



TOWNSHIPS TODAY

A QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER
BROUGHT TO YOU BY
YOUR TOWNSHIP

Everyone Plays a Role in Making the Community Safe for Kids

Start by Promoting Walking, Bicycling Awareness

Across Pennsylvania, shrinking funds and increasing mandates are taking a toll on school districts' budgets, and schools have been tightening their belts however they can.

And Pennsylvania's Safe Routes to School Coordinator Chris Metka is gearing up for the phone calls he knows he'll receive.

"Every year, it's like clockwork right before school starts," he says. "Once the reality hits that busing has been eliminated or cut back at a school, parents will call and ask what they can do now that their students no longer get picked up.

"I explain that as school budgets get tighter and tighter, one of the first things that schools will look to cut is transportation. Then I steer them to the resources available through the Safe Routes to School Program."

Safe routes offer many benefits

This federal initiative, administered in the commonwealth by the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation, touts the many benefits of having safe walking and bicycling routes for children and their families to travel to school and other places.

Obviously, getting kids to walk and bike to school promotes exercise and encourages healthy habits, both important missions. Communities also

benefit when more people choose foot and pedal power. Increased walking and biking means less traffic congestion, especially around schools, reduced air pollution, and ultimately cost savings for everyone.

"In the last few years, the focus of Safe Routes to School has shifted toward economics," Metka says. "Schools are looking to save money by reducing transportation costs. Parents are hoping to save on gasoline costs by driving children to school less often. And municipalities are seeking ways to stretch their dollars and provide a safe, comprehensive transportation network to residents."

Pennsylvania's Safe Routes to School Program can help all these groups meet their goals. Metka points out another important benefit of teaching safe walking and cycling skills to students: reduc-



Pennsylvania's Safe Routes to School Program is eager to educate the public and help communities create and improve walking and bicycling routes.

ing injuries and fatalities among this group of inexperienced pedestrians and bicyclists.

“Based on PennDOT crash data, we know that, on average, more than three pedestrians between the ages of 5 and 18 are injured in a reportable motor vehicle crash every day,” Metka says. Although the number of school-age pedestrian fatalities has declined in recent years, he notes that 17 fatalities occurred in 2011.

“That’s a number we must continue working to reduce,” he says. “Safe Routes to School encourages properly designed roads that safely accommodate pedestrians, bicyclists, and motor vehicles. Also, and just as important, the program teaches safe walking and bicycling skills. All of these efforts will help make children safer as they walk and bike around their communities.”

Partnering for the kids

In early 2011, PennDOT teamed up with the Pennsylvania State Association of Township Supervisors to create the Pennsylvania Safe Routes to School Resource Center.

“The center is focused on developing partnerships between townships, residents, and school districts to improve pedestrian safety, reduce traffic congestion, and expand transportation options,” says Karen Atkinson, who manages the resource center for PSATS.

“From assessments of walking routes near a school to crossing guard training, the Safe Routes to School Program offers a number of no-cost initiatives that encourage many different groups in the community — everyone from local elected officials and organizations to parents, teachers, and retirees — to work together for the benefit of the kids.”

Metka says the center’s initiatives have helped to spread the word about the need for safe routes.

“The center has also provided some valuable tools that local police, school officials, teachers, and others have taken advantage of to make pedestrian and bicycling safety a priority,” he says. For more information about the Safe Routes Program, call (717) 763-0930 and ask for Safe Routes or email info@saferoutespa.org.

“The Safe Routes to School Program offers a number of no-cost initiatives that encourage many different groups in the community — everyone from local elected officials and organizations to parents, teachers, and retirees — to work together for the benefit of the kids.”

What You Can Do to Get Involved

- **Participate in Walk or Roll to School Day, on October 3.** This internationally recognized day draws attention to the need for safe routes by encouraging children to walk and bicycle to school. Walk to School Day celebrations are more successful if the entire community, including parents and grandparents, police officers, and municipal and school officials, are engaged and participate in the event.

If the local school district hasn’t yet committed to hosting Walk or Roll to School Day, please encourage it to do so.

- **Encourage local police, teachers, and youth leaders to attend training to teach proper bicycle safety and riding techniques to children.** This course, offered through the Safe Routes to School Resource Center, enables participants to go home and set up similar training for young people in their community. Free training is scheduled at six sites in September and October. Additional details are available at www.saferoutespa.org.

- **Attend a class on how to be an effective, efficient, and safe crossing guard at train-the-trainer sessions around the state.** Participants are taught adult-learning techniques to set up training for crossing guards in their hometowns. These free sessions will be held in March and April 2013. Again, check out www.saferoutespa.org for more information.

- **Urge your school to perform a walk-**

ability audit. During this two-day assessment, a traffic expert evaluates student walking routes and recommends solutions ranging from low-cost measures, such as using pedestrian signs and crossing guards, to infrastructure improvements, such as sidewalk and crosswalk construction. School districts can arrange these audits with the resource center throughout the school year.

- **Encourage your school to apply for a grant to fund activities that promote, encourage, and enhance walking and biking.** Earlier this year, for instance, the Pennsylvania Safe Routes to School Resource Center awarded \$66,000 to 11 schools to fund a variety of projects, including assemblies, bike rallies and rodeos, teacher and crossing guard training, safety equipment, and promotional materials.

Be sure to tell the school that the deadline to apply for the next round of grants is **November 15**. As a prerequisite, schools must conduct a student tally and parent survey this fall to gauge current walking and biking habits and attitudes.

- **Tell your children’s teachers about the variety of free resources available from the Pennsylvania Safe Routes to School Resource Center.**

This includes lesson plans on pedestrian and bicycle safety geared to elementary and middle school students and a series of videos to teach bicyclists and motorists about bicycle safety and sharing the road. The lesson plans and videos can be downloaded for free at www.saferoutespa.org.

For more information, go to saferoutespa.org