

What is Safe Routes to School (SRTS)?

FACT SHEET

Safe Routes to School (SRTS) is defined as any effort making it safer and more convenient, accessible, and affordable for students and their families to walk, bike, or take public transit to school.¹ Through SRTS, students and their families can more easily incorporate physical activity into their day.

SRTS IMPROVES COMMUNITY HEALTH AND WELLBEING

- **Healthier Kids:**

By walking or bicycling to and from school, students get more exercise, increase their levels of cardiorespiratory fitness, reduce their risk of obesity and diabetes, and improve their overall health.^{2,3,4,5,6}

- **Better Academic Performance:**

Students who exercise before school are more focused and engaged and get better grades.^{7,8}

- **Enhanced Traffic & Child Safety:**

SRTS measures improve safety and access by lowering morning traffic congestion, decreasing the risk of crashes, and reducing school-aged pedestrian injury rates by up to 50%.^{9,10,11}

- **Improved Environment Quality:**

SRTS activation may result in fewer vehicle trips, which can lead to lower greenhouse gas emissions and decreased levels of air pollution.^{12,13}

- **Increased Connection:**

SRTS creates opportunities for increased family and community engagement.

SRTS IMPLEMENTATION: OVERVIEW OF SRTS PROGRAMS & POLICIES

SRTS Programs: The Six Es

SRTS programs encourage, teach, and guide students and families to walk, bike, and take public transit to school. They can be run by a local school district, nonprofit, parent volunteer group, or a partnership of these interested stakeholders. The activities of a comprehensive and integrated SRTS program are commonly organized into the Six Es: engagement; education; encouragement; enforcement; evaluation; and equity.¹⁴

1. **Engagement:** This E prioritizes listening to and working with stakeholders in the school and broader community (students, families, teachers, school leaders, and community-based organizations) to establish meaningful, ongoing opportunities for engagement in the program structure.
2. **Engineering:** This E aims to enhance student safety by making physical improvements to the built environment, such as sidewalks, bikeways, crosswalks, or lighting.

3. **Education:** This E focuses on spreading awareness of the benefits of SRTS, and teaching pedestrian and bicycle safety skills. Approaches include developing and disseminating trainings and educational materials.
4. **Encouragement:** This E involves generating excitement and community support for SRTS programs. Activities may include hosting events like *Walk or Bike to School Days*.
5. **Evaluation:** This E assesses how well a SRTS program accomplishes its goals. Activities include defining appropriate goals for the SRTS program, collecting relevant data, and assessing its effectiveness, including for example, by evaluating its impact on child safety.
6. **Equity:** This E ensures that SRTS programs benefit all communities and demographic groups. Approaches include targeting SRTS programs and investments in high-need areas, such as areas with high traffic injury rates.

SRTS Policies

Policy can be used to extend the reach of a SRTS program from a single school to an entire district or municipality. SRTS policies support the sustainability of SRTS initiatives by institutionalizing practices, providing more consistent program implementation, creating accountability, and establishing formal relationships and responsibilities.¹⁵ We highlight two local-level SRTS policy opportunities below.

Local Government Resolution (LGR): A local government can adopt a resolution to express its support for SRTS through various commitments, such as establishing a SRTS task force, prioritizing infrastructure improvements near schools, and formalizing partnerships with local school districts. For example, in 2015 the city of Cupertino adopted a resolution in support of SRTS that formalized a partnership between the city and a local school district and supported an established SRTS working group.¹⁵

Local School Wellness Policy (LSWP): SRTS can be incorporated into a local school wellness policy by adding language that explicitly calls for ongoing walking and bicycling programs, safe routes for bicycles through campus and ample bicycle storage, and/or integration of bicycle and pedestrian safety education into school curriculum.¹⁶

Beyond LGRs and LSWPs, SRTS promoters can push for the inclusion of SRTS considerations in planning documents such as general plans, active transportation plans, and bicycle or pedestrian master plans.¹⁷ These planning documents establish a community's vision for its future growth and development.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- [Champion Provider Success Story: SRTS](https://bit.ly/2M8mVrW) (bit.ly/2M8mVrW)
- [Building Blocks: A Guide to Starting and Growing a Strong Safe Routes to School Program](https://bit.ly/2Z1bW8Q) (bit.ly/2Z1bW8Q)
- [National Center for Safe Routes to School](https://bit.ly/38WZsnt) (bit.ly/38WZsnt)
- [ChangeLab Solutions: Incorporating SRTS into Local School Wellness Policies](https://bit.ly/2rZSLQI) (bit.ly/2rZSLQI)
- [ChangeLab Solutions: SRTS fact sheet and infographic](https://bit.ly/2PYwjj1) (bit.ly/2PYwjj1)

List of references available online at championprovider.ucsf.edu/references.

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