Safe routes to school improve access and safety for adults and children traveling to schools by foot and bicycle. It is essential to engage local stakeholders to create a policy that is grounded in a community’s unique strengths and challenges. This fact sheet, a companion to The Sample Safe Routes to School Resolution for Oklahoma Local Governments, provides tips and resources for engaging schools and school districts that are important partners in creating safe routes to schools.
The Sample Safe Routes to School Resolution for Oklahoma Local Governments provides an action-oriented policy that municipalities can adopt to change the way they make decisions, leading to improved access and safety for adults and children traveling to schools by foot and bicycle. The Sample Resolution also describes how to actively engage local stakeholders in creating a policy that is grounded in a community’s unique strengths and challenges.

GETTING SCHOOLS ON BOARD FOR SAFE ROUTES

Schools and school districts are essential allies for a municipality interested in adopting and implementing a safe routes to school policy. Some schools are already pioneering safe routes to school projects or may already have safe routes to school policies. Discovering, partnering with, and learning from these schools can lead to launching a community’s safe routes to school campaign. Even if a community does not have any “local expert” schools already working on safe routes, it is essential to solicit schools’ input. Perhaps they have tried safe routes projects and can offer valuable lessons about what doesn’t work. Perhaps they have garnered support for safe routes projects and have ideas for prioritizing local efforts. Schools’ experiences and capacity will vary, even within a single community, and all should inform a strong safe routes to school policy.
Schools and school districts are often stretched thin; they are asked to incorporate more and more services for students, with dwindling resources. Rather than requesting assistance from a school or school district, safe routes to school advocates should approach a school as a learning partner. Seeking the hard-earned knowledge of school leaders and staff about their experience with safe routes to school can encourage thoughtful engagement. Even better, safe routes to school advocates can offer schools tools that may further, rather than hinder, their broader goals. Advocates can attend school board meetings and invite school leaders to engage in a dialogue about how safe routes to school can complement the work of schools and school districts. Champions for safe routes to school should be ready to demonstrate the benefits of local investment in safe routes to school policies:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School and School District Goals</th>
<th>Benefits of Safe Routes to School Efforts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Improving student achievement    | Walking or biking to school can improve behavior and academic performance:  
• Exercise before school helps students arrive focused and ready to learn.  
• Healthier students miss fewer days of school. |
| Promoting the health and well-being of students and staff | Walking or biking to school provides physical and mental health benefits:  
• People who get more physical activity improve their overall health and reduce their risk of obesity, diabetes, and other chronic diseases.  
• Physical activity helps reduce risk of stress and depression. |
| Securing the safety of students and staff on and near school property | Safe routes to school projects can reduce traffic and make streets safer for anyone who is not driving:  
• Ten to fourteen percent of morning rush-hour traffic is attributable to families driving their children to school—when they walk or bike instead, it reduces congestion and other incidents caused by traffic near schools. |
| Engaging communities and families to support school efforts | Safe routes to school can increase interconnectedness of schools, students and families, and the community:  
• People can become more familiar with neighbors and community when they walk to school.  
• Walking or biking increases the visibility of students, which can change the way the school is experienced by the surrounding community. |
| Working toward equitable outcomes among all students at all schools | Safe routes to school can improve access to safe, active transportation options, especially in high-need neighborhoods:  
• People biking and walking are typically least safe in low- and moderate-income areas.  
• There are long-standing infrastructure disparities in low-income areas. |
Resources for Working with Schools

There are resources available to help safe routes to school advocates strengthen their partnerships with schools in a variety of contexts. Advocates can selectively review the resources below based on their community needs and goals, using the results of their community assessments.

**Building relationships with school leaders:**
*Cultivating Support for Safe Routes to School: A Guide to Building Relationships with School Board Members and Superintendents* (Safe Routes to School National Partnership)

**For rural communities:**
*On the Move: Safe Routes to School Policies in Rural School District* (ChangeLab Solutions)
*Rural Communities: Making Safe Routes Work* (Safe Routes to School National Partnership)

**For Tribal communities:**
*Walking and Bicycling in Indian Country* (Safe Routes to School National Partnership, National Center for Safe Routes to School)

**For communities who need it most:**
*Working in Underserved Communities* (Safe Routes to School National Partnership)
*Implementing Safe Routes to School in Low-Income Schools and Communities* (Safe Routes to School National Partnership)

**Supporting funding and fundraising efforts:**
*Active Schools Fundraising* (Safe Routes to School National Partnership)
SUPPORTING SCHOOLS ON THE WAY TO SAFE ROUTES

Schools are inherently focal points of safe routes implementation. For communities that pass a safe routes to school policy, transit planning and other community-wide efforts will prioritize schools and surrounding areas in a new way. In addition to government changes, school and school-district programming and policies can bring broader community goals to bear in specific areas. Policies deserve particular encouragement from the local government and advocates, but even school programming can change day-to-day activities to foster a cultural shift around getting to and from schools.

In all communities, local governments and safe routes advocates can support schools in these and other implementation activities, even with different levels of policy commitment and resources, by doing any of the activities, or combination of activities, in the following list:

- Helping coordinate volunteers and other forms of community outreach
- Sharing resources from organizations like the Safe Routes to School National Partnership, the National Center for Safe Routes to School, and ChangeLab Solutions
- Creating awards and publicity campaigns to highlight safe routes efforts in the community
- Offering priority status or drafting assistance for grant applications, including support of joint applications and the exchange of letters of support, where applicable
- Furnishing safe routes resources, like posters, brochures, T-shirts, or bike racks
- Providing direct funding for school or district policies, programs, and events related to safe routes to school

Ways Schools Can Support Safe Routes to School

1. By creating their own, complementary safe routes to school policies.
2. By updating their required wellness policies: see Incorporating Safe Routes to School in Local School Wellness Policies from ChangeLab Solutions
3. By coordinating curriculum changes to support safe routes to school education: see the Arkansas Safe Routes to School Curriculum
4. By connecting schools, families, and neighbors through, for example, volunteer-led walking school buses: see Resources for Parents and Educators from the Safe Routes to School National Partnership
5. By participating in promotional safe routes to school activities: see the Fire Up Your Feet program from the Safe Routes to School National Partnership
6. By looking to schools that have worked on safe routes to schools: see the Safe Routes to School Local School Project: A health evaluation at 10 low-income schools from the Safe Routes to School National Partnership
REFERENCES


