Chapter 14: How to Start Improving Your School Zone

The safety, health and well-being of children are the concern and the responsibility of the entire community. Parents, school districts, city and county officials (including engineers, planners, public works and law enforcement) all play a role in student pedestrian and bicycle safety.

Community members must work together to develop and maintain walk and bike to school plans. This partnership approach to student pedestrian and bicycle safety benefits the entire community. Improving walk and bike to school routes with added sidewalks, widened shoulders, bike lanes or other improvements creates a safer environment for everyone —24 hours a day. Working collaboratively with community partners ensures that pedestrian and bicycle safety concerns can be addressed by a variety of solutions including engineering improvements, law enforcement efforts, and education. This section provides an overview of the steps involved in the creation of a comprehensive student pedestrian and bicycle travel plan.

Find a Champion

Start by taking the reins or finding an individual or group to take up the challenge to improve your school's travel environment.

Seek Out Your Regional SRTS Coordinator

Safe Routes to School Regional Coordinators from eight Transportation Management Associations (TMAs) throughout New Jersey are ready, willing and able to offer advice and assistance in kicking off Safe Routes to School programs in communities from all 21 counties. Find your SRTS Regional Coordinator at www.saferoutesnj.org/about/regional-coordinator-tmas/

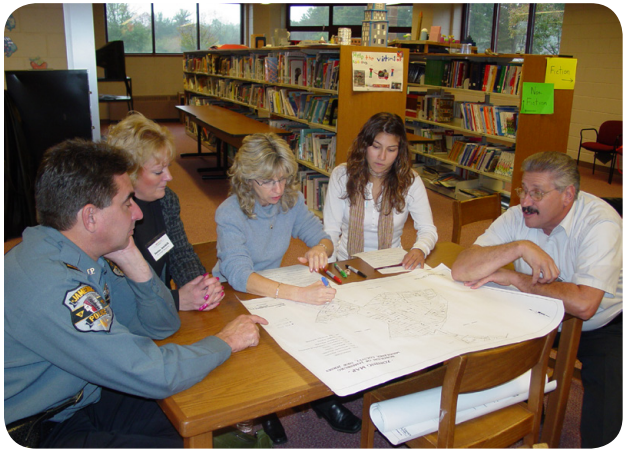
Prepare a School Travel Plan

A key question to be answered before moving forward is: Does your school have a Safe Routes to School (SRTS) Travel Plan? If yes, collect as much information as you can based on previous SRTS efforts and build on those resources. You should also look to see what issues and solutions have been previously discussed and determine their status before moving forward. If you do not have a School Travel Plan, enlist your Regional Coordinator to help you create one.

Image: VTC

Host a Kickoff Meeting

Once your champions have been identified and taken on the commitment to making changes, host a kickoff meeting for the project. Invite others who feel the same to form a task force. Be proactive about including people or organizations that can positively contribute to the process of implementing your vision such as your local department of public works. Together, craft your vision, establish next steps and assign responsibility.



Kickoff Meeting for the JFK School Travel Plan in Jamesburg, NJ. Image: The RBA Group

Define your Goal

Creating a vision at the onset will lead to the setting of goals and determining strategies for implementing them. Use your vision statement as an expression of what you want to see in the long-term as a result of the task force's work. Your goals and strategies for implementation should be geared towards achieving that outcome.

Map the Issues

The first order of business for the task force should be to inventory the areas in the vicinity of the school, especially the primary access routes used by students. Task force members should walk the school neighborhood, identity the major issues and document all findings through photos or maps. There are many tools available to evaluate the walkability and bikeability of the school zone. Before completing any walking or bicycling assessment, you will need to obtain two maps: A School Neighborhood Map and a School Site Map. These maps can be easily generated online at www.saferoutesnj.org/resources/stp/maps/ .

Once your mapping exercise has been completed, identify high priority problem locations on a map and ask others in the community to contribute their thoughts on the issues.

Sample Vision Statement

The Anytown Safe Routes to School Task Force will strive to bring awareness of the Safe Routes to School Program to the schools, identify infrastructure improvements necessary to make walking and bicycling to school safer, encourage more students to walk or bike to school through activities and events, enforce traffic laws, and incorporate walking and bicycling education into the school curriculum.

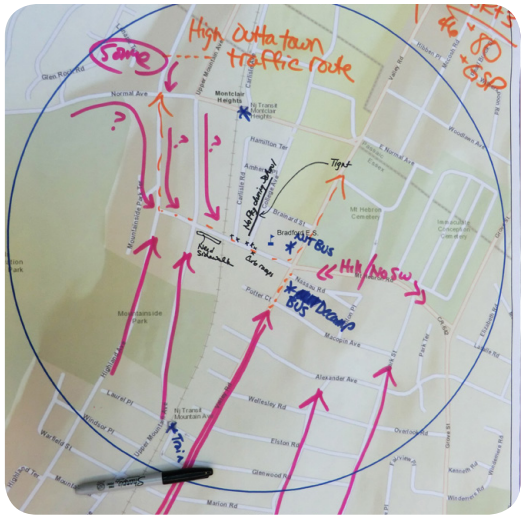


Image: The RBA Group

Consult with Others to Generate Solutions

There are numerous ways to approach solutions to school zone design. Create one central list that starts with the high priority locations and works its way down to lower priority locations. Work with local experts, law enforcement or municipal, county and state engineers to identify strategies. Separate your strategies into short-term, low-cost solutions, and long-term, high-cost solutions.

After creating your prioritized list of improvements and locations, and discussing it with members of your community, you may find that some issues can be easily solved with either short-term or temporary fixes. For instance, if speeding is identified as an issue you may want to install a speed radar feedback sign in the school zone as one of your solutions. However, there are some solutions that will require going through a more in-depth process. If changing the speed limit within the school zone is proposed as a solution, speeding must be verified through a speed study initiated by the police department. The results of that study will determine, for example, if a change in the speed limit is warranted or if the introduction of traffic calming is necessary to support a lowering of the speed limit. If missing sidewalk is an issue, the municipal engineer will need to be contacted and included in the conversation (if they are not already on your task force). In general, anything that requires construction will require additional study and can take time to secure funding, create the design, and obtain the proper permitting necessary for construction.

Example of an Action Plan Matrix

Montclair Safe Routes to School Program

Safe Routes to School Travel Plan – Bradford Elementary School

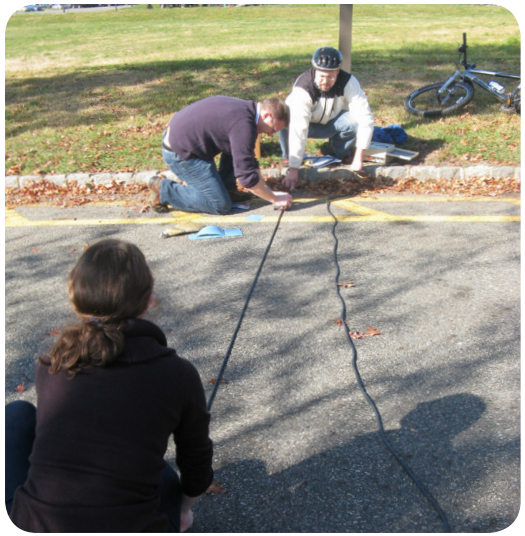
Action Plan Matrix – Bradford School Neighborhood Specific

Timeframe Definition	Cost Definition
Short-term = less than 3 months	**Low** = Less than $2,000
Mid-term = between 3 to 6 months	**Medium** = between $2,000 and $10,000
Long-term = longer than 6 months	**High** = more than $10,000

No.	Action	Partners	Timeframe	Cost
Lead Entity: Principal				
1	Create a school pavement "quilt" to define the drop-off zone along College Avenue	Township/Board of Education/PTA	Mid-term	Low
2	Order and install "No Idling Zone" signs around the school	Township/NJDEP/ Board of Education	Short-term	Low
3	Install "Pull up" signage in the red zone to reinforce use of the entire curb length	Township/Board of Education	Short-term	Low
4	Invite NJ TRANSIT to give their SAFETY RULES! Assembly presentation every year	Board of Education	Short-term/ ongoing	Low
5	Utilize the school website to advance Safe Routes to School safety campaign/messages	Board of Education	Short-term/ ongoing	Low

Decide What, When and How to Collect and Measure

You will not be able to measure change in the school environment if you do not know what to look for and where to look for it. Set up mechanisms to establish your baseline so that you will be able to measure impacts before, during, and after changes have been made to the school zone. Information on traffic volumes, speeds, crashes, yielding percentage at crosswalks, and number of students walking or biking to school can all be relevant to measuring impact resulting from infrastructure improvements.



Pneumatic tubes can record speeds and volumes. Image: The RBA Group

Use the Results of Initial Efforts to Inform Next Steps

Take the results you have identified and interpret the findings to inform the next steps. For example: Since the implementation of the use of temporary in-roadway "Stop for Pedestrian" crossing signs, has there been an increase in the percentage of motorists who stop for pedestrians in that particular crosswalk? If your results show a dramatic increase, it may show that a permanent installation is warranted. If there is no change in the percentage of motorists stopping for pedestrians, then you may want to consider other solutions for this site.

Be an Original

Transportation and safety issues are unique to each school zone. It is important to recognize that while your school zone and its physical attributes (crosswalks, traffic control signs, etc.) may resemble that of many other neighborhood streets, they are not the same. Your school zone is distinctive and should be designed to be the place where the safety of student travel takes precedence over a roadway's functional classification. The solutions proposed and implemented should be customized to fit your school neighborhood, population and priorities.

Start Small

Creating any type of program that is volunteer-based or minimally funded is difficult. Instead of jumping in headfirst, take your time and start when and where you feel most comfortable. To build momentum, start with the little wins or the low-hanging fruit that you know can easily be attained in a short amount of time.

Bring in Reinforcements

Utilize available resources to build your program such as the TMAs and SRTS Resource Center. They currently offer assistance in hosting bicycle and pedestrian events such as a walk/bike to school day, organizing educational events such as bike safety lessons, and developing planning and policy documents such as a walkability assessment.

Keep Your Eyes on the Prize

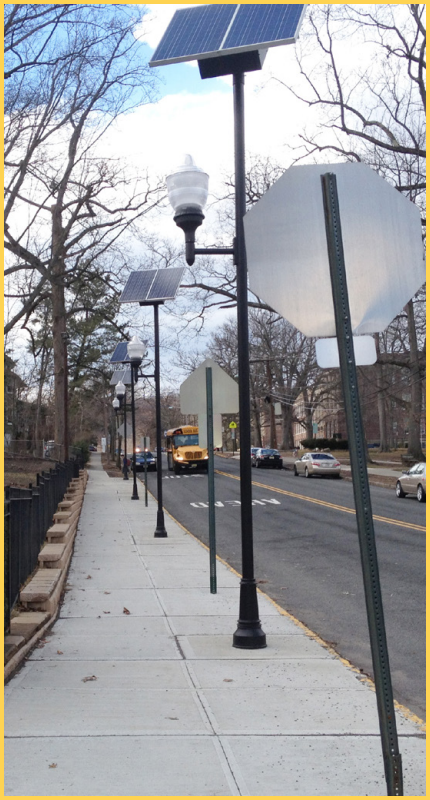
All your planning efforts are intended to lead to one ultimate goal: improving the overall access and safety conditions for families walking and biking to school. If implemented in conjunction with other programmatic strategies, these physical improvements will elevate walking and/or biking as safe, healthy and convenient options to getting to school.

Spotlight: Montclair SRTS Engineering Improvements at the Renaissance at Rand School

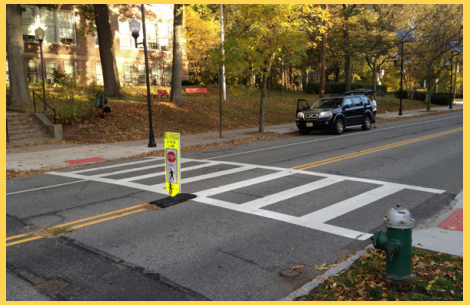
In 2011, Montclair showcased new changes to the school environment around the Renaissance at Rand School just in time for the new school year. The improvements made to the intersection and school zone were the result of a federal grant received for the school (previously named Rand) neighborhood in 2007. The Rand School was one of the three schools to participate in the NJDOT Safe Routes to School (SRTS) Pilot Program (www.nj.gov/transportation/community/srts/demonstration.shtm) when it debuted in 2005. As a result of the program, the school developed a travel plan highlighting recommendations for a variety of engineering improvements and programmatic activities. Schools that have completed a school travel plan are eligible for extra points in the application for NJ SRTS infrastructure grant funding.

These infrastructure improvements included new sidewalk, concrete driveway aprons, corner handicap ramps, high-visibility crosswalk striping, in-pavement "Stop for Pedestrians" crossing signs, solar powered pedestrian-scale lighting and radar speed monitor signs, and installation of new fences.

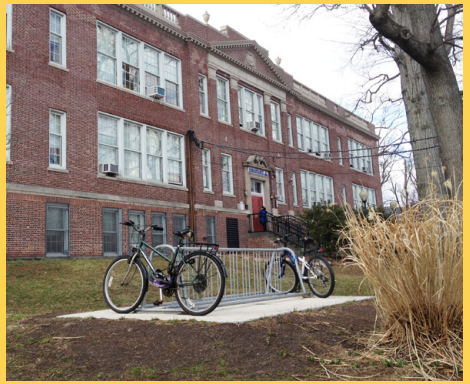
This construction was the final phase of a three-part SRTS program grant at Rand School which included educational and encouragement programs for the students, increased police enforcement in the school zone during school hours, and enhancements to pedestrian safety along and across the streets within the school zone. In 2009, Montclair applied and received federal funding to make similar improvements to school zones throughout Montclair.



Newly installed solar powered lighting along North Fullerton Avenue. Image: Arterial



Newly painted high visibility, continental crosswalk and in-pavement "Stop for Pedestrian"crossing sign. Image: Arterial



Newly installed concrete pad and bike rack at the front entrance of the school. Image: Arterial

Where to Find Funding

There are several places to seek funding for SRTS infrastructure improvements including:

Federal Programs

There are several federal programs under which funding for infrastructure improvements would be eligible.

The Transportation Alternatives Program (TA or TAP) is the largest federal source for trail and greenway funding under MAP-21, the most recent federal transportation funding law. Transportation Alternatives is a combination of two core active transportation programs from SAFETEA-LU—Transportation Enhancements and Safe Routes to Schools (SRTS). While Transportation Alternatives projects are federally funded, the funds are administered by the New Jersey Department of Transportation and the state's three Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs). Funding categories include: bicycle and pedestrian facilities; safe routes for non-drivers; abandoned railroad corridors for trails; environmental mitigation activity including storm-water mitigation; and community improvement activities including vegetation management, historic preservation, archaeological activities related to transportation projects, and boulevard construction.

To the right is a table listing possible infrastructure improvements and corresponding federal programs under which they would be eligible for funding. Note: All federal funding comes with specific procedures and requirements so be sure to check eligibility prior to completing the application.

Regulatory Process

In New Jersey, the creation of school-related traffic regulations pertaining to mid-block crosswalks, school speed limits, bike lanes, etc. must follow a regulatory process. This regulatory process is set forth in N.J.A.C. 16:27-4.1 through N.J.A.C. 16:27-5.1.

Desired Improvement	Program Eligible for funding under MAP-21
Crosswalk, new or retrofit	TAP, CMAQ, STP, HSIP, NHPP, UZA, 5310
Sidewalks, new or retrofit	TAP, CMAQ, STP, HSIP, NHPP, UZA, 5310
Traffic calming	TAP, STP, HSIP
Police patrol	TAP, UZA
Trail/highway intersection	TAP, CMAQ, STP, HSIP, RTP, NHPP
Bicycle parking facilities	TAP, CMAQ, STP, UZA, SGR, 5311, BBF
Spot improvement program	TAP, CMAQ, STP, HSIP
Bicycle lanes on roadway	TAP, CMAQ, STP, HSIP, NHPP, UZA,
Trail/highway intersection	TAP, CMAQ, STP, HSIP, RTP, NHPP
Signal improvements	TAP, CMAQ, STP, HSIP, NHPP
Curb cuts and ramps	TAP, CMAQ, STP, HSIP, NHPP, UZA, 5310
Paved Shoulders	TAP, CMAQ, STP, HSIP, NHPP, UZA
Safety brochure/book	CMAQ, STP, RTP, UZA, 402

Abbreviation	Program
402	State and Community Highway Safety Grant Program
5310	Enhanced Mobility of Seniors and Individuals with Disabilities
5311	Formula Grantsfor Rural Areas, Rural Transit Assistance Program, and Public Transportation on Indian Reservations
BBF	Bus and Bus Facilities
CMAQ	Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement
HSIP	Highway Safety Improvement Program
NHPP	National Highway Performance Program
RTP	Recreational Trails Program
SGR	State of Good Repair Grant Program
STP	SurfaceTransportation Program
TAP	Transportation Alternatives Program
UZA	Urbanized Area Formula Program

NJ SRTS Program

Federal funding is periodically made available for infrastructure projects through the NJ Department of Transportation. Infrastructure projects may include the planning, design and construction or installation of sidewalks, crosswalks, signals, traffic-calming and bicycle facilities. Visit the NJDOT website for more information, www.state.nj.us/transportation/community/srts/funding.shtm

County and Municipal Funding

Many low-cost engineering solutions such as new signs or fresh paint on crosswalks can easily be incorporated into the work plan for a local or County public works department. Do research to identify existing funds that are currently targeted to transportation, safety or health issues - like Capital Improvement Projects and operating budgets.

Health and Physical Activity Funds

Mini-grants from the health, transportation and environmental fields can also be a good potential source of funding. Given the sporadic nature of the solicitation cycle for these types of funds, subscribing to listservs such as the NJ Safe Routes to School e-mail discussion list may help to keep up with these types of opportunities. Sign up for the listserv at www.saferoutesnj.org/whats-happening/listservs/

Additional Funding Resources

- *Funding Pedestrian and Bicycle Planning, Programs and Projects* is a compilation of funding sources by the NJ Bicycle and Pedestrian Resource Center; bikeped.rutgers.edu/ImageFolio43_files/gallery/Funding/Documents/VTC_2009_Funding_Bicycle_Pedestrian_Projects_NJ.pdf
- The National Center for Safe Routes to School Funding Portal provides links to potential local, private, and federal funding information and a search-able database of federally funded SRTS programs; www.saferoutesinfo.org/funding-portal

Complementing Infrastructure Changes with Programmatic Efforts

Too often SRTS programs are limited to infrastructure improvements. Engineering solutions should be the result of a comprehensive planning process, such as a SRTS Travel Plan that follows the 5E approach (Engineering, Enforcement, Education, Encouragement and Evaluation). Any physical improvements to the school zone should be accompanied by programmatic improvements.

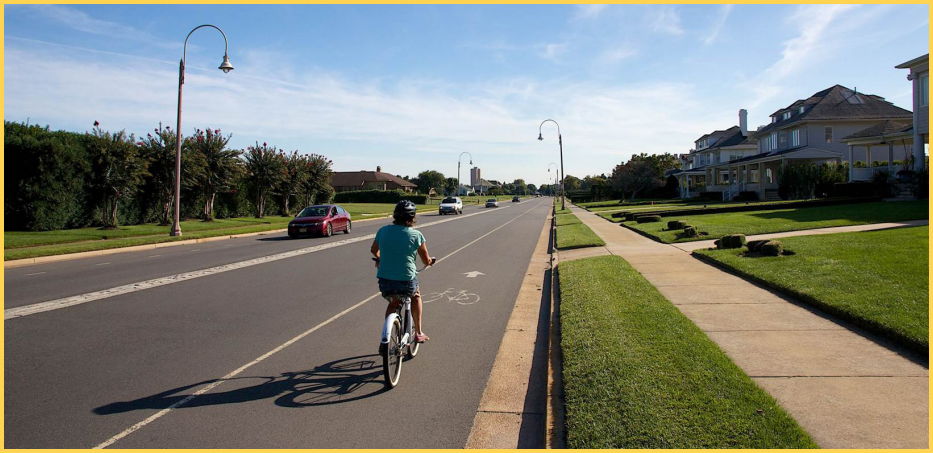
International Walk-to-School Day in West Orange. Image: The RBA Group

- Participate in International Walk to School Day and National Bike to School Day.
- Introduce bike, pedestrian and traffic safety into the curriculum.
- Utilize the school website to relay important information about changes to the school zone.
- Use the school handbook to include clear information about expected, safe behavior within the school zone for motorists, walkers, bikers, and bus riders. Ask that both the parent/guardian and the student sign-off that they have read the information.
- Create and hang banners near school entrances that include the rules of the school zone.
- Create a school-wide pledge that asks parents and students to walk, bike, drive, take the transit or the school bus safely.
- Ask the school board to pass a policy that supports walking and bicycling to school.
- Address walking and bicycling to school as a way to meet daily physical activity goals as part of your school wellness policy.
- Conduct school traffic counts.
- Host safety forums/presentations.

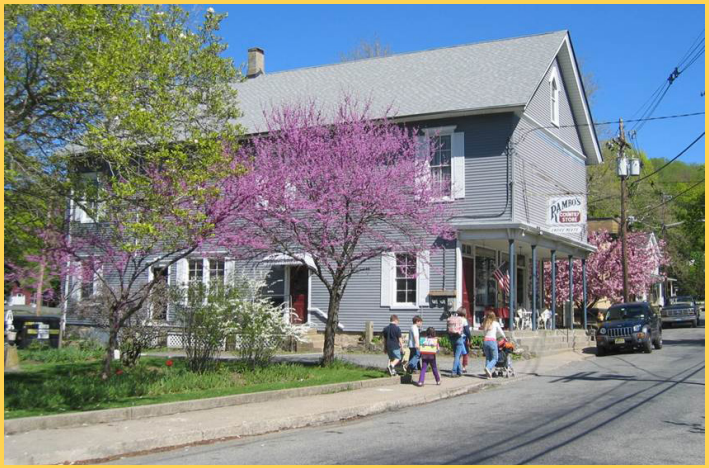
Complete Streets and Safe Routes to School - Perfect Together!

Complete streets are designed and operated to enable safe access for all users – pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists and transit riders of all ages and abilities. Instituting a Complete Streets policy ensures that agencies routinely design and operate the entire right of way to enable safe access for all users.

A community with a Complete Streets policy considers the needs of children every time a transportation investment decision is made. Roads near schools and in residential neighborhoods are designed and altered to allow children, the most vulnerable users of our streets, to travel safely. Complete Streets and Safe Routes to School have numerous synergies, so it is only natural for them to work together to advocate for and to strengthen the practice of safely walking and bicycling to and from schools and throughout our communities.



Ocean Avenue through Deal, NJ is an example of a Complete Street in a suburban setting with wide sidewalks and street lighting appropriate to the context.
Image: Parsons Brinckerhoff



Main Street in Califon, NJ is an example of a Complete Street in a more rural setting. Image: Parsons Brinckerhoff

There are several organizations and resources in New Jersey that can help with developing and implementing local Complete Streets policies, including:

- The New Jersey Bicycle and Pedestrian Resource Center collects all adopted Complete Streets policies around New Jersey.
- A short video, The Complete Streets Movement in NJ, highlights municipalities that have embraced Complete Streets.
- The Making Complete Streets a Reality Guidebook includes information on developing Complete Streets policies, updating local policies and procedures and more.
- The New Jersey Department of Transportation Complete Streets website includes information on success stories, workshops, etc.