



TIPSHEET EVALUATION



SAFE ROUTES TO SCHOOL EVALUATION BEST PRACTICES

Around the country and throughout Minnesota, communities are conducting Safe Routes to School (SRTS) programs in order to enable and encourage children to walk and bicycle safely to school. Communities tailor a combination of engineering, education, encouragement and enforcement strategies to address the specific needs of their schools. Evaluation is an important component of any SRTS program.



Why should we conduct evaluations?

Every SRTS program, no matter the size, can benefit from evaluation. For local programs, evaluation can help:

- Make sure the underlying problem is identified and proper strategies are implemented to address the problem
- Set reasonable expectations and goals for your SRTS programs
- Monitor activities so that changes can be made to improve success
- Determine if the program is having the desired results. This is the main reason for any evaluation program, and information can be used to seek out funding opportunities, media coverage, and public support for your program

When should we conduct evaluations?

Data should be collected before, during, and after programs are implemented. Evaluation occurring:

- **Before** the program collects baseline information and helps plan activities and strategies.
- **During** the program identifies progress and/or challenges and areas needing improvement.
- **After** the program identifies changes in behaviors, attitudes and/or the physical environment and informs decisions about the future of the program.

What data should be collected, and how often should we collect it?

There are two kinds of information that should be collected – **quantitative** (numbers) and **qualitative** (words). While numbers are sometimes easier to handle and relay – for example, the number of students who walk and bike to school, qualitative data offers a richer understanding of the how or why behind numbers. A combination of data should be collected to get a full picture of your program:

- **Student Travel Tally: SRTS Student Travel Tallies** collect information about how students get to and from school using different modes of travel such as walking, bicycling, taking school bus, private vehicles, etc. It is helpful to collect this information at the beginning of your program, or your baseline, so that you can measure changes after SRTS activities. Continuous collection of student travel information helps to monitor changes in student travel. It's suggested that the Tallies be collected twice each school year – once in the fall semester and again in the spring semester.

- **Parent Survey:** **SRTS Parent Surveys** allow parents to voice their opinions and/or concerns about student travel and important travel-related issues. Parents are asked how their children travel to and from school, what barriers there are to walking or biking to and from school, and their attitudes about walking and biking to school. Responses help schools to establish a realistic goal for walking and bicycling and help to identify the top factors that influence parents' decisions about walking and bicycling. Collecting surveys on annual basis can help determine how to improve opportunities for children to walk or bike to school, and measure changes in parent attitudes as your SRTS program grows.
- **Walk Audit:** Walk Audits are field visits to school neighborhoods to observe how drivers, pedestrians, and bicyclists interact with each other and the built environment, to document existing infrastructure, and to identify safety conditions that need improvement. Each new school year brings a new set of students and families with new behaviors, and sometimes brings changes in the environment. Therefore, a Walk Audit should be scheduled early in each new school year.
- **Existing Data Sources:** Existing data sources can reveal important information, especially before a program begins. There are many potential sources with a variety of helpful information. Statistics about pedestrian and bicycle crashes may be available from local or state injury prevention programs, hospitals or law enforcement agencies. The school or town may already have a walking route map, and potentially, the school or local health agency may already ask students about their attitudes and behaviors regarding physical activity which would eliminate the need to collect some data. The school may also have records that reveal how many students live within walking and bicycling distance. After identifying and making a list of these sources, annually contact the groups to obtain updated information.
- **Interviews:** Interviews can be used to gather more specific information about experiences and opinions than might be collected from written surveys. Groups that may be able to provide additional insight to your SRTS program can include crossing guards, students, law enforcement officers, etc.



How do we collect data if we don't work within the school?

Data collection, such as student travel to and from school or surveys of parents, will require close coordination with the school. For example, schools may have rules about collecting information from students and it will require time from teachers, school staff and administration in order for data collection to be a success.

Collecting data from students can be challenging. Be aware that data are routinely collected from students to meet state requirements and additional requests may be difficult to accommodate. Furthermore, parent permission may be needed before surveying students. The following tips come from program implementers who have fostered relationships that have eased the way for data collection:

- Learn and act on the permission requirements early if students are to be surveyed.
- Develop a relationship with and gain the understanding of the school board and school principal as to why Safe Routes to School (SRTS) is important and how data collection will help.
- Learn what data is already being collected in what manner and see if there is a way to coordinate efforts.
- Find a key supporter of the SRTS data collection efforts in the administrative office.

What should be done with evaluation findings?

Information collected during evaluation should be organized and reviewed to inform development and implementation of your SRTS program. Some questions to consider may include:

- Are your walking and bicycling goals realistic?
- Have you made any progress towards your goals? If so, what did you implement that could be attributed to increasing the number of walkers and bicyclists? How can you use this success to make further progress toward your goals?
- Have any new safety issues surfaced?
- Have the priorities shifted within the list of desired engineering improvements?
- Are more students now coming from another direction that was less frequently traveled in the past?
- Are attitudes and perceptions about walking and bicycling different than in past years? Should the focus shift to safety education or adult supervision?

Evaluation findings can be **published** to raise awareness and increase visibility, and to reinforce and commend the support of key program partners and stakeholders. Data can also be used to educate stakeholders about the prioritization of concerns and next steps for your SRTS program. Publicizing the evaluation outcomes and findings can be as easy as:

- Posting information on the school website and in newsletters
- Sharing successes with the local media outlets
- Identifying unresolved issues and providing the data to key decision makers or elected officials
- Scheduling a press conference or a local presentation



Source: http://guide.saferoutesinfo.org/pdf/SRTS-Guide_Evaluation.pdf