



Active and Safe Routes to School

School Travel Planning

FACT SHEET

What is Active and Safe Routes to School?

Active & Safe Routes to School (ASRTS) promotes the use of active transportation (e.g. walking and cycling) for the daily trip to school by students and their families.

ASRTS addresses health and traffic safety issues while taking action on air pollution and climate change.

What is School Travel Planning?

School Travel Planning brings together key community stakeholders to address the issues of sustainability, safety and health associated with transporting children to school.

Why should my school be involved in this program?

Student Health

- Almost 60% of Grey Bruce residents are overweight and obese and less than 50% of Grey Bruce residents are physically active.
- 87% of Canadian children and youth are not meeting the recommended guidelines for 90 minutes of physical activity per day.
- 57% of Canadian children are so sedentary that they are harming their health.
- Recent research suggests that while 68% of Canadian children live within a 30 minute walk from their school, only 36% walk as a rule.

Student Safety

- Using motorized vehicles as a primary mode of transporting children to and from school has led to unsupervised and empty neighbourhood sidewalks that are considered unsafe places for children. With fewer parents monitoring their sidewalks, children who do have to walk to school alone are left even more vulnerable to the dangers of traffic, bullying, harassment or abduction.
- 20% of Canadian parents who don't feel safe about letting their children walk to school say they would let them do it if it was safe.
- Extreme traffic congestions around schools at drop off and pick up times leads to increased risk of injury for children and adults who must walk through this area.



- Younger children who walk to school with a parent or caregiver have the chance to build up their road sense over time, making them better prepared for independent journeys when they get older.

School Performance

- High grades and performance on cognitive measures are consistently associated with children who are more active.
- Physical activity helps a child's growth and development, builds self-esteem, and helps with concentration and learning.
- A direct link has been made between people who exercise and improved interpersonal relationships, as well as reduced incidence of depression, anxiety and fatigue.
- Road traffic is the main cause of human exposure to ambient noise. Noise can interfere with mental activities requiring attention, memory and the ability to deal with complex analytical problems.

Environmental Awareness

- Vehicular transportation creates approximately 30% of Canada's emissions of carbon dioxide, a powerful greenhouse gas.
- Our dependency on motorized transportation has led to a continuing decline in air quality, and rising cases of asthma in children. Due to their smaller lung capacity, children breathe three times more air than adults do, and therefore three times more pollution too.
- Vehicles that idle in the drop-off and pick-up zones around a school contribute to a decreased air quality around the school.
- Families that participate in active transportation, like a Walking School Bus, can prevent almost 1,000 kg of carbon dioxide from being released into the atmosphere – and save money on fuel costs as well!

Who else should be involved in this program?

Typically, stakeholders in an ASRTS program in any community may include:

- School boards
- Municipal transportation engineering and planning staff
- Police
- Public Health units
- Politicians and municipal councils
- School principals
- Parent councils
- Teachers
- Other community organizations that have a stake in the safe travel of children to and from school



What are some of the successes of the program?

- Ontario's Walkability Study discovered that 75% of Ontario elementary school students surveyed would prefer to walk or cycle to school.
- One grade 4 student participating in an Ontario ASRTS program summed up the program: *"Everyone in our school tries to walk for a healthy body and safer streets. I like walking to school with my friends because we could talk. Walking is way better than riding in a car because walking is more fun than getting a ride."*
- A 5 year old student participating in IWALK: *"The best part was walking in the hard rain. I walked with a friend and saw some worms and birds."*
- It is estimated that almost 3000 schools in Ontario have participated in at least one ASRTS event over the past 7 years
- Parents and educators who participate in Active and Safe Routes to School are clearly better informed about the impact of current transportation choices than parents who have never been exposed to this program.

What do we have to do?

There are a variety of options available for schools. You can participate in just one, or all of the ideas, depending on what works best for your school.

- International Walk to School Day (IWALK)
 - This is the annual, premier event of the Active and Safe Routes to School Program each October. It is a mass celebration of active transportation and is used to introduce communities to the ASRTS program.
- No Idling at School
 - Parents are updated about the No Idling at School project through the school newsletter or information cards that are sent home with students. Parents can be given stickers or cards to display in their windshield as a reminder to themselves and a message to others that they don't idle. Students can make banners and signs in art class to remind parents not to idle.
- Walking School Bus
 - Volunteer parents who live on the same block or in the same apartment building can start out walking together, sharing responsibility and building social networks along the way. Later, as trust is built and schedules are organized, taking turns can save time.
- Cycling School Buses
 - Can be set up in the same manner as Walking School Buses. Participants should be provided with cycling safety training and must wear helmets.



- **Walking Buddies**
 - This is a great way for older students (grade 5 and up) to walk to school in safety with their friends. Students who walk together look out for each other and enjoy the responsibility that this entails.
- **Walking Wednesdays, Trekking Tuesday or Phys. Ed Friday**
 - Set aside one day each week/month to walk to school. This is a good way to introduce the idea of walking to school and also allows families an opportunity to experience it for themselves.
- **Cross Canada Walking Map**
 - It's 7428 kilometres from St. John's Newfoundland to Vancouver, British Columbia. Use the Cross Canada Walking Map as a motivation for students to walk to and from school, and chart their progress across the country.
- **Kilometre Club**
 - During recess or lunch, students walk or jog around the schoolyard or local park. Students count the total number of kilometres traveled by the class, and keep their own personal log of kilometres traveled.
- **Walk a Block**
 - This strategy works well for families who live too far from their school to make walking feasible, or for working parents who drop their children off at school on their way to work. Work with local municipal staff to identify safe and legal parking spaces a few blocks from the school. This will encourage driving parents to park their car in these spots and walk the remaining blocks with their children.

Where can I find out more about Active and Safe Routes to School and School Travel Planning for my school?

For more ideas and information, check out the Green Communities Canada, Active and Safe Routes to School website: <http://www.saferoutestoschool.ca>

For resources and support for starting a program at your school, contact the Grey Bruce Health Unit at 519-376-9420 or 1-800-263-3456.