

# DNPAO State Program Highlights

## *Active Transport to School*



### State-Based Programs

The Nutrition, Physical Activity, and Obesity Program (NPAO) is a cooperative agreement between the CDC's Division of Nutrition, Physical Activity, and Obesity (DNPAO) and 25 state health departments. The program goal is to prevent and control obesity and other chronic diseases through healthful eating and physical activity.

### DNPAO Target Areas

The state programs develop strategies to leverage resources and coordinate statewide efforts with multiple partners to address all of the following DNPAO principal target areas:

- **Increase physical activity**
- Increase the consumption of fruits and vegetables
- Decrease the consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages
- Increase breastfeeding initiation, duration, and exclusivity
- Reduce the consumption of high energy dense foods
- Decrease television viewing

### Strategies Related to Active Transport to School

DNPAO developed six guidance documents to provide assistance and direction regarding each of the principal target areas. The guidance document developed to increase physical activity includes the following strategies:

- Community-wide campaigns
- Point-of-decision prompts to encourage use of stairs
- Individually adapted health behavior change programs
- Enhanced school-based physical education
- Social support interventions in community settings
- Creation of or enhanced access to places for physical activity combined with informational outreach activities
- **Active transport to school**
- Street-scale urban design and land-use policies
- Community-scale urban design and land-use policies
- Transportation and travel policies and practices

### Active Transport to School

Active transport to school initiatives are designed to encourage and support youth to engage in active transportation (e.g., walking, bicycling, skating) to school. These initiatives take several forms, including KidsWalk, Walk to School, Walking School Bus, and Safe Routes to School. They may involve urban-design elements and practices, land-use policies and practices to improve conditions for active transport, and non-infrastructure activities, such as walking programs. This strategy can be implemented at elementary, middle, and high schools.

### State Activities Related to Active Transport to School

#### Iowa

#### Improving the Walkability of Iowa Communities

In spring 2010, the Iowa Department of Public Health presented local health departments with the opportunity to apply for \$500 mini-grants to utilize a walkability assessment tool called the Iowans Fit for Life "Walking with a Purpose." The communities selected were expected to organize a walkability assessment, use the provided tool, and complete a report about their efforts.

The "Walking with a Purpose" assessment tool was developed by the Iowa Department of Public Health as a resource to assist communities in conducting walkability assessments in diverse neighborhoods with various partners. It is recommended that the assessment be conducted on a neighborhood's main route. The tool includes a checklist of community features, including the amount of room to walk, ease of crossing the streets, safe behavior of drivers, safe behavior of pedestrians and cyclists, aesthetics of the route, and connectivity of the sidewalks. Once the assessment is conducted, the partners involved are increasing awareness of how their community environment facilitates or challenges physical activity and are encouraged to use the information collected to become advocates for a more walkable community.

As a result of these efforts, 13 communities utilized the assessment tool, and many communities engaged city officials, key school personnel, and students. The results of the assessments will be shared with county boards of supervisors, city councils, and school boards.

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#### Minnesota

#### Safe Routes to School in Minnesota

The Minnesota Department of Health convenes a Safe Routes to School committee within the Active Living Advisory Group (a coalition of state agencies and organizations collaborating and coordinating efforts to improve opportunities for active living) to make recommendations on statewide policy changes related to Safe Routes to Schools. The committee is composed of key stakeholders and community organizations focused on implementing policy, systems, and environmental changes.

With input from the Safe Routes to School committee, the Department of Health has developed a statewide training for communities implementing active living strategies to promote regular physical activity, including Safe Routes to School, and plans to educate key decision makers about the value of Safe Routes to School.

The Minnesota Department of Health has also been working to implement components of the Statewide Health Improvement Program (SHIP), an initiative to help Minnesota residents live longer, healthier lives by reducing the burden of chronic disease. Through SHIP, 181 schools that serve over 79,000 students have implemented Safe Routes to School or walking school bus policies.



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**Montana****Montana Safe Routes to School Efforts in Rural Settings**

To better understand the issues related to active transport in rural areas, the Montana Nutrition and Physical Activity Program partnered with the Montana Department of Transportation to bring the Safe Routes to School national course to the city of Shelby (population, 3,500). Once the training was complete, the two organizations collaborated with Shelby community members to develop a Walking/Wheeling Wednesday program, which has obtained Safe Routes to School funding for the past four years. Because of the success of the program in Shelby and the increased obesity prevalence in rural areas, the Montana Nutrition and Physical Activity Program decided to replicate components of the Shelby initiative in two additional regions.

The Nutrition and Physical Activity Program supported the efforts of the two funded communities by building community capacity through webinars, site visits, and conference calls; providing technical assistance on baseline data collection, which captured the number of children currently walking, identified parental barriers, and assessed environmental barriers; helping the communities apply for Safe Routes to School funding; and supporting the communities' efforts to develop realistic, non-infrastructure Safe Routes to School programs that include elements of education, encouragement, and enforcement.

As a result of these efforts, the two recently funded communities and Shelby have accomplished the following:

- All of the communities have established coalitions on active transport to school.
- Two of the communities have successfully leveraged Safe Routes to School funding to increase their capacity.
- All of the communities have provided increased opportunities for children to walk and bicycle to school through ongoing Safe Routes to School events, including a Walking and Wheeling Wednesday Program in Shelby.

In addition to these community-level achievements, the Montana Nutrition and Physical Activity Program obtained a Safe Routes to School state network partnership grant and has since developed a statewide coalition to work on active transportation

policy issues. The coalition has developed model state policies for school siting and Complete Streets and has reinstated a statewide bicycle and pedestrian education curriculum for schools.

Future plans include securing additional Safe Routes to School funding to improve the built environment in rural communities. The Montana Nutrition and Physical Activity Program also plans to increase walk to school participation among students who live far away from school by establishing remote drop-off locations to encourage children to walk or bike part of the route to school. The successes and challenges of these community efforts will be compiled and disseminated on the Montana Nutrition and Physical Activity Program Web site and at upcoming statewide webinars.

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**Washington****Safe Routes to School in Washington**

The Washington State Department of Health, the Washington Department of Transportation, the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, the Washington State Bicycle Alliance, and additional advocacy groups and public partners are working together to create new grant programs and provide support to schools and communities initiating and maintaining Safe Routes to School programs. The activities of the Safe Routes to School programs include sidewalk, street safety, and design improvements; education to encourage children to be active by walking and bicycling; enforcement to improve traffic safety around schools; and community health initiatives to link parents and children with community efforts that support a healthier lifestyle.

Specifically, the Washington State Department of Health has been essential in providing funding, technical assistance, and trainings to eight local health departments to implement a Safe Routes to School program that is supported by policy and environmental strategies in two low-income schools.

Each site is required to develop a Safe Routes to School advisory committee, conduct walking and bicycling audits, develop a safe walking map, sponsor school assemblies, and provide ongoing Safe Routes to School trainings to parents and teachers. In addition, the Washington State Department of Health has compiled and offered resources for sites, including walking

and bicycling audit tools and state law examples, to assist in implementation of policy and environmental strategies.

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**Need more information?**

Visit the CDC DNPAO Web site to learn more information about our funded state programs:  
<http://www.cdc.gov/obesity/stateprograms/index.html>