Safe Routes to School 101

Safe Routes to School is a movement that aims to make it safer and easier for students to walk and bike 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.

1. SRTS aims to create safe, convenient, and fun opportunities for kids to walk and bike to and from school, thereby reverse the alarming nationwide trend toward childhood obesity.

2. The SRTS program encourages and enables parents to allow their kindergarten through 8th grade children (recently expanded to 12th grade) to safely walk and bike to school.

3. SRTS helps facilitate the planning, development, and implementation of projects and programs that will improve safety and encourage walking and biking within 2 miles of a school.

As the stats bear out, kids today have become less active, less independent, and less healthy. In 1969, nearly 50% of all children in the United States (and nearly 90% of those within a mile of school) walked or bicycled to school. Today, that number has plummeted to fewer than 15%.

Concerned by the long-term health and traffic consequences of this trend, in 2005 Congress approved funding for implementation of Safe Routes to School programs in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. Though there have been policy shifts, Safe Routes to School has remained eligible for funding under every subsequent federal transportation bill. Communities use funds to construct new bicycle lanes, pathways, and sidewalks, and launch Safe Routes to School education, promotion, and enforcement campaigns in elementary and middle schools.

At the local level, Safe Routes to School practitioners run education and encouragement programs with families and schools and push for strong municipal and district policies to support safe walking and bicycling. The most successful Safe Routes to School programs incorporate the Six E's: evaluation, education, encouragement, engineering, enforcement, and equity. At the regional and state level, Safe Routes to School practitioners work to find new funding and ensure proper spending of existing funding for Safe Routes to School. And at the federal level, the National Partnership of SRTS and its allies maintain a steady voice for policy and funding support in Washington D.C. and provide a source of expert help, ideas, and resources for leaders at all levels.

