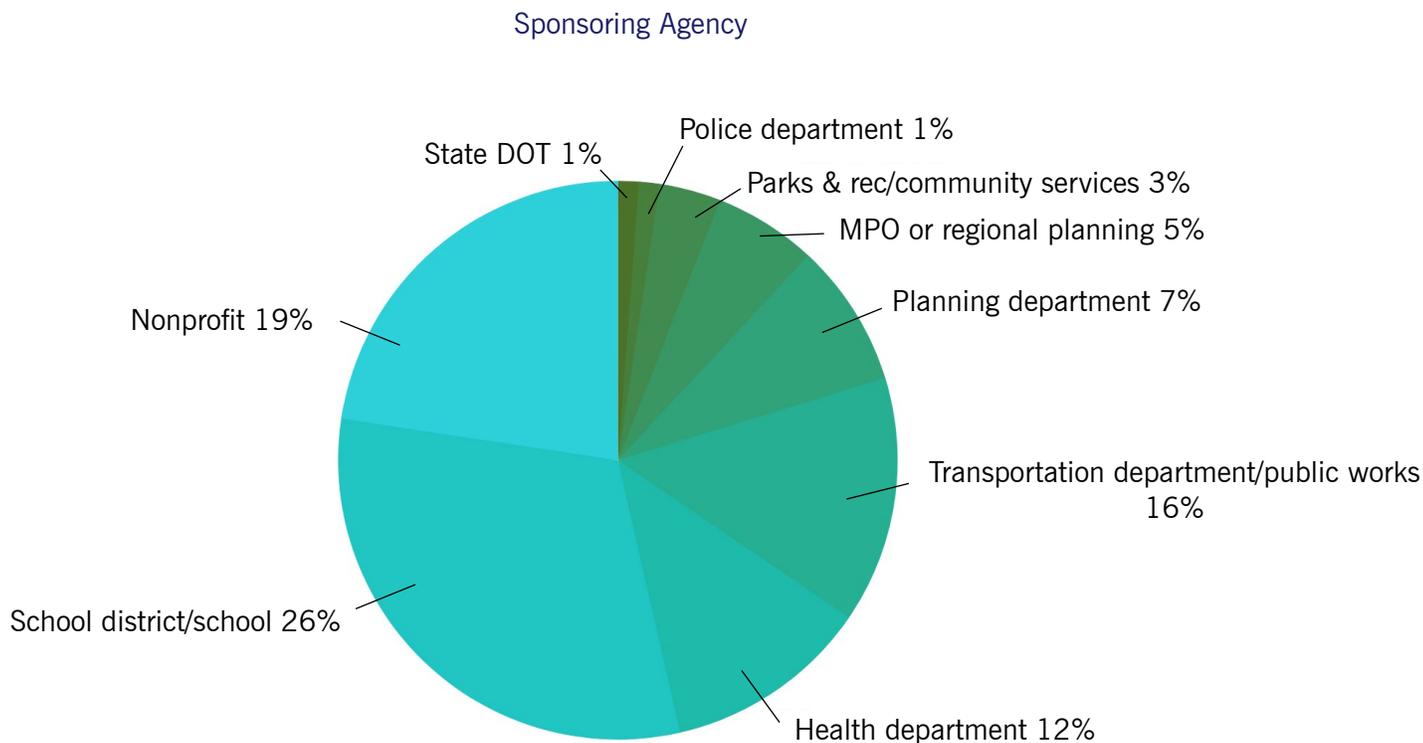


Limitations on the Results

One challenge with the Safe Routes to School census is that because the universe of Safe Routes to School programs is not known, we were unable to ensure that our survey constituted a representative sample. The data help us understand Safe Routes to School programs much better, and give us new insight into various aspects of programs, but the survey responses and subsequent analysis may or may not be representative of the overall population of Safe Routes to School programs.



Sponsoring agency: An important factor in the emphasis and goals of a Safe Routes to School program is determined by the nature of the agency or organization that hosts the program. Programs at schools are often more focused on educational and programmatic activities; programs in planning departments may have a stronger infrastructure emphasis. Programs that serve only a single school tend to overwhelmingly be hosted by their school or school district; as a result, we looked at sponsoring agencies for the survey responses as a whole and also after removing single-school programs. Even after removing single-school programs from the survey responses, respondents still indicated that their programs were most likely to be hosted by a school district, at 26 percent; nonprofits were the next most common sponsors at 19 percent; transportation/public works at 16 percent; health departments at 12 percent; and planning departments at 7 percent.

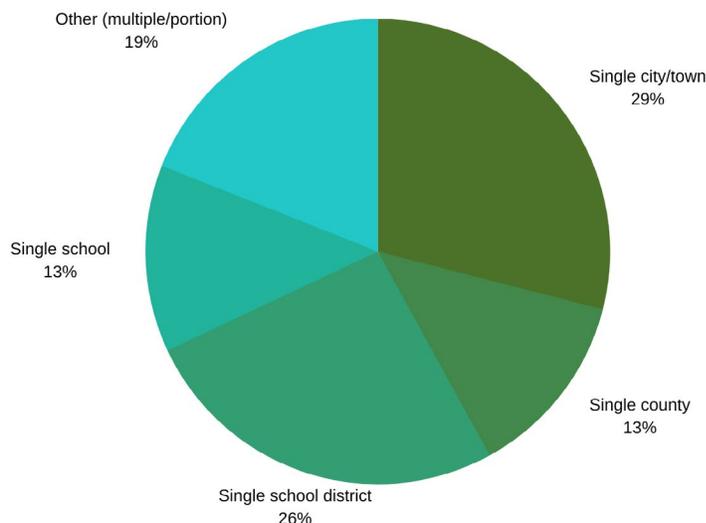


Single-school/multischool programs: Many Safe Routes to School programs begin at a single school, based on the efforts and enthusiasm of a passionate parent, teacher, or administrator. Ideally, we want to see such programs develop greater reach, expanding to cover additional schools and develop broader institutional support. We were encouraged to see that 86 percent of local program respondents ran multi-school programs, and only 13.6 percent of local program respondents ran single-school programs.

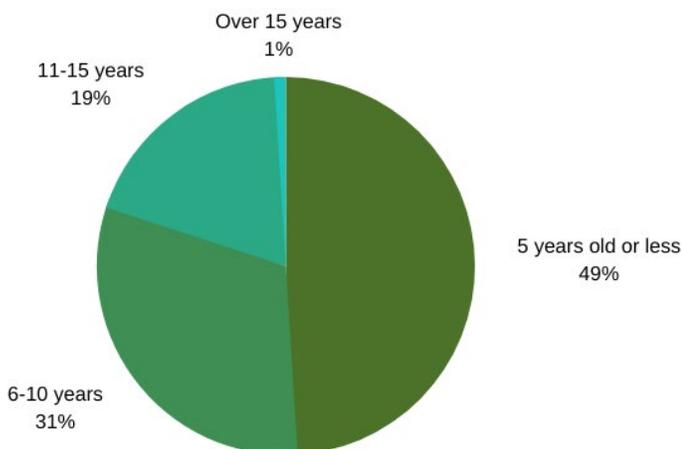
Geographic scope of program/program service area:

Different programs define their service areas differently, with some having the same boundaries as a town or school district. 29 percent of local program respondents had programs that served a city or town, 26 percent served a school district, 13 percent served an entire county, 13 percent were at a single school, and 20 percent had other service areas – either a smaller portion of a city or school district, or multiple cities, school districts, or counties.

Geographic Scope of Program



Program Age



Program age: We also asked survey respondents when their program was started. Almost half of programs were 5 years or younger; 30 percent were 6 to 10 years, almost 20 percent were 11 to 15 years, and just 4 programs were older than 15 years.

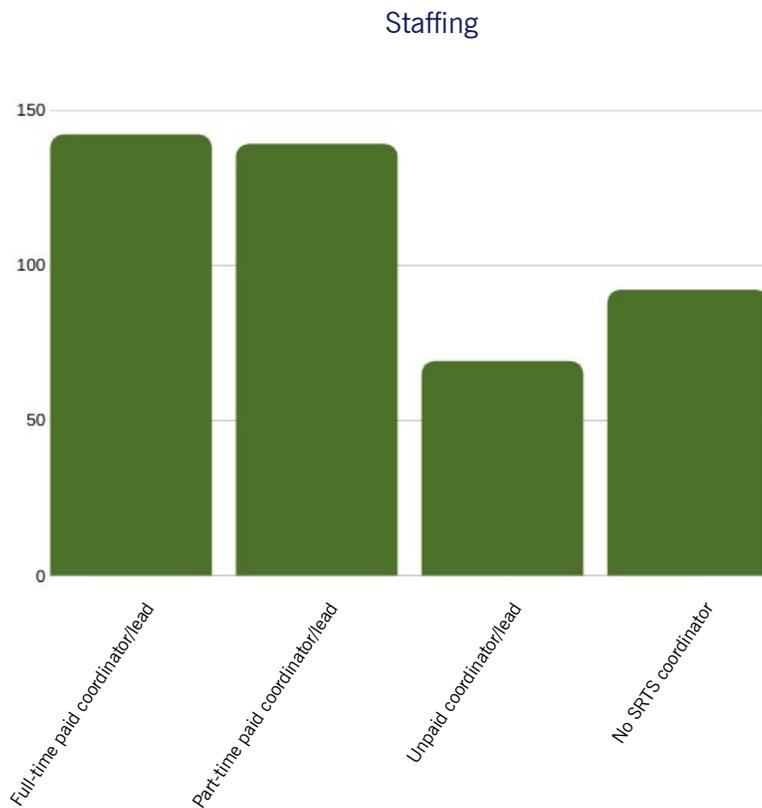
“A health impact assessment informed the writing of the Columbus Safe Routes to School District-Wide School Travel Plan. Based on the assessment, a group of 15 focus schools were selected for targeted outreach and initiatives. At the focus schools, we piloted girls-specific programming to (1) keep girls active during pre- and teenage years when they typically become less physically active, and (2) provide a safe space for girls to explore (typically) male-dominated careers such as city planner and bike mechanic. These pilots will be brought to scale for the school district in the next 5 years. The focus schools are located in neighborhoods with a significant presence of low-income, non-white, and/or non-English speaking populations, including some neighborhoods with a significant presence of immigrants, refugees or New Americans. Our program conducts culturally relevant outreach to schools – and neighborhoods that surround those schools – to engage students, teachers, administrators, neighbors, and community organizations in policy, systems and environmental changes that will support safe walking and biking activities in all seasons and safe routes to everywhere. The program has brought unique experiences to girls from diverse backgrounds, and our local media have helped to make the special aspects of the program more visible across the Columbus metro area, showing middle school girls riding bikes in hijabs and dresses.”

-Katherine Swidarski, Safe Routes to School/Safe Passages Program Manager, Columbus Safe Routes to School, Ohio

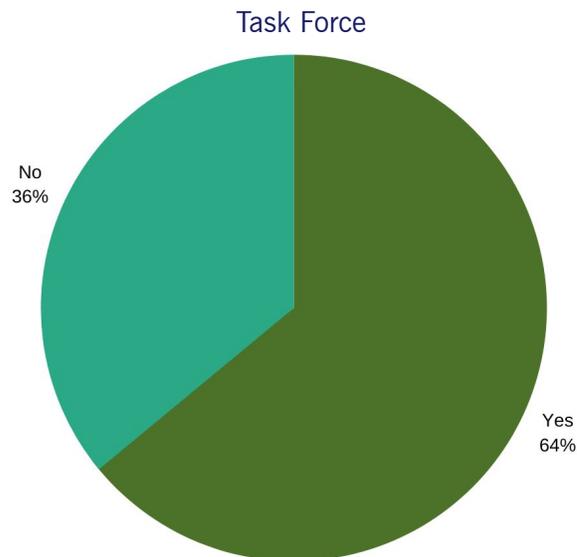
B. Building Blocks of Strong Safe Routes to School Programs

The survey explored a number of characteristics of programs that our experience has shown are important to the strength, effectiveness, comprehensiveness, and sustainability of a Safe Routes to School program: staff, task forces, funding, and having supportive policies.

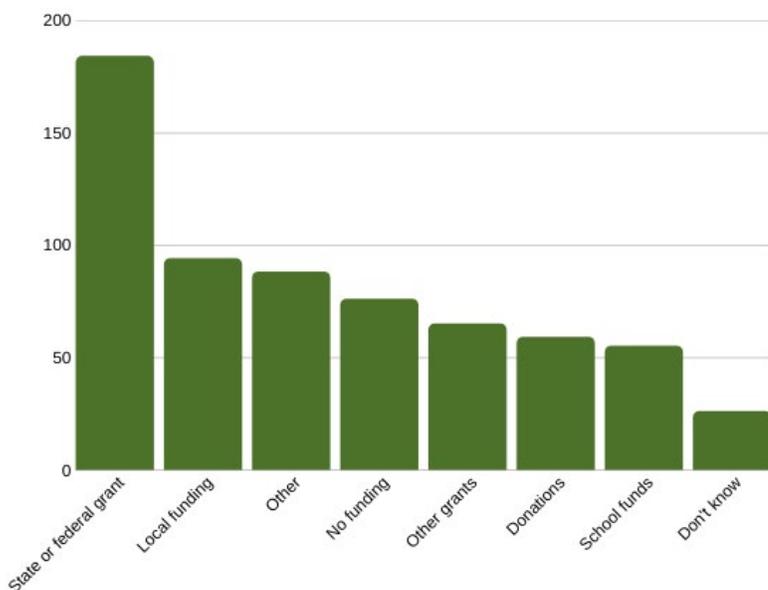
Staffing: Paid staff is one of the most important elements for a strong Safe Routes to School program. Although there are many exceptional programs across the country that are run by volunteers, for a program to be sustainable in the long term and grow to comprehensively meet the needs of the majority of students in a community, it needs paid staff. Respondents indicated that 35 percent of programs had a full time coordinator, 34 percent had a part time coordinator, 17 percent had an unpaid coordinator, and 22 percent had no coordinator or staff.



Task force: Approximately two-thirds of local program respondents reported having a task force or advisory team, while one third did not. Interestingly, these numbers were similar for single-school programs and for multi-school programs. In contrast, in a state like Michigan that has invested in strong Safe Routes to School programming, more than three-quarters of the local Safe Routes to School programs have task forces.



Funding Types



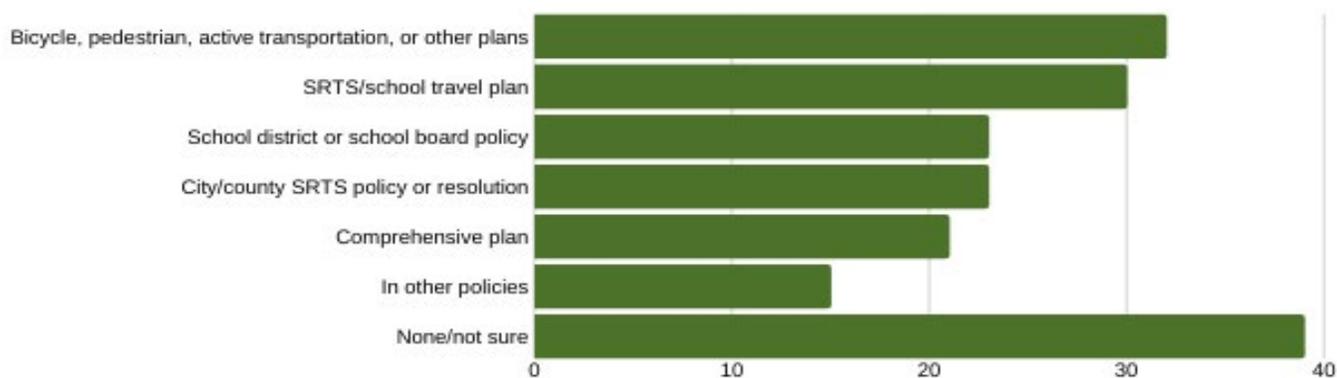
Funding types: Almost 20 percent of programs reported that they were unfunded. Forty-five percent indicated that they had a state or federal grant, with federal TAP funding making up a significant amount of this funding. Twenty-three percent of programs received local funds, which was encouraging as a potentially more stable and long term source of funding; 13 percent received education funding; 14 percent received donations. Programs also found additional funding from a variety of other places, including health funding, earned income, local foundations, and more.

Budget size: The survey contained a variety of questions that sought to better understand program funding. Results were incomplete and challenging to compare; respondents had access to different information, and there were inconsistencies in whether respondents included in-kind funding for staff or supplies and whether they included infrastructure funding. Although the answers are not reliable for purposes of generating averages or other statistical analyses, they do provide a sense of the wide discrepancies in funding levels and insights into the variable results and intensity of different programs.

- \$1 million to \$2.5 million: 9 programs (all large cities/counties)
- \$500,000 to \$1 million: 6 programs
- \$100,000 to \$500,000: 57 programs
- \$50,000 up to \$100,000: 57 programs
- \$20,000 up to \$50,000: 26 programs
- \$5,000 to \$20,000: 28 programs
- \$100-\$5,000: 45 programs
- The remainder of programs either left the response blank, indicated that there were in-kind donations of time and resources, or indicated that they were an entirely volunteer operation.

Policy: Supportive policies are key to ensure that an initiative like Safe Routes to School becomes integrated into the workings of a municipality or school district, rather than functioning as a short term initiative that is discarded as interest moves on. According to survey respondents, 61 percent of programs were in communities that had language supporting Safe Routes to School in some type of local city or school district policy or plan; 39 percent had no policies supporting Safe Routes to School or were not sure. Respondents reported that bicycle/pedestrian/active transportation plans, along with school travel plans, were the most common type of policy containing Safe Routes to School language (32 percent and 30 percent, respectively). 21 percent reported Safe Routes to School language in their comprehensive plan, and 23 percent reported that their city or county had adopted a Safe Routes to School resolution or policy, with a similar number reporting a school district Safe Routes to School policy. However, our further exploration revealed that these numbers may overstate the number of such policies. To the extent that these policies have been formally adopted, they often provide only brief mention or general support for Safe Routes to School, demonstrating that there is considerable room for more policy support for Safe Routes to School at the local and district levels. In addition, there may be a lack of understanding or familiarity with the different types of community policies and plans.

Policy



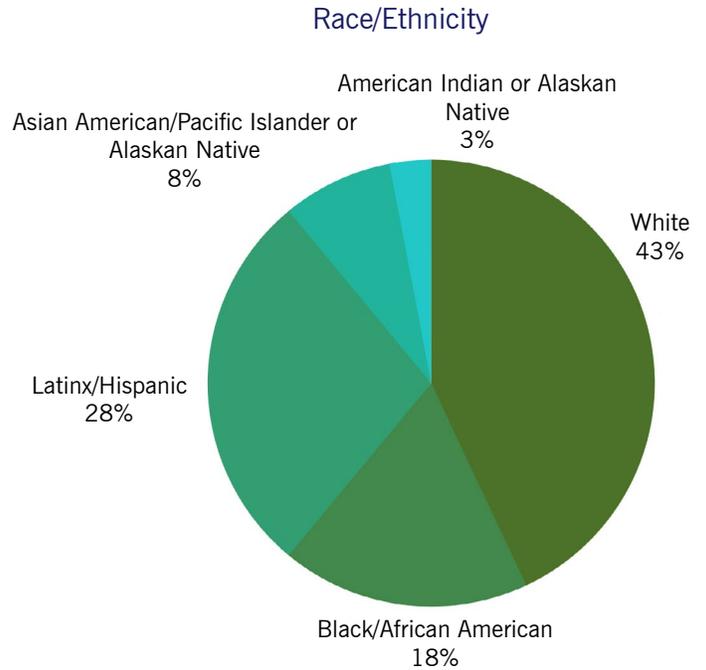
Building Blocks of Safe Routes to School Programs

The Safe Routes Partnership has identified a number of key elements of Safe Routes to School programming that constitute fundamental building blocks of strong Safe Routes to School programs. In our experience, programs with these components tend to reach more students, have more comprehensive programming, show greater longevity and sustainability, and effectively coordinate with different community stakeholders to make physical and cultural changes that support walking and biking to school. The components we have found most essential to a strong program include having: paid staff, task force, funding, action plan, and supportive policies. For more information, see our report [*Building Blocks: A Guide to Starting and Growing a Safe Routes to School Program*](#).

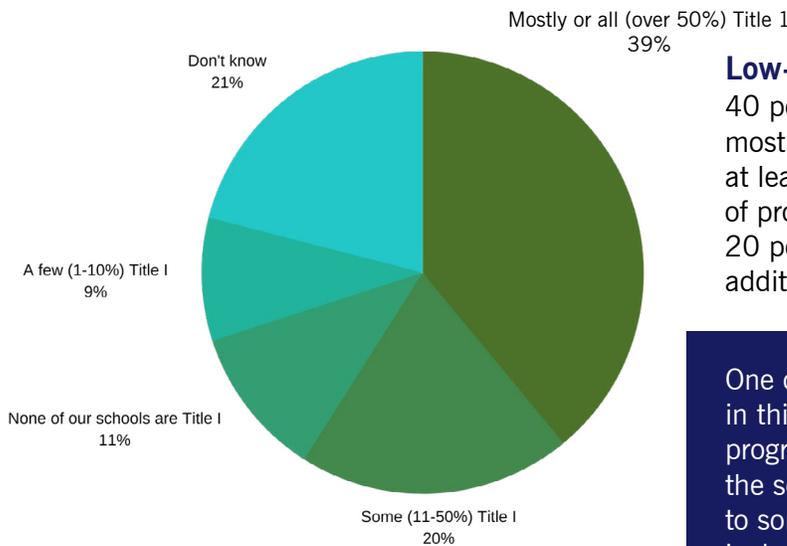
C. Demographics of Students Served

A key element of understanding the nature and equitable impact of Safe Routes to School programs requires having an understanding of the race, ethnicity, and income characteristics of the students currently served by Safe Routes to School programs.

Race/ethnicity: According to local program respondents, 60 percent of programs served a significant percentage of white students; 39 percent of programs served a significant percentage of Latinx students, 26 percent of programs served a significant percentage of black students, 12 percent of programs served a significant percentage of Asian American, Pacific Islander, or Hawaiian students, and 4 percent of programs served a significant percentage of Native students. Because some programs serve significant percentages (defined as 30 percent or more of students served) of more than one of these groups, the numbers add up to more than 100 percent. Racial distribution of school age children in the United States in 2017 was: white (51%), Latinx (25%), black (14%), Asian American (5%), Native (1%).²⁰ Although the racial percentages for Safe Routes to School programs are not directly comparable to the breakdown for school age children, and the racial estimates from program respondents are likely to contain a fair degree of error, a normalized analysis of the numbers provides an indication there is not a substantial facial racial imbalance in students' access to Safe Routes to School programs.



Title I Schools



Low-income schools: Of survey respondents, about 40 percent of programs worked with schools that were mostly or all schoolwide Title I schools (schools serving at least 40 percent low-income students). 20 percent of programs worked with some Title I schools, and 20 percent worked with few or no Title I schools; an additional 20 percent weren't sure.

One of the factors that was most challenging to measure in this project was the number of students served by a program. Some programs included all students at any of the schools served, since all the students were exposed to some messaging and general activities. Others only included students who participated in regular activities that provided evidence of mode shift, like weekly walk to school days or regular bicycle trains.

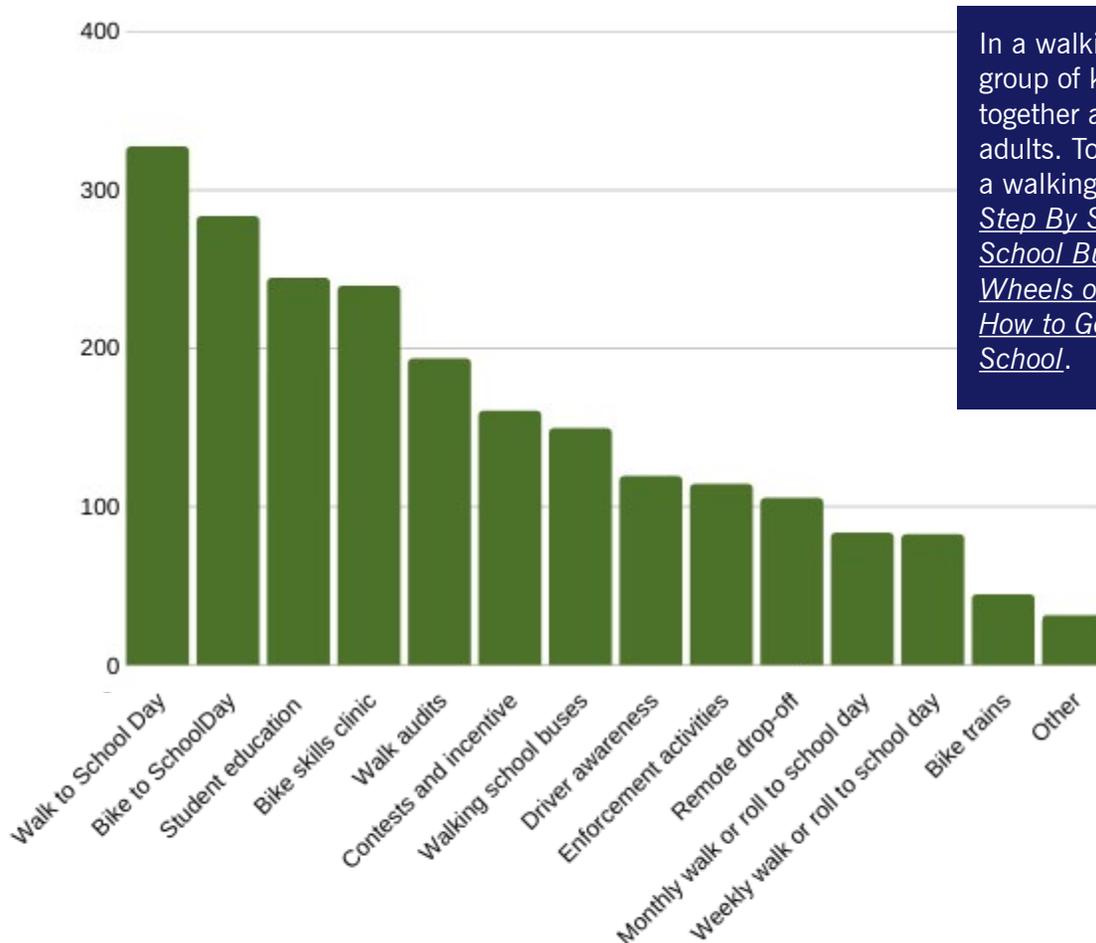
D. Program Activities and Details

To better understand the scope and impact of Safe Routes to School programs, a key aspect was delving into the types of activities that programs engage in.

Program activities: We asked programs about a wide variety of potential Safe Routes to School activities, and provided opportunities for programs to share additional examples as well as provide details about the standard activities through open-ended questions.

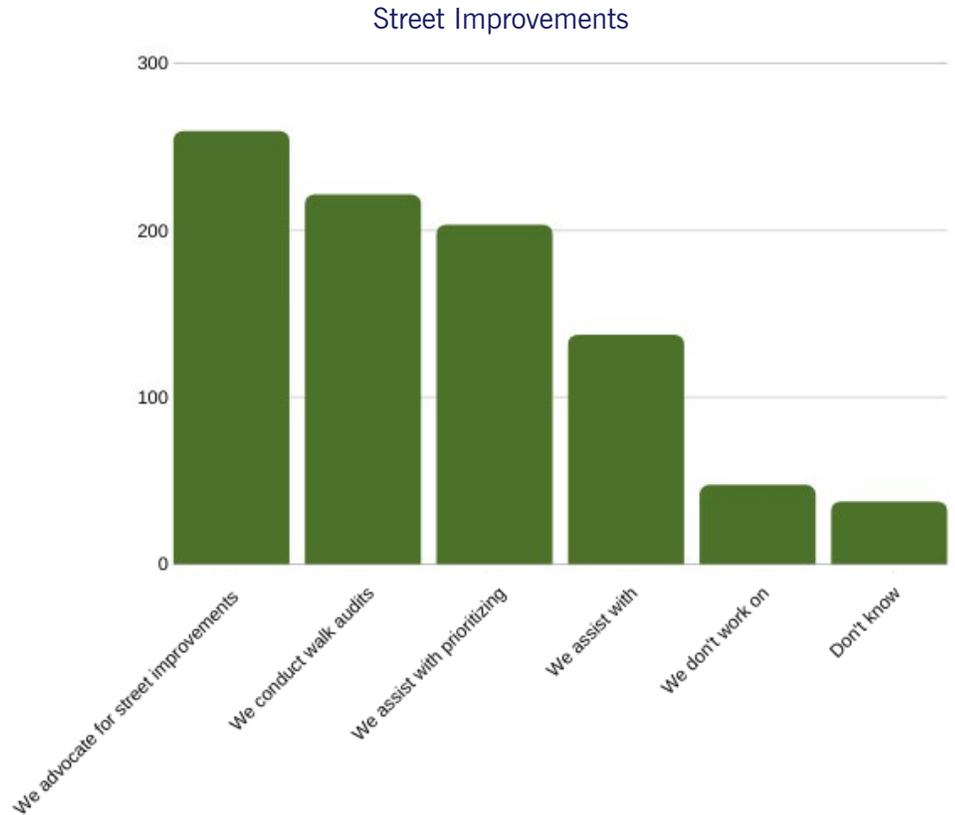
- Walk to school day & bike to school day were the most popular activities, with 81 percent and 70 percent participating, respectively. This accords with our experience -- single day events tend to be low-hanging fruit for programs, and are common starting places.
- 60 percent are running student educational activities, either during school hours or outside school.
- A smaller but decent percent of programs are embracing the most effective activities: activities that occur regularly and get students in the habit of walking and bicycling to school. 37 percent conducted walking school buses, while 11 percent conducted bike trains, and 21 percent conducted monthly walk to school days and 20 percent conducted weekly walk or roll days.

Program Activities

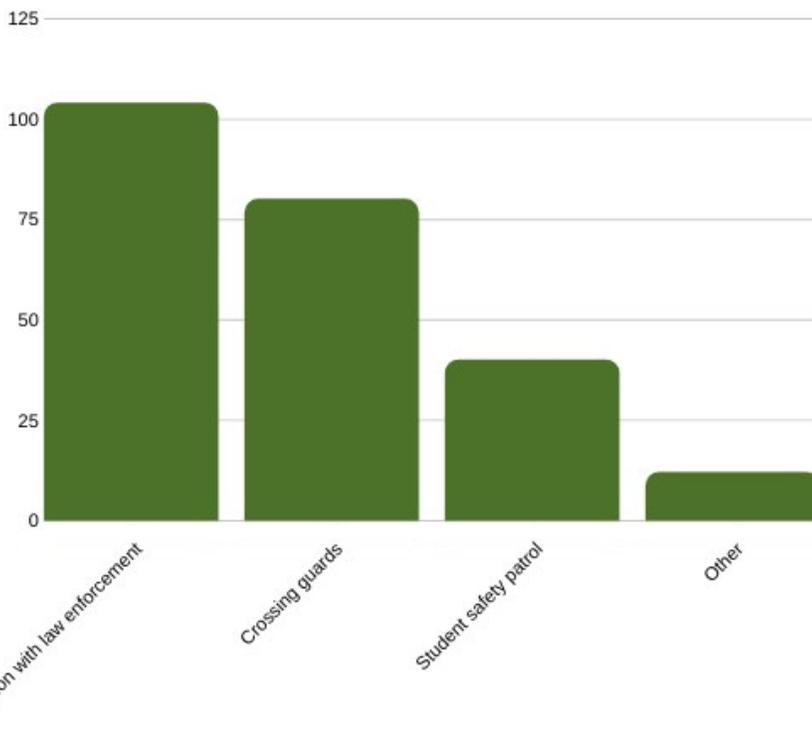


In a walking school bus or bike train, a group of kids walk or bicycle to school together accompanied by one or more adults. To learn how to organize and run a walking school bus or bike train, see [Step By Step: How to Start a Walking School Bus at your School](#) and [The Wheels on the Bike Go Round & Round: How to Get a Bike Train Rolling at Your School](#).

Street improvements: We were surprised by the large percentage of programs reporting involvement in street improvements: only 20 percent reported that they were not involved or were not sure of involvement in activities related to street improvements. 63 percent reported engaging in advocacy for improvements and 54 percent reported conducting walk audits. Because research and experience tell us that both programming and infrastructure improvements are essential for improving safety and rates of walking and biking, this is a good sign.



Enforcement



Enforcement: As far as enforcement activities, 26 percent of programs engaged in some coordination with law enforcement; 20 percent engaged in crossing guard related enforcement activities; and 10 percent ran student safety patrols.

"One of our best features on walking and biking designated days is our World Drumming group and 8th Grade Jazz Ensemble playing for the school outside as students walk or bike up to the building. It is an excellent way to be greeted!"

-Bruce Geffen, teacher, Clague Middle School Safe Routes to School Program

Many respondents reported increases in the number of students walking or bicycling to school:

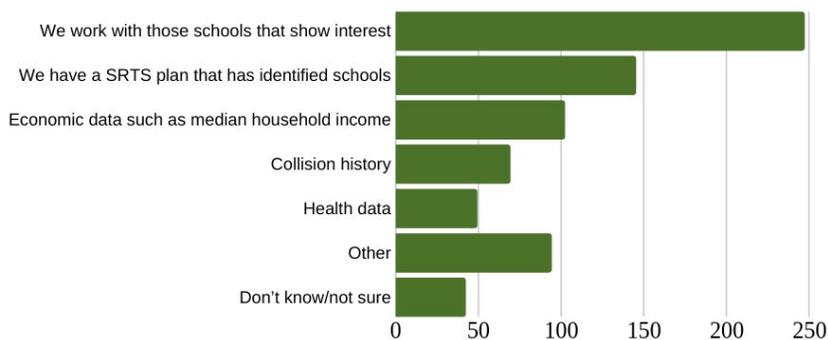
- “67% live within a walkable distance. About half walk at least once a week.”
- “56% of MS students bike and 51% of HS students. 65% alt mode use overall (77% middle, 70% High). Continued growth at a rate of 1% per year.”
- “Of our 40 K-8 schools, all participate in walk to school day, and 50% are working on weekly walk to school days.”
- “One specific school has increased from 9 students to 102 students.”
- “In 10 years our program went from 0 schools to impacting about 22.”
- “In addition to daily after school walking school bus, we also host "Morning Fun Walks" giving 80-120 3rd-5th graders who arrive at school early the chance to walk 1/2 a mile on Mondays and Fridays. One school we serve has gone from only participating in "Walk to School Day" each Fall to 7 walk events.”
- “Over 20% average increase.”
- “Because this is a 100% busing district, many parents informed me that they were not aware that it was allowed for their children to walk to school. A cohort of parents from two schools requested support in advocacy for and infrastructure changes that would allow their children to bike and walk to school. As a result, there is not only more participation at monthly WTSD events, but more of an increase in daily walkers and bikers.”
- “10-25%”
- “Walk to School Months in October and May have sparked continued walking in other months.”
- “It has increased by 5% overall since the beginning of the program, but the scope of the service area has increased drastically.”
- “Each year, more students bike to school. We do monthly counts and in the last 3 years it has increased.”
- “Started a WSB program that bumped active transportation up from 8% to 13% over the last couple years.”
- “In specific schools where we helped to start daily walking school buses, the number of students walking on a daily basis has increased.”
- “Surveys done at one elementary school in 2015 and 2018 showed a 3% increase in walking and biking to school.”
- “We are partnering with the housing authority to identify recently arrived refugee families; we had about ten kids walking at beginning of semester and 50 kids walking at end.”
- “Our WSB enrollment has doubled every year for the 6 years we have operated the program. Our average for attendance this school year (from August-February) is 72 students a day.”
- “Slight increase in walking from 16% to 18% and bicycling from 2% to 3%. Data from Student travel mode counts.”
- “Increase of about 15% of students walking and biking to school.”
- “The schools have doubled the number of bike racks at the middle and high schools as the SRTS kids in elementary school have gotten older.”
- “16% of parents said they were driving less after participating in the program.”
- “It varies from school to school and year to year, but more students do bicycle in good weather than in the past. We have been doing bike rack counts the last couple of years to collect more data.”
- “Average of 5% increase in participating schools When we started in 2000, 21% walked or biked. Now over 50% take a green way to school. Some schools are as high as 60% and over 80% if they provide bus service.”
- “In our funding school it grew from 1% to almost 50%.”
- “Schools which have hosted Bike to School Day have seen an increase interest and participation in students biking to school.”
- “Average 19% increase among schools where we did more intensive SRTS programming (student walk audits, ed/encouragement activities, built environment changes, walking school bus).”

E. Equity in Safe Routes to School Programs

Safe Routes to School programs have the potential to either create greater equity in our communities, or to exacerbate disparities, depending upon factors such as whether investments are prioritized in lower income communities and whether programs are designed and tailored for the needs of different demographic groups. We wanted to understand whether and how programs focused on low-income schools differed from other schools.

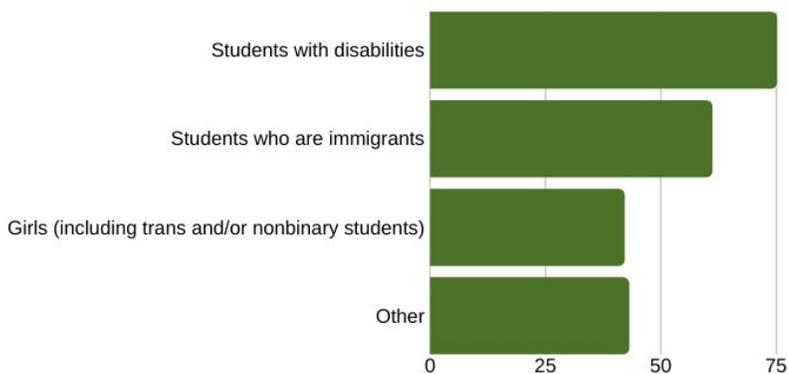
Selection of Schools: We were interested to understand more about how schools were selected for Safe Routes to School activities and services by the program, a question that has significant implications for the equitable impacts of the program and how well it is able to address health and transportation inequities. Sixty percent of programs indicated that they work with those schools that show interest. While that is an important factor, if it is the only factor, it is likely to reward more affluent schools that have the bandwidth to engage with student transportation. 35 percent of schools had a plan to prioritize schools, and 25 percent of programs indicated that they use economic factors to prioritize low income schools or students.

Selection of Schools



Targeted Outreach & Programming: Fewer than one-third of local programs engage in any kind of targeted outreach or programming to encourage participation by specific groups. Eighteen percent of programs reported a focus on students with disabilities, followed by immigrants/non-English speakers (15 percent). Ten percent of respondents conducted outreach or programming specific to girls or nonbinary students; 10 percent indicated another group that received targeted programming, with low-income students, students who are refugees, chronically absent students, and others among the focus groups. Of programs that did special outreach for one group, most targeted more than one specific group. The targeted outreach and programming ranged from fairly minimal outreach efforts to very creative and intensive specialized, tailored programming (see sidebar).

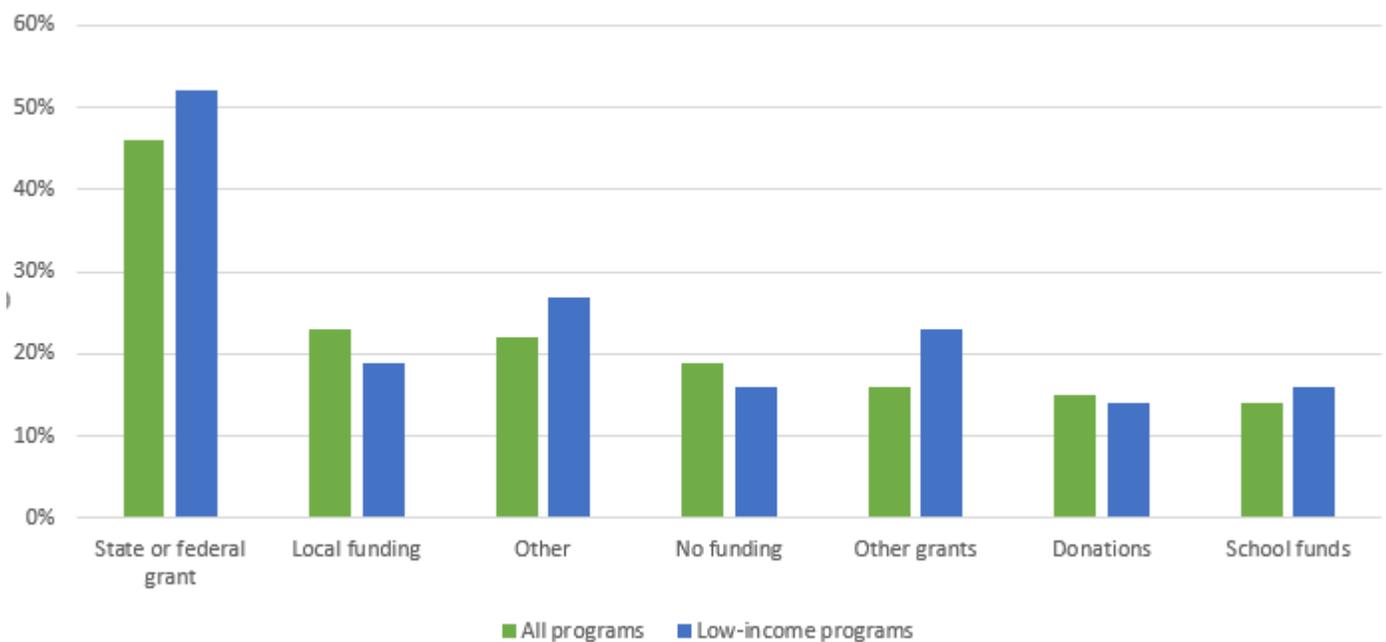
Targeted Outreach and Programming



Programs Focused on Title I Schools: In order to explore potential differences between programs that were focused in low-income communities versus programs as a whole, we separately analyzed the data for the programs that reported serving a majority of Title I schools (“low-income programs”). There were 159 of these responses, 39 percent of the total local/regional program responses. Interestingly, although there were variations in responses, overall the programs serving more low-income students had responses that were similar in many regards to the whole group of Safe Routes to School programs. Some areas of variation for programs serving a majority of Title I schools included:

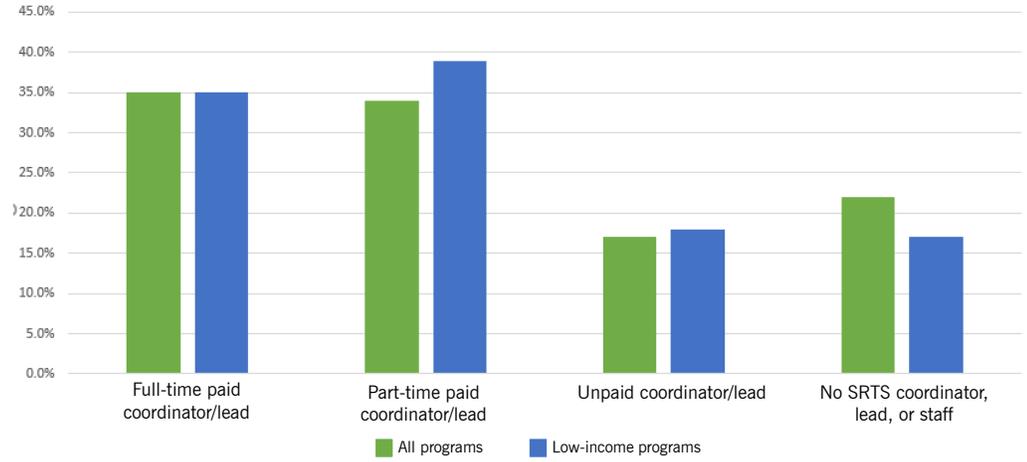
- Low-income programs were three times as likely to serve a single school (36 percent to 13 percent). Single school programs generally have less institutional support, and while they may be deeply important to the students at the school, they are less able to affect overall culture and direction of the larger community.
- Low-income programs were more likely to be hosted by a school or school district (42 percent versus 34 percent), a nonprofit (25 percent versus 17 percent), or a health department (15 percent versus 10 percent).²¹
- Low-income programs were a little less likely to have task forces or advisory teams (59 percent versus 64 percent).
- Low-income programs were a little more likely to have funding, and that funding was more likely to be from a state or federal grant and less likely to be from local funding.

Funding: Low-Income Programs vs. All Programs

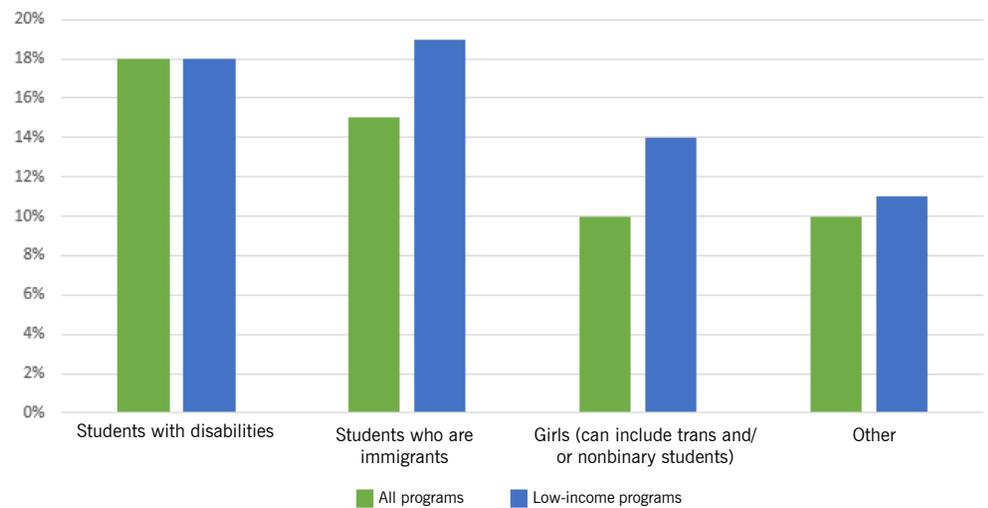


- Staffing for low-income programs was similar to staffing for all programs, with 35 percent of both groups having a full time coordinator, slightly more low-income programs having a part time coordinator, and slightly fewer low-income programs having no coordinator .
- Low-income programs were slightly more likely to have targeted outreach and programming for students who were immigrants and for girls; they were equally likely to have targeted outreach and programming for students with disabilities.
- Low-income programs were more likely to be in urban areas, less likely to be in suburban areas, and equally likely to be in rural areas.

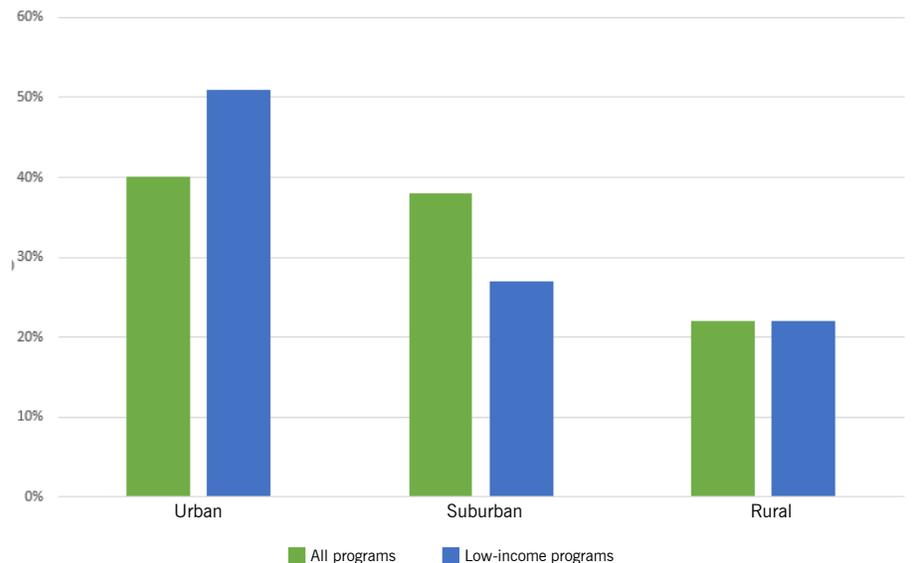
Staffing: Low-Income Programs vs. All Programs



Targeted Outreach & Programming: Low-Income Programs vs. All Programs



Urban/Rural: Low-Income Programs vs. All Programs





Examples of Targeted Outreach and Activities

- "We conduct outreach in multiple languages, partner with programs/initiatives/extracurricular activities such as the Hispanic PTA, Special Education PTA, Student Government, and school-based clubs like Girls on the Run, Best Buddies, and Phoenix Bikes."
- "Majority of students already attending our service area schools are Latino/a/x, therefore presentations and workshops are already geared towards that demographic."
- "We promote inclusive active transportation programs, as well as ADA-compliant infrastructure."
- "Providing SRTS outreach materials in multi-language and video."
- "Bike assembly, Girls on the Run, and bicycle safety."
- "We have an ADA adaptive bike and assist with a bike education therapy group for those with disabilities."
- "Community partners have Girls Only bike rides, Women/Trans bike repair nights, and adaptive bike opportunities."
- "Bike club leader encourages and actively recruits female students to become more comfortable biking."
- "Action Cycle, Girls riding club focused on riding skills and local political engagement."
- "Wheels education program for special education students. Some outreach to recent migrant and refugee families."
- "Each year we hold 1-3 bike events at low-income apartment complexes, mostly immigrants (many are farmworkers)"
- "Girls in Gear programming for empowering middle school girls on bicycles."
- "This community has a large refugee population, we have identified parent and community champions to help us outreach to these parents."
- "We work in schools with high numbers of immigrant families. I have attended ESL parent meetings to provide information and education. This includes a pedestrian safety lesson, with a practice roadway and crosswalk."
- "For students who speak a different language, we provide educational opportunities for families at a resource night, where we provide information and/or have a translator present, while we present a safety presentation to them. We include special needs students with a separate curriculum we created specifically for them and accommodate to their needs."

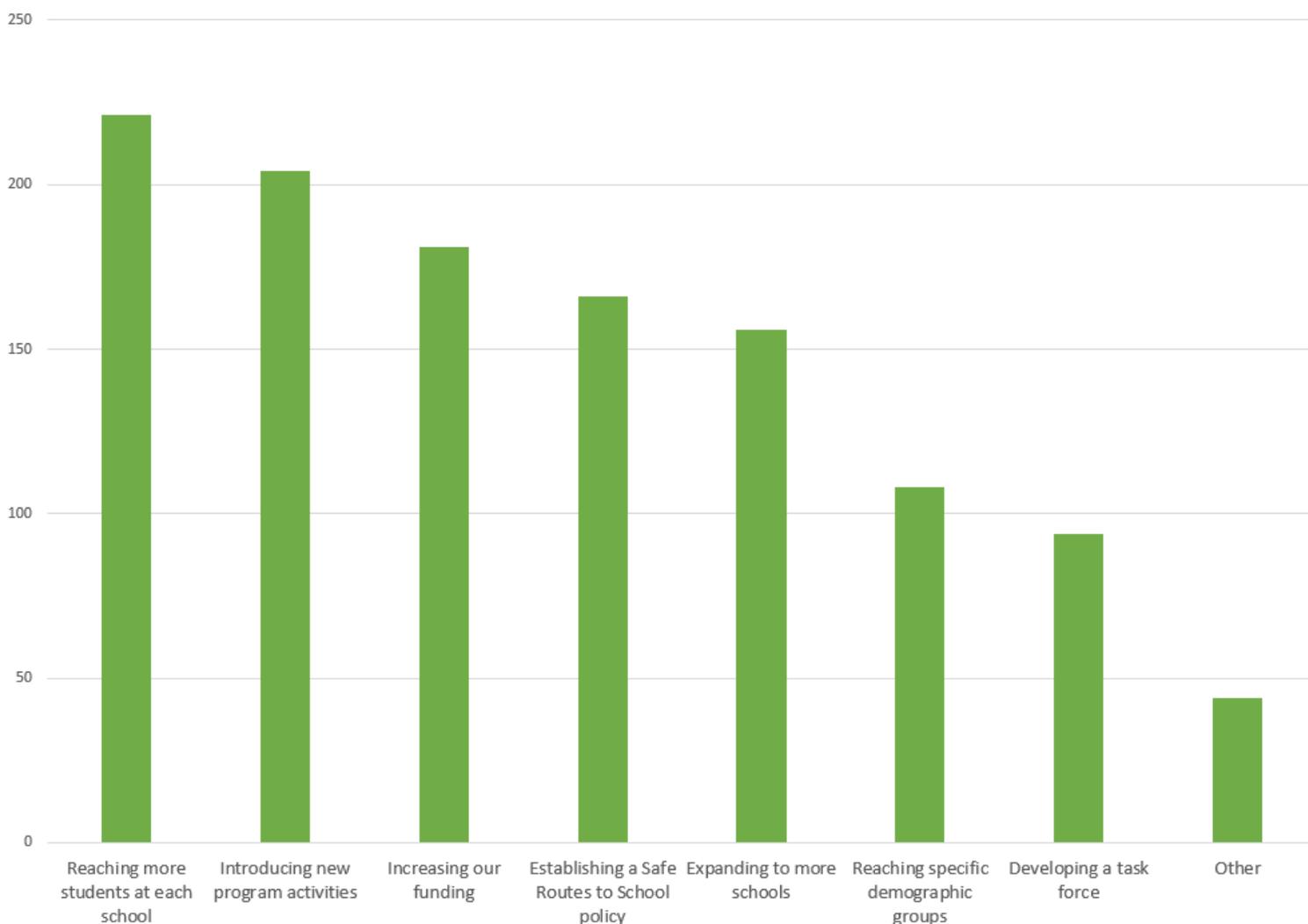
F. Plans for Improvement

We also asked programs to tell us what they were planning to or wanted to do to improve in their programs in the next two years. The most popular improvements were wanting to reach more students at each school (54 percent) and introduce new program activities (50 percent). Finding increased funding and policy change were also of interest to many programs (44 percent and 40 percent, respectively). 38 percent intend to expand to additional schools, and 26 percent want to reach specific additional demographic groups.

Girls Get in Gear

A number of Ohio-based program reported engaging in Girls In Gear programs.²² Girls in Gear (GIG) is a girls-specific bicycling program designed to empower adolescent girls (aged 9-15) by building confidence and self-reliance through the integration of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) activities, physical exercise, community involvement and nutrition education. The program can be conducted as an afterschool program or a community program. The program is structured to meet once a week for 8 to 10 weeks, focusing on skill-building with regard to bicycle riding, mechanics, public speaking, and more. It is great to see the embrace of the program in Ohio, and would be great to see the program move to other states as well.

Plans for Improvement



G. Successes and Challenges

Programs reported a wide array of inspiring successes, challenges, and key lessons that have been incorporated into ongoing program operations.

Successes: A few examples of successes include:

- “Our tremendous partnership with public works, schools, and more have led to site assessments and implementation of short-term recommendations at every school.”
- “Our school district has 40 k-8 schools. We typically have 100% participation from schools on National Walk and Bike to School Day. Nearly 50% of the schools are successfully implementing or working on implementing a weekly walking Wednesday program. 3 years ago the district put full-time school nurses in place at each school. For the most part it has been the school nurses that have taken on the role of SRTS program implementation in order to achieve their School Health Improvement goals. We are in our 5th year of offering a Bicycle Fix It and Safety Program at 16 schools each school year. (8 in the fall semester and 8 in the Spring semester).”
- “Getting SRTS Policy into our district wellness policy was a huge milestone, now we are working on implementation and holding the district to it.”
- “Having the staff walk with kids from low-income housing communities has been great and successful. The kids love it.”
- “I successfully collaborate with the county's public health department. We have formed a great partnership and have worked to help schools and their respective cities establish relationships. It's a lot of work but I believe we have been successful. We are currently focusing on one school for a collective impact project. We have school people, city traffic engineers, CBOS and parents on the committee.”
- “One of our most successful efforts has been our Middle School Helmet Educators Program. We train middle school leaders on the importance of helmets and how to properly fit the helmets. These middle schoolers present to third to fourth grade students and do outreach to the community. They even made a video highlighting the importance and how to check for fit (www.lgsaferoutes.org). Over the past 5 years they have educated over 1200 students and connected with hundreds of community members. We think they rock!”
- “One unique success is that we worked with partners in Public School System's Facilities Department to add stronger bike/ped considerations into their Learning Environment Guidelines document, which outlines guidelines for new school sites.”
- “Our principals have been very excited about our recent inclusion of safe routes between home and bus, bus stop safety, and bus safety. The majority of our students are transported by bus so it makes our program more inclusive.”
- “Students who participated in the Walking School Bus...
 - Absences decreased by 63.25%
 - Tardies decreased by 80.51%.”
- “Our school board now has a task force working with city planning and public safety to try to get cars away from school campuses to increase safety.”
- “The purchase of a bike fleet and creation of an on-bike training program including riding with students in real conditions was a huge challenge logistically, but has been successfully expanded to all schools in town.”

Challenges:

Respondents identified an array of challenges:

- **Funding:** Funding was a major focus of the comments and challenges of program respondents. Obtaining sufficient funding is a significant challenge for program longevity and activities. Census results indicate that federal funding continues to be a crucial source of funding for Safe Routes to School programs. “Need more funding for better outcomes.”
- **Parent attitudes and behavior:** Changing parent behaviors is a struggle. It is very difficult to ensure that families return survey data.
- **Engaging schools:**
 - “Schools have so much on their plate, Safe Routes to School is always competing for airtime.”
 - “Critical to have an in-school champion”
 - “Challenging to engage parents in low-income areas”
- **Volunteers:** It is a constant challenge to find and keep sufficient volunteers.
- **Dangerous streets:** “Dealing with impatient drivers (often parents) creates dangers for students walking and bicycling.”
- **Fear of crime and violence:** Perceptions of lack of safety due to crime and violence discourage walking.
- **Distance:** Students who go to school far from their homes, including lengthy distances due to charter schools and schools of choice. “Rural schools have barriers due to distances.”
- **Lengthy process for change:**
 - “The process is long and involves many organizations.”
 - “When working with a large urban school district it takes almost 5 years to establish a SRTS program.”
 - “The biggest issue is developing the case for change and building the political will for prioritizing walking and biking over the car.”

“Every neighborhood with similarities still has differences. Every school moves at its own pace and all we can do is be a consistent, available resource.”

- Safe Routes to School Wyandotte County (Kansas)



VI

Conclusion: Reflections and Recommendations

Across the United States, there are very uneven conditions for Safe Routes to School. In some states, strong structures are in place that provide interlacing supports for local programs. In these states, state laws support walking and biking in communities; state transportation departments have staff focused on Safe Routes to School, allowing support for new and existing local Safe Routes to School programs; state money supplements federal dollars, providing funding for local Safe Routes to School staff; an equity focus ensures that Safe Routes to School programs thrive in low-income communities. Even in these states, Safe Routes to School programs only reach a portion of the population, but there are many strong programs providing real benefits to children's health.

In contrast, other states have a hostile environment for Safe Routes to School. State policies not only do not support sidewalks, bike lanes, walking, or bicycling, but may be actively unfriendly to them. Safe Routes to School programs are not eligible for state or federal funding under state transportation department determinations. Local governments receive little encouragement to provide safe walking or bicycling conditions for students or anyone else. Such states may have next to nothing in the way of Safe Routes to School programming, or may have a few programs that are volunteer run or are funded by a local government that recognizes the importance of physical activity and safe walking to school. Unlike the strong states or the hostile states, the majority of the states fall somewhere in the middle.

And yet, the upshot is that, for every state, there is room for considerable growth in Safe Routes to School programming. National, state, and local leadership can all play a role in enabling Safe Routes to School to provide full benefits to children and to communities. Greater access to consistent and increased funding, strong incentives for states to support local programs, and continued control of funding by regional governments can help to transform states that have little Safe Routes to School activity. In addition, existing programs have the potential for much higher levels of impact. Dedicated state funding for Safe Routes to School could provide much more significant support for staffing of Safe Routes to School programs, as well as for improved street safety in school zones around the state. In addition, many communities around the country are ensuring the longevity and efficacy of their Safe Routes to School programs by providing guaranteed sources of local funding. There are many schools and children who are not benefiting from Safe Routes to School, even in communities with good programs. More funding, more staffing,

Top Ten Recommendations

- Maintain or increase funding for Safe Routes to School programs; encourage all states to make funding available and easily accessible for Safe Routes to School non-infrastructure programs, not simply for Safe Routes to School infrastructure.
- Support opportunities to make school districts, nonprofits, and other local and regional agencies eligible for funds that support Safe Routes to School programs, since substantial numbers of programs are being hosted by these entities.
- Encourage states to support policies and funding as described in the State Report Cards.
- Look at Safe Routes to School metrics that reflect program quality and depth, rather than bare measures of the numbers of students touched by messaging or single-day event programming. Better metrics include: mode shift, physical activity level changes, student learning, motivation, attendance improvements, and health outcomes.
- Support staffing for programs, through funding, in-kind staffing by local agencies, and by addressing additional barriers.
- Provide programs with technical assistance, application assistance, and policy support.
- Develop the wide range of additional resources requested by Safe Routes to School programs: mapping assistance, assistance engaging and connecting with different populations, evaluations, volunteer recruitment, funding, application assistance, more templates, and so on.
- Support low and middle efficacy states in learning from those states that have developed strong structures to support local Safe Routes to School efforts.
- Continue to explore and address research gaps.
- Listen to the needs and ideas expressed by those running local, regional, and state Safe Routes to School programs.



and stronger commitments from local elected officials and other stakeholders have the potential to significantly improve children's health and safety.

The good news is that there are hundreds of robust and inspiring programs around the country – strong and innovative Safe Routes to School programs in rural, suburban, and urban areas. New programs are emerging while existing programs are becoming stronger and more comprehensive. Programs have creative and inspiring programming that is helping children develop healthy habits and have fun, and many programs are tailoring these programs to engage students with disabilities, girls and female-identified students, low-income students, students who are immigrants or refugees, and more.

By investing more funding, technical assistance, and policy assistance into new and existing Safe Routes to School programs, and listening to the ideas suggested and resources requested by programs, there is tremendous potential to expand the benefits of Safe Routes to School, supporting healthy children and adults, reducing the long-term societal costs of diabetes and chronic disease, addressing climate change and air pollution, and creating more vibrant and connected communities.

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