

SRTS CASE STUDY:

Eugene, Oregon

A Team Approach to Safe Routes to School Builds “Kidical Mass”

SafeRoutes

National Center for Safe Routes to School



CASE STUDY

Introduction

Roosevelt Middle School and the surrounding community of Eugene, Oregon, have successfully developed a team of community organizations committed to providing Safe Routes to School (SRTS) for children.

Roosevelt Middle School was constructed in 1942, and the combination of a small parking lot and high traffic volume created safety hazards for students who walked or bicycled to school. In 2005, Roosevelt began addressing health and safety issues through a School Wellness Committee comprised of parents, community members and school personnel, as well as city officials, engineers, planners, transit officials and a professor of urban planning at the University of Oregon.

“I think we’re on track to be a strong program, and it’s really because of building that relationship with the district,” said Shane Rhodes, SRTS Program Manager for Roosevelt Middle School. “Having many collaborators is important; each one will play a key role.”

Activities

Roosevelt Middle School received \$37,532 for a one-year pilot program, which began in October 2007. The funds covered the hiring of a SRTS Coordinator and a laptop and projector to share the SRTS program with feeder schools and other groups. The grant also funded the cost of bicycle helmets, safety vests and modest incentives for SRTS events, according to Julie Yip, Oregon SRTS Coordinator.

Another key component to this program’s success has been Roosevelt Middle School’s match of \$20,493 in in-kind services. The school contributed \$10,110 in volunteer time for SRTS events and for the SRTS Coordinator to attend the Seattle ProWalk/ProBike Conference as part of a panel discussion on partnership development, Yip notes. The school donated printing and equipment and also matched \$7,310 in other direct costs that included bicycle instructor training.

“Oregon SRTS investment at the Roosevelt project has seen great bang for the buck,” Yip says, adding that the program has grown under the coordinator’s direction from the middle school to mentoring schools within the district and now involves the city of Eugene.

The Oregon SRTS program has granted the Eugene 4J School District another two-year award (FY 2009–2010) for \$120,962 to continue SRTS activities and establish a sustainable program in Eugene.

As the middle school SRTS program manager, Rhodes divides his time among working with Roosevelt Middle School, the five elementary schools and the district on policies. He is helping the school create a resource guide that will include a document and CD with SRTS ideas and contact information as resources to help other schools develop their programs. Rhodes said the first thing schools need to do is develop an action plan to determine their needs in creating a successful SRTS program.



Pedestrian and bicycle safety is an important component of the Roosevelt SRTS program.

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The school strengthened its bicycle safety program by having the school’s physical education teacher become a trained bicycle safety educator through a certification program from the League of American Bicyclists. During the 2007 to 2008 school year, 22 percent of sixth graders participated in a bicycle safety program, Rhodes said, and he anticipates that in 2008 to 2009, 100 percent of sixth graders will participate. The school has its own fleet of bicycles and helmets, thanks to a grant from the Eugene Education Fund and an ACT Bicycle mini-grant. With the bicycles on-site, students can practice what they learn.

“Having it (bicycle education) at the middle school, that’s where real change starts to happen,” Rhodes said. “Students are trying to figure out what they want to do; it’s a key part; you can have some solid bike education.”

But he added that elementary education is also important.

Another success for Roosevelt is that it has been selected as the first Oregon site for the Freikomometer, which provides a high-tech way to count students who ride their bicycles to school. During the 2007 to 2008 school year, five Boulder Valley School District, in Colorado, used the Freiker Program. Students insert a radio frequency identification tag into their bicycle helmets, and when they ride beneath the Freikomometer installed near the bike racks, it counts the bicyclists once a day. The data is sent to a database, which makes it easy to track how often students bicycle to school.

“Students were really motivated,” Rhodes said. “It also encourages helmet use.”

Rhodes is working to develop ways to fund the Freiker automated counting through pledges.

Roosevelt is participating in other efforts to address pedestrian and bicycle safety. After distributing the SRTS parent survey in February 2007, in April the Wellness Committee designated two alternative lots adjacent to the school as “preferred parking” areas to reduce the number of single occupancy motor vehicles using the school’s small main parking lot. To increase the number of parents who use the lots, the school publishes reminders in the monthly newsletter, and once a month the school’s Bike Phantom gives out prizes and raffle tickets to students who are dropped off at the lots. During Walk & Roll Week, the school sponsors a quesadilla breakfast for those who park in the preferred “Park and Stride” areas, with a goal of decreasing campus drop-offs by 30 percent.

At the school’s request, the city assists safety efforts by providing the school with parking enforcement officials during the first weeks of the school year. These officials help reinforce proper pedestrian and motor vehicle traffic laws to ensure the safe use of the main parking lot and main roads around the school. The city repainted the crosswalks at two major intersections in front of the school, which improved drivers’ views of the cross points and created a safer place for the students to cross.



Students bicycling to Roosevelt Middle School.

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— Shane Rhodes, SRTS Program Manager for Roosevelt Middle School

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Milestones

In October 2007, approximately 80 students, parents and staff from Roosevelt Middle School participated in the school’s first annual International Walk to School Day. One year later, thanks to efforts of a team of community members committed to Eugene’s SRTS program, the school district has had a 300 percent increase in participation in International Bike and Walk to School Day with 9,000 students from 28 schools participating.

Roosevelt Middle set a goal to have 80 percent of its sixth graders complete the Bike Education Class in 2007-2008. Rhodes worked to develop Kidical Mass community bike rides that begin with safety instruction and end with a bike ride to a fun location such as a park or ice cream shop. The events educate all levels of bicyclists and also promote networking

In January 2008, the City of Eugene held a Walk & Bike Summit that encouraged community members to come together to share ideas. One of the three breakout sessions was targeted for SRTS. After the Summit, the Eugene SRTS Team was formed and included members of the City Council, a university professor, a pediatric nurse, a public transit employee working on a Smart Ways to School program, a community group promoting “healthy and active youth” and a Roosevelt representative. The team is finalizing its Goals and Activities and working to expand its membership to include representatives from two local school districts as well as a student. The team is writing a position paper to bring to the school board to discuss transportation choices and goals.

“We have a really good, strong team,” Rhodes says, “with buy-in” from the school district, Lane Transit District’s Smart Way to School Program, the city’s Transportation Planning Department, the University of Oregon’s Planning, Public Policy and Management Department, the Lane Coalition for Healthy Active Youth and the Bicycle Transportation Alliance.

Successful SRTS efforts in the pilot project have been spreading to other schools in the district, and Rhodes said that is a key goal of the pilot project. “Every school has its own needs,” he notes.

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