

Health and Safe Routes to School Connections

The connection between the Safe Routes to School program and children's health has always been obvious, but not well documented. Several recent publications have documented the relationship.

CDC Recommended Community Strategies

The Center for Disease Control and Prevention released a major report in 2009 titled "*Recommended community strategies and measurements to prevent obesity in the United States: Implementation and measurement guide*." [\[link\]](#) Though much of the report addresses the availability of healthy food and high quality school physical education, "Category 5: Strategies to create safe communities that support physical activity" includes these three active transportation strategies that directly connect to Safe Routes to School programs and projects:

17. **Enhance infrastructure supporting bicycling:** The SRTS program will fund a shared-use path for Eagle Valley MS and bike lanes at other locations, and works with Carson City Public Works to enhance the bicycle network with other funds.
18. **Enhance infrastructure supporting walking:** The SRTS program will fund construction of sidewalks to close gaps on and near school campuses, and works with Carson City Public Works to construct or improve sidewalks and ADA accessibility with other funds.
23. **Enhance traffic safety in areas where persons are or could be physically active:** The SRTS program directly addresses traffic safety around schools by regulating the flow of drop-off/pick-up traffic, maintaining adult school crossing guards at critical locations, installing speed display signs and improving school zone signing, constructing traffic calming infrastructure adjacent to schools, and working with law enforcement to focus on school zones, and working with Carson City Public Works to ensure complete streets in new and reconstruction projects.

CDC Childhood Injury

The CDC's *Childhood Injury Report: Patterns of Unintentional Injuries among 0-19 Year Olds in the United States, 2000-2006* [\[link\]](#) demonstrates that injuries due to transportation were the leading cause of death for children. The highest death rates were among occupants of motor vehicles in traffic. There were also a substantial number of pedestrian and pedal cyclist deaths among children. Combining all unintentional injury deaths among those between 0 and 19 years, motor vehicle traffic-related deaths were the leading cause.

Mayor's Guide to Fighting Childhood Obesity

In the US Conference of Mayor's publication *Mayor's Guide to Fighting Childhood Obesity* [\[link\]](#), the Safe Routes to School section identifies seven specific actions for mayors and staff to take, including: Partner with schools and the community to create local Safe Routes to School team or task force; Prioritize funding for short- and long-term improvements to the built environment to allow children to walk and bike to school safely; Apply for funding through the state Department of Transportation's Safe Routes to School program for both infrastructure and non-infrastructure projects; Support bicycle and pedestrian safety training for children in the schools or community; Participate in a Walk and Bike to School Day in your community or in other efforts to publicize the benefits of a local Safe Routes to School program; Encourage school officials to locate schools

within walking distance of neighborhoods; and Establish additional sources of funding for SRTS efforts.

Physical Activity Guidelines

The US Department of Health and Human Services' *2008 Physical Activity Guidelines* [\[link\]](#) recommends at least one hour of physical activity a day for children and adolescents, which cannot be met by recess or once-a-week PE classes alone. Walking or biking to school can supplement or meet this guideline. The guidelines identify key benefits of regular physical activity, including improved cardiovascular endurance and muscular fitness, favorable body composition, improved bone health, improved cardiovascular and metabolic health biomarkers, and reduced symptoms of anxiety and depression.

Healthy Schools

The Alliance for a Healthier Generation's *Healthy Schools Program Framework* [\[link\]](#) includes "School has a plan in place to promote safe walking and bicycling to school" as a criteria within the Physical Activity content area.

IOM Local Government Actions

The Institute of Medicine's *Local Government Actions to Prevent Childhood Obesity* [\[link\]](#) recognizes several actions related to physical activity, including: Collaborate with schools to develop and implement a Safe Routes to School program to increase the number of children safely walking and bicycling to schools; Improve access to bicycles, helmets, and related equipment for lower-income families, for example, through subsidies or repair programs; and **Create incentives for remote parking and drop-off zones and/or disincentives for nearby parking and drop-off zones at schools**, public facilities, shopping malls, and other destinations.

AAP Designing Communities

The American Academy of Pediatrics *The Built Environment: Designing Communities to Promote Physical Activity in Children* [\[link\]](#) recognizes Walking to School as a valuable opportunity and recommends "...ensure that children's ability to walk, play, and get to school safely are a top priority."

Transportation Prescription

Policy Link's *The Transportation Prescription* [\[link\]](#) states "...children and teens are already at risk for heart disease and type 2 diabetes, once considered 'adult' ailments. Today's youth may turn out to be the first generation in modern history to live shorter lives than their parents." Among many recommendations, says "Prioritize investments in bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure to make walking and biking safer and more convenient."

NASBE Meeting the Challenge of Childhood Obesity

The National Association of State Boards of Education's September 2009 issue of *State Education Standard* is themed "Meeting the Challenge of Childhood Obesity" [\[link\]](#) and has several articles related to Safe Routes to School, freely downloadable, including *Preventing Childhood Obesity: A School Health Policy Guide* [\[link\]](#).