

Safe Routes to School Plans Highlight Active Transportation in the QCA!

by: Be Healthy QC

SUMMARY

Safe Routes to School (SRTS) is a national program to encourage and foster safe, convenient and fun ways to bicycle and walk to/from school. SRTS programs can build support for better health and safety within communities. In the Quad Cities, Bi-State Regional Commission has supported elementary and middle schools to develop SRTS plans. A SRTS travel plan examines conditions around a school that might limit or discourage students from bicycling and walking, and offers potential solutions to forge better, safe ways to get there.



CHALLENGE

Writing a SRTS plan for Wilson Middle School gave transportation planners at Bi-State Regional Commission an opportunity to reach an older and larger student body and inform them of the positive benefits of walking and biking to and from school. Aside from these circumstances, there was also an opportunity to address geographic challenges Wilson Middle School faced. Wilson's school boundary is comprised of all of the boundaries of its feeder schools and therefore

encompasses most of the eastern part of Moline. The majority of Wilson Middle School's students live more than a mile away from the school. This posed a unique challenge in terms of negotiating how to promote safely walking and biking to school. The lack of sufficient sidewalk infrastructure within a half-mile radius of Wilson Middle School also posed a formidable challenge.

YOUR INVOLVEMENT IS KEY

This work was made possible with funding from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in support of Be Healthy QC. Administered by the Quad City Health Initiative, the Be Healthy QC project seeks to increase access to healthy food and beverage options and physical activity opportunities through the implementation of policy, systems and environmental change across the community. Follow our progress at behealthyqc.org and on Facebook by searching for Quad City Health Initiative.

"By boosting the benefits of walking to school, these schools set a model for students that could impact the rest of their lives. They may become the next responsible transit user, the next cyclist using bike lanes, or an avid user of trails."

- David Soliz (Bi-State Regional Commission)

Contact

Be Healthy QC

Quad City Health Initiative
Central Park Medical Pavilion 2, Ste 3100
1227 East Rusholme Street
Davenport, IA 52803
563-421-2826 phone
<http://www.behealthyqc.org>

SOLUTION

The goal of every SRTS plan is to promote walking and biking to students, and identify the safest ways to get to school. In the case of Wilson Middle School, Bi-State planners conducted parent surveys to assess their concerns. Planners also analyzed existing sidewalk infrastructure and traffic patterns near the school to better understand any barriers that the built environment may have caused. Planners took time to consider possible ways to address these challenges by including school officials and the city public works department for additional perspectives. Suggestions have ranged from sidewalk improvement and construction, to the use of speed signs and traffic flow recommendations.

RESULTS

Given that the distances students live from the school posed the biggest challenge to walking and biking to school, Bi-State planners emphasized other transportation options in the plan. Wilson Middle School has partnered with MetroLINK, the Illinois Quad Cities public transit service, to provide school bus routes to students throughout the city. The SRTS plan highlights these route options and encourages students to walk or bike to these routes if they live too far from the school. The plan also stresses the need for some sidewalk updates on busy corridors near Wilson Middle School and also the need for a possible multi-use trail that would better connect neighbors to the school. The result is a SRTS plan that is tailored to the specific needs of an urban middle school while capitalizing on existing partnerships.

SUSTAINING SUCCESS

Over the last three years, the Quad City community has increased the number of K-12 schools that have increased physical activity opportunities for school-aged children by developing Safe Routes to School Plans in 10 locations; 20 sites now have plans in place. All travel plans included steps for local schools to use to implement the proposed solutions. Enthusiasm for physical activity is growing through the SRTS travel plan process. It will take school leaders, elected officials, parents, teachers, law-enforcement and community groups working together to continue the momentum and make safe, convenient ways to/from school.