

Public Health & Safe Routes to School

Stepping Forward

A program within the Building Healthy Communities initiative of the Cardiovascular Health, Nutrition, and Physical Activity Section, Michigan Department of Community Health
In partnership with the Michigan Department of Transportation



Background

The number of overweight children has risen over the past two decades (1) while physical activity levels have declined with the popularity of sedentary pursuits like screen time from TV, video games, and computers. The ways children commute to school are also part of an inactive lifestyle which contributes to an epidemic in overweight, obesity, and serious health consequences. Walking and biking to school have declined significantly over the last several decades with more students riding on the bus or in an automobile (Fig.1). It is recommended that children get at least 60 minutes of physical activity a day, but only 35.8% of children meet this recommendation (2).

Safe Routes to School (SRTS) is an international movement that teaches children to build physical activity into their day. SRTS encourages all children, including those with disabilities, to walk, bike, and roll to school. When children participate in regular physical activity, the risk for chronic disease is reduced (Fig. 2) and academic performance is enhanced.

1. CDC, (2008). Tips for Parents- Ideas and Tips to Help Prevent Childhood Overweight.
2. CDC (2006). YRBS, 2005.

Safe Routes to School Program

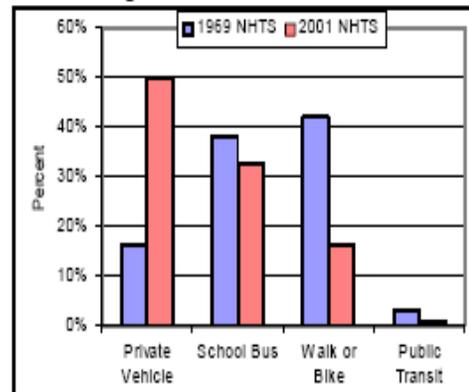
The SRTS initiative is designed to enhance the safety of routes to school and increase the number of students walking, biking, and rolling to school through promotion, education, collaboration, and design. SRTS programs can increase physical activity for all residents thereby building healthier communities.

The Michigan Department of Community Health has partnered with six local health departments to increase the physical activity levels of elementary school students (K-8). Local health departments will work with schools to implement a SRTS program by providing technical assistance and financial support to:

- Organize a core SRTS team
- Plan and implement a Walk to School Day event
- Assess student and parent attitudes & beliefs about walking/biking to school
- Audit routes to school and create plans to make them safer
- Create a SRTS action plan that focuses on education, encouragement, enforcement, and engineering
- Teach students to safely walk, bike, and roll to popular destinations which increases daily physical activity
- Most importantly, get students moving while having fun!!!!!!!!!!!!!!



Fig. 1 Decrease in Walking/Biking



Ages 6-12, 1969 & 2001
National Household Travel Survey

When students participate in regular physical activity, school scores for math, language, and reading increase over time. Schools with students who participate in limited physical activities had lower performance test scores.

Source: Hanson & Austin, Student Health Risks, Resilience, and Academic Performance in California: Year 2 Report, 2003.

Fig. 2: Effects of Increased Physical Activity

Regular physical activity improves health by:

- Reducing the risk of dying prematurely from heart disease
- Reducing the risk of developing diabetes
- Reducing the risk of developing high blood pressure
- Helping to maintain a healthy weight
- Helping to build and maintain healthy muscles, bones, and joints
- Reducing feelings of depression and anxiety
- Promoting psychological well-being

Source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Physical Activity and Health: A Report of the Surgeon General, 1996.

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Participating Health Departments & Schools

To increase the number of students getting daily physical activity, the following health departments are providing guidance to these elementary schools:

| Health Departments | Schools |
|-----------------------|--|
| Mid-Michigan District | -Schavey Road Elementary -Bath Elementary |
| Ingham | -Reo Elementary -Willow Elementary |
| Saginaw | -St. Charles Elementary -Stone Elementary |
| Washtenaw | -Thurston Elementary -Carpenter Elementary |
| Delta & Menominee | -Franklin Elementary -Webster Elementary -Cameron Elementary -James T. Jones Elementary |
| Tuscola | -Campbell Elementary -F.E. Schall Elementary |

Frequently Asked Questions:

What is Safe Routes to School (SRTS)?

Safe Routes to School is an international program-now at federal and state levels- that is designed to improve the safety of routes to school and increase the number of students walking, biking, and rolling to school through promotion, education, collaboration, and design. SRTS programs can increase physical activity for students as well as residents thereby building healthier communities.

Why do we need a SRTS program?

In just one generation, we have seen a great decrease in the number of children walking to school. In 1969, 42% of children walked to school while in 2001, only 16% walked to school (CDC, 2005). Safe Routes enables children to have fun walking and biking to school while being physically active. Research has shown that physical activity increases academic test scores and decreases health risks for chronic diseases. Moreover, active children have reduced feelings of depression and anxiety.

What is Walk to School Day and how does it fit in with SRTS?

Walk to School Day (W2SD) is an event where children all over the world walk to school. It will be held this year on October 8. W2SD is aimed at creating a more walkable America whether it is to enhance children's health, create safer routes, or to improve the environment and air quality. It is often used as a kick-off event for SRTS.

Who can apply for funds?

Through this program, grantees are local health departments in Michigan. MDCH has partnered with MDOT to provide funds for local health departments to 1) build capacity within local health departments so they become one of the SRTS leaders and facilitators within their jurisdiction; 2) provide leadership to selected elementary schools in their area interested in implementing the program; 3) serve as a leader by assisting with SRTS regional trainings to other public health and community leaders; and 4) increase the number of students walking, biking, and rolling to school.

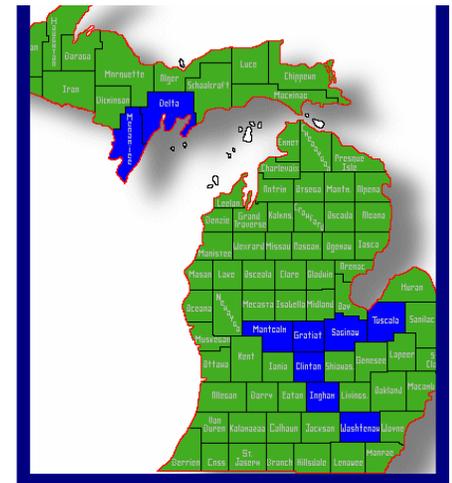
How do I know which local health department can assist my school?

Schools can visit the Michigan Association for Local Public Health website at www.malph.org and click on "Directory" for an alphabetical listing of local health departments.

Who Can I contact for more information?

For more information about the MDCH Safe Routes to School program, please contact Holly Nickel at NickelH@michigan.gov or (517) 241-0535 or Lisa Grost at GrostL@michigan.gov or (517) 335-9781.

Fig. 3: Counties that receive funding.



Michigan Department of Community Health is providing this program in cooperation with:

