

# Inclusion of Children with Disabilities in Safe Routes to School: Progress and Opportunity in New Jersey



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Edward J. Bloustein School  
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NEW JERSEY  
Safe Routes to School



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### **New Jersey Safe Routes to School**

The mission of the New Jersey Safe Routes to School Program is to empower communities to identify and overcome barriers to walking and cycling to school through the creation of partnerships and implementation of projects and programs that make walking and biking to and from school an appealing and safe daily activity.

### **The New Jersey Safe Routes to School Resource Center**

The New Jersey Safe Routes to School Resource Center assists public officials, transportation and health professionals, and the general public enables in creating safer and more accessible walking and bicycling environments for children in New Jersey through education, training, and research. The Center is supported by the New Jersey Department of Transportation through funds provided by the Federal Highway Administration.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction .....	4
Experiences With SRTS Inclusiveness .....	5
Increasing SRTS Inclusiveness .....	10
Suggestions and challenges from SRTS Coordinators.....	10
Proactive Steps Toward Increasing Inclusion of SRTS.....	13
Develop resources to assist SRTS Regional Coordinators .....	14
Update existing resources for inclusion.....	15
Offer additional training on inclusion .....	16
Plan and implement an inclusive SRTS event .....	17
Purchase and share equipment .....	17
Recommendations and Next Steps.....	17
Update and Develop Resources to Increase Inclusion.....	18
Implement Training.....	18
Plan and Implement Inclusive SRTS Events.....	19
Research Purchase of Equipment .....	19
Conclusion.....	20
Appendix A: Interview Questionnaire for SRTS Coordinators.....	22

## INTRODUCTION

The New Jersey Safe Routes to School (SRTS) Resource Center at the Alan M. Voorhees Transportation Center (VTC) at Rutgers University is committed to exploring and pursuing strategies to broaden Safe Routes to School activities and events to include children with disabilities more effectively. To accomplish this goal, the team has undertaken a variety of activities in recent years, including the following:

- Conducted a series of interviews with stakeholder organizations representing the interests of persons with disabilities across the state of New Jersey and performed a literature review to gather information on diverse disability categories as well as the benefits and strategies related to participation of children with disabilities in physical activities, including SRTS programs nationwide;
- Convened classroom-style training for NJ SRTS Regional Coordinators to inform them of the interviews and literature review findings as presented in a VTC report entitled *Broadening Outreach Efforts of Safe Routes to School to Children with Disabilities – Assessing Opportunities in New Jersey* which was released in December 2012. The training focused on the importance and benefits of inclusion, a sensitivity overview, and a discussion of disability categories; and
- Performed a walkability assessment training with the SRTS Regional Coordinators led by Mike Danemiller of the RBA Group which reviewed basic principles of the ADA, offered insights on the importance of planning and accommodations, and gave participants the opportunity to experience active travel using darkened glasses, walkers and wheelchairs.

To continue to advance the goal of SRTS inclusiveness in New Jersey, VTC has most recently pursued one of the key recommendations included in the report from December 2012, which is to educate and train regional SRTS Coordinators about the benefits of inclusive SRTS programs along with facilitating discussions with the SRTS Coordinators to develop strategies on how to successfully include more children with disabilities in SRTS activities statewide.

To determine how to best support New Jersey's SRTS Coordinators in increasing the inclusiveness of SRTS activities, the VTC research team undertook a series of key informant interviews in 2015 with the SRTS Regional Coordinators from each of the State's eight Transportation Management Associations (TMAs). A total of eleven SRTS Coordinators were interviewed, as at the time of interviewing, Greater Mercer TMA (GMTMA) had two SRTS

coordinators on staff, and Meadowlink TMA had three SRTS coordinators on staff. The intent of the interview sessions was to better understand if and how each of the interviewees currently involves students with disabilities in their respective SRTS program and to seek their feedback and input on the types of presentation materials and resource tools that would be most useful for VTC to develop and share with the coordinators to assist them as they work with communities and schools to promote inclusive SRTS activities throughout the state (*See Appendix A for the Interview Questionnaire*).

The intent of this report is to share highlights of the key topics discussed in the interview sessions and to propose next steps to be pursued by the VTC team, subject to approval from NJDOT, to assist the SRTS Coordinators as they pursue and implement more inclusive SRTS programs and events.



Hudson County Walk-to-School Day

## EXPERIENCES WITH SRTS INCLUSIVENESS

All of the SRTS Coordinators who were interviewed indicated that they offer a diverse SRTS program to schools and communities comprised of planning activities and events in their respective service areas that often include:

- Pedestrian and bicycle safety education assemblies/presentations
- Walk to school and/or bicycle to school events
- Bicycle rodeos
- Walkability assessments
- School travel plans
- Contests and Mileage Clubs
- Walking School Buses
- Train-the-trainer initiatives
- School roadway inspections

While each SRTS Coordinator explained that they implement a mix of the activities listed above, some devote more efforts to particular SRTS events such as walk to school initiatives, while others concentrate on SRTS planning activities such as development of school travel plans and implementation of walkability assessments. Some SRTS Coordinators oversee a service area comprised of one county, such as RideWise, HART, Hudson and Keep Middlesex Moving (KMM), while others oversee a multi-county region, such as Meadowlink, TransOptions, Greater Mercer and Cross County Connection (CCC) TMAs.

Notably, each of the eleven SRTS Coordinators opined that accommodating students with disabilities in SRTS programming is a relevant and important goal to be addressed. However, while experiences with inclusive SRTS programming varied somewhat among the coordinators, in general, most expressed limited encounters in planning and implementing SRTS programming for children with disabilities, with the majority indicating their inclusion of children with disabilities has been unplanned. SRTS Coordinators have typically realized **during or immediately after** the conclusion of a given SRTS event that students with disabilities participated and were accommodated. A Meadowlink SRTS Coordinator offered the example of a hearing impaired student receiving assistance from a school staff member who interpreted using sign language to facilitate participation in a school bicycle rodeo. The SRTS Coordinator from CCC TMA shared the experience of being given a microphone by school staff to wear during his presentation so hearing impaired students could participate, while the HART SRTS Coordinator reported on students with down syndrome and students on the autism spectrum participating in various walk to school events and safety presentations without prior planning for their involvement. The SRTS Coordinator from CCC also reported on how a student with a



Safety Wheel at a presentation by  
HART TMA



A safety presentation conducted by Hudson TMA



Hudson TMA's Golden Sneaker contest in Jersey City, NJ

cognitive disability accompanied by his parent participated in a bicycle rodeo with his adaptive bicycle. The Coordinator remarked that he was unsure how to best engage and accommodate this student whom he had met the day of the event, therefore he was grateful for the parent's presence and active involvement.

The SRTS Coordinator from Hudson TMA similarly discussed typically being made aware of the presence of students with disabilities upon arrival at a school the day of program implementation. This reality necessitated that he perform on-site, quick assessments of his student audience to determine if students with disabilities are present and if so, deciding what strategies he can employ or how he can best

alter his language or tone as needed to secure maximum student understanding and involvement in the SRTS activity. The SRTS Coordinator also shared a positive unplanned inclusion example that occurred with the TMA's Golden Sneaker contest in Jersey City that resulted in the successful involvement of an overweight student with special needs who had diabetes. Eager to participate in the contest, this student made the decision to walk to school each day with his parents, stopped using the school elevator and inspired his peers with and without disabilities to walk to school.

These reported inclusive SRTS experiences that were largely unplanned, were described by the SRTS Coordinators as primarily positive, with several reporting that participating students with disabilities appeared to be receptive and interested in SRTS. In addition, coordinators indicated that no major accommodations were needed when including students with disabilities, and typical accommodations were limited to assistance from teaching staff, aides and paraprofessionals. Thus, the coordinators expressed uncertainty as to why their efforts to include children with disabilities in some SRTS events do not always receive a positive reception from school administration and/or teaching staff. For example, several interviewees shared experiences where teachers and aides informed SRTS coordinators which students to select for participation during safety education presentations or other events and seldom include those with disabilities.

One Coordinator from KMM explained that since he only visits most schools once or twice annually, it is difficult to develop relationships with teaching staff. This limited involvement in



A Bike School conducted by KMM in New Brunswick, NJ



A Bike School event at a New Brunswick charter school by KMM

the school makes it difficult to motivate teachers to establish a working partnership with him. The Coordinator from RideWise added that school staff turnover can also negatively impact development of sustained positive relationships with any given school, which can in turn hinder organized involvement of students with disabilities in SRTS programs.

Positive on-site experiences with school administration and/or teachers were also described, with TransOptions offering one example of successfully including a group of students with down syndrome who were assisted by their teachers and aides in a safety town presentation which focuses on how to be a safe pedestrian and bicyclist and includes an interactive component. On another occasion, support from school staff enabled successful event inclusion of a student with cerebral palsy in a safety town presentation.

The SRTS Coordinator from KMM explained that he sometimes is able to identify groups of children with specific disabilities when he arrives at a school to give a presentation and will then seek to discuss with teachers how to best accommodate those students. For example, he informs teachers of the presentation length and if music will be incorporated, as he is aware that both of those factors could positively or negatively influence the successful involvement of children with certain disabilities. He also asks the teaching staff if there are any particular strategies he can use to make the presentation as inclusive as possible.

One of the most common sentiments expressed by interviewees was the difficulty in knowing when implementing any given SRTS activity or event whether participating students have



disabilities, unless they have an obvious physical disability or if the teachers/staff share that information with the SRTS coordinator. SRTS Coordinators expressed awareness that many students have what are considered “hidden” or “invisible” disabilities, in which their disability is not immediately apparent. The increasing prevalence of these types of disabilities – which may include cognitive or sensory disabilities – among students was discussed by several coordinators. The RideWise SRTS Coordinator shared his positive experiences in involving students with cognitive and/or learning disabilities in SRTS programs. He noted that when working with students with these types of disabilities, he strives to focus on imparting basic pedestrian and/or bicycling skills and recognizes the importance of reinforcing and repeating these safe pedestrian and bicycle behaviors with these students to achieve maximum retention. If he is given advance notice that students with cognitive disabilities will be participating in a classroom event, he reviews the presentation slides ahead of time to remove any slides that contain too much detailed information.

Specific examples of SRTS activities that intentionally focused on planning for the involvement of students with disabilities that were shared by interviewees included but were not limited to the following:

- Some SRTS Coordinators noted that they include ADA topics in their safety presentation discussion about who is a pedestrian, how people who use wheelchairs and other mobility devices are also pedestrians and the importance of acknowledging their needs and related accommodations so they can walk safely. Furthermore, they show truncated domes to the students and discuss how these tools help persons with visual impairment and mobility issues cross the streets safely.
- Several SRTS Coordinators ensure that any recommendations included in school travel plans and/or walkability assessments are ADA compliant.
- GMTMA offered bicycle helmet fittings for students with disabilities at a Trenton elementary school.
- GMTMA gave a SRTS pedestrian safety presentation at a school for children with disabilities in Hamilton.



A Safety Town event in Morris Plains, NJ

- GMTMA has planned but not yet implemented a walkability assessment at a school in Hamilton that will include students with disabilities on one of the routes that has wider sidewalks and is located closer to the school. Due to inclement weather conditions the walkability assessment for the school was cancelled and has not yet been rescheduled.
- Meadowlink has given bicycle helmets to students with disabilities and special needs at Thurgood Marshall School in Asbury Park who participated in a school-run bicycle therapy program.
- Meadowlink participated in a summer program in Long Branch that focused on teaching high school students with disabilities how to use the Meadowlink shuttle bus to access desired local destinations, such as the town library and train station.
- Hudson TMA has partnered with another nonprofit agency to teach elementary age children with disabilities in Hoboken to ride bicycles and adaptive bicycles, assisting with curriculum development and instruction.
- RideWise has included images and photos of students with disabilities in a recent Walk to School poster.

In total, the predominant sentiment among the SRTS Coordinators regarding SRTS inclusiveness is that while the TMAs do not typically target SRTS events and programs specifically for students with disabilities and special needs, they do not exclude any students who wish to participate, and they recognize the need for and benefits of more robust SRTS involvement among students with disabilities.



## INCREASING SRTS INCLUSIVENESS

### Suggestions and challenges from SRTS Coordinators

As noted, SRTS coordinators' desire and interest in increasing SRTS inclusiveness so that such action becomes the standard practice and not the exception, was strongly evident from the



**A TransOptions event at Memorial Elementary School in Washington, NJ**

interview process. As the TransOptions coordinator recommended, when planning inclusive events SRTS coordinators need to be proactive instead of reactive and discussing the program goal of inclusiveness is “...the first thing we should mention when we meet new people at schools.” In total, all SRTS Coordinators interviewed openly shared a variety of suggestions and thoughts related to how SRTS inclusiveness can be better achieved.

Emphasis focused on the need to more proactively plan inclusive SRTS events, eliminating or at least reducing the need for SRTS coordinators to modify and adapt programs and events “on the fly,” which is the dominant current practice. To achieve this goal, coordinators suggested seeking to plan and organize with school administration, teachers, aides and/or paraprofessionals prior to events to gather information on student needs and potential engagement strategies and accommodations. One of the Meadowlink coordinators added that in addition to working proactively with school administration and teachers in planning events, TMAs should seek to partner with local disability organizations and local non-profit organizations that could also provide guidance and assistance with SRTS event planning and implementation. The coordinator explained that she was currently considering partnering with a local autism non-profit organization to achieve that goal. Overall, it was noted by several interviewees that partnering with local community organizations could be extremely useful, especially when seeking to plan inclusive SRTS events outside of school.

Several coordinators also recommended pursuit of specific SRTS inclusive events. For example, the CCC SRTS Coordinator suggested a Wheel to School Wednesday event, where students without disabilities can help students with physical disabilities travel to school. One



**A bike safety event conducted by CCC**

of the Meadowlink coordinators suggested holding a Special Olympics-style SRTS event at the county level. This coordinator, along with the GMTMA coordinator, also suggested implementing walking school bus events for students with disabilities that would convene at a location close to school. Including more students with disabilities in SRTS walkability audits at and near schools was also recommended, as was ensuring that SRTS presentations are designed to be as inclusive as possible. For example, the CCC coordinator recommended inclusion of an interactive component in presentations that highlights ADA concerns, such as utilizing a wheelchair and navigating steep slopes to demonstrate to all students how environmental and infrastructure barriers can hinder access for persons with disabilities.

Some other specific suggestions included the following:

- Implement inclusive SRTS events, such as safety town presentations, in controlled, safe environments prior to initiating any real, on-street experience. The value of reinforcing important lesson themes and practicing in a controlled space with the students with disabilities and special needs was acknowledged.
- Ensure that the goal of involving students with disabilities is included in all NJ SRTS marketing literature and materials, which would help increase and reinforce awareness and support across New Jersey.
- Work closely with school crossing guards when planning inclusive SRTS events and activities as often they have knowledge and familiarity regarding the students with disabilities they serve.

While support for more inclusive events was universal among the coordinators surveyed, several noted specific concerns. One such concern was the potential difficulty in anticipating the details of implementing a successful inclusive event, such as determining level of teacher or aide support needed and how to best adapt planned events for students with a range of disabilities. Regarding this last point, coordinators expressed desire for more specific information on how they could best involve students with diverse disabilities and how they could adapt their presentations with the appropriate terminology and messaging to avoid offending or excluding anyone.



**A Bike Rodeo in Asbury Park, conducted by Meadowlink TMA**

Another concern expressed by several interviewees involved the potential issue of violating the confidentiality of a student's Individualized Education Program (IEP), if the SRTS coordinator seeks to learn more detail about a student's particular disability in an effort to better adapt a SRTS program for that individual student. Other coordinators also expressed concern about how to address the potential hurdle of securing involvement of students with disabilities in walk to school events on a regular basis if these students are primarily bused to school, which several interviewees acknowledged is often how students with disabilities get to school each day in New Jersey since it may be a requirement included in their IEP.



**GMTMA conducts SRTS outreach**

A final concern mentioned was that a variety of infrastructure and land use policies and conditions exist throughout the State that should be recognized and addressed to ensure true SRTS inclusiveness for all populations. For example, one of the GMTMA coordinators discussed how non-ADA compliant infrastructure conditions, such as rapid signal timing, serve to exclude or limit certain populations from safe SRTS participation, and he added that poor land use surrounding many schools throughout the State make implementation of SRTS activities difficult and challenging.

## PROACTIVE STEPS TOWARD INCREASING INCLUSION OF SRTS

One of the main goals of the interview process was to discuss and determine desired information and resources that could aid the SRTS coordinators as they seek to increase SRTS inclusiveness. Interest in and need for informational resources on the topic of inclusiveness was conveyed by all of the SRTS Coordinators. For example, the SRTS Coordinator from CCC was disappointed when he was recently asked by a colleague how to best convene a bicycle rodeo in Evesham, NJ for students with physical and developmental disabilities, and he did not know how to guide her to achieve maximum program inclusiveness. Other coordinators expressed similar concerns regarding uncertainty as to how to best achieve SRTS inclusiveness among students with disabilities.

In response, SRTS Coordinators presented several ideas on the types of resource information and tools that could potentially be produced to assist SRTS coordinators achieve fuller program inclusion and the formats in which those resources could be produced. General consensus among interviewees was that no one resource tool would help to address every situation that could occur when working with students with disabilities, but that the TMAs could benefit from “all the resources we can grab onto” to help increase program inclusiveness.

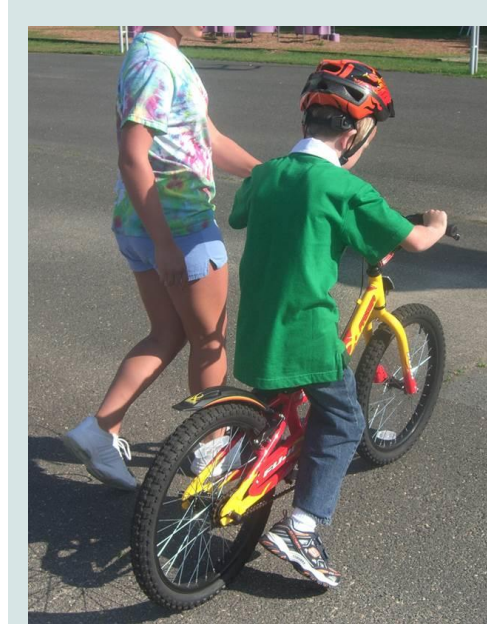
### Develop resources to assist SRTS Regional Coordinators

All of the SRTS Regional Coordinators interviewed expressed interest in having access to more informational tools and resources that would help to achieve greater SRTS inclusion of students with disabilities throughout their respective service areas. Specifically, a desire for resources that would facilitate their ability to be proactive rather than reactive when working with schools – particularly during the event planning phase – to include children with disabilities and special needs in SRTS programs and events was emphasized.

SRTS Regional Coordinators were asked to discuss what types of information and resources would be most helpful to them as they work with communities and schools to promote inclusive SRTS activities, the format in which they would like the information to be provided and the specific stakeholder audiences they want these information tools/resources to target.

SRTS Regional Coordinators indicated that each of the suggested information topics presented below would be useful in their outreach work. The information topics are as follows:

- a. SRTS overview of the program goals and popular activities and events,
- b. How SRTS can benefit children with disabilities and special needs,
- c. Examples of SRTS activities children with disabilities can participate in,
- d. Success stories of those activities in New Jersey or other states, and



A student at a Learn to Ride event in Ocean Township, NJ

- e. Strategies to ensure safe participation of children with disabilities and special needs such as addressing real and perceived concerns (stranger danger, bullying, supervision, skill instruction, etc.).

Of the eleven SRTS Regional Coordinators interviewed, seven were interested in having resources discussing all five types of information topics (a-e), while three Coordinators cited specific interest in success stories of inclusive activities (d) and strategies to ensure safe participation (e). One Coordinator did not indicate any topic of interest or need.

SRTS Regional Coordinators were then asked how they would like the topics of interest to be shared: (1) promotional flyers, (2) SRTS fact sheet, (3) Frequently asked questions (FAQs) sheet or Tip sheet that answers commonly asked questions on the SRTS program and issues related to including children with disability and offers helpful tips, or (4) other means. Eight of the SRTS Coordinators mentioned that FAQ sheets with helpful tips would be the desired format for receiving the information topics. Two Coordinators suggested a parent letter be developed, while another Coordinator suggested a visual flip book be created, and one suggested a bookmark. Two Coordinators did not express a format preference.

Ten of the eleven SRTS Regional Coordinators interviewed indicated the desired audience for the information tools was school administrators and teachers. Eight of the SRTS Coordinators specified that parents should be the target audience for the information. Two Coordinators noted that information tools targeted to students could be helpful and one mentioned targeting tools to municipal officials.

Based on the feedback received from the SRTS Coordinators, developing FAQ and Tip sheets including information about SRTS program goals and activities; benefits of SRTS for children with disabilities; examples of SRTS events and activities that children with disabilities can participate in; success stories from New Jersey and other states of inclusive activities; and strategies to ensure safe participation in SRTS for children with disabilities targeted to school administration, special educators, teachers and parents would greatly assist SRTS Coordinators with proactively planning and implementing SRTS programs and events.

### Update existing resources for inclusion

Updating all existing marketing and outreach materials that SRTS Coordinators use to stress the importance of inclusion when planning and implementing events would assist them in proactively including students with disabilities. Also, editing pedestrian and bicycle safety education presentations with the appropriate terminology and language (e.g. using person-first language and determining if using the term “walking” is acceptable when including persons in

wheelchairs) would increase the level of comfort for Coordinators who are presenting to children with diverse disabilities, including physical disabilities.

### Offer additional training on inclusion

Several SRTS Regional Coordinators interviewed indicated that both the training session conducted in the Fall 2013 on broadening outreach of SRTS to children with disabilities which focused on the importance and benefits of inclusion, a sensitivity overview, and a discussion of disability categories and the follow-up Spring 2014 training session led by the RBA Group which reviewed basic principles of the ADA, discussed the importance of planning and accommodations, and offered first-hand experience with active travel using darkened glasses, walkers, etc. were valuable.

Requests were made for additional inclusion training for SRTS Coordinators. Specifically, several interviewees requested a training session to discuss topics including strategies to involve students with disabilities in SRTS activities, how to best use the requested informational resources, and identification of tools/equipment that would be useful when conducting inclusive events. Several interviewees noted that such a session would also provide a forum for Coordinators to collectively discuss and brainstorm opportunities to enhance program inclusiveness.



Meadowlink TMA assists with a Walkability Audit in Elizabeth, NJ



A student rides a bike equipped with an assistive device



## Plan and implement an inclusive SRTS event

When interviewing SRTS Regional Coordinators about increasing inclusiveness, seven Coordinators were interested in partnering with VTC and NJDOT to implement an inclusive SRTS event. One Coordinator was interested in convening an event involving children with autism and connecting with a non-profit organization. Another Coordinator would like to implement a SRTS event at a large school district where there are a number of students with disabilities. Still another Coordinator mentioned a desire to collaboratively implement an event such as a walk/bike to school day, bike rodeo and/or walk assessment involving students with disabilities. Overall, Coordinators interested in collaboratively planning and implementing an inclusive SRTS event indicated they would appreciate assistance and guidance from professionals who have knowledge of how to best include and accommodate students with disabilities.

## Purchase and share equipment

Several SRTS Coordinators mentioned that having access to adaptive bicycles for students with special needs to use when conducting bike rodeos would be valuable. Pursuing funding opportunities to enable the purchase and availability of a small fleet of adaptive bicycles and extended bicycle handles which can be shared among the state's TMAs would enable children with disabilities to participate safely and more easily in bike to school events and bike rodeos.

SRTS coordinators also noted that accessibility tools such as black out glasses, canes, and wheelchairs would assist with SRTS safety education presentations and walkability audits, and they would enable students and community members to experience and understand the mobility issues that persons with disabilities face.

## RECOMMENDATIONS AND NEXT STEPS

Based on the feedback received through interviews with each of the SRTS Regional Coordinators that serve the municipalities from all 21 counties across New Jersey, there is support for inclusion of children with disabilities and special needs in SRTS events and activities as well as recognition of the benefits SRTS inclusion offers to both students with and without disabilities. None of the Coordinators exclude any students who want to participate in SRTS activities; however, they are not proactive in inquiring if there are children with disabilities and special needs who would like to participate and in discussing any accommodations if needed. SRTS Coordinators were in agreement that if they had the proper informational tools and training they would feel more comfortable and confident in being more proactive in broadening

outreach to all students including those with disabilities and special needs. The following recommendations are suggested and could be pursued subject to NJDOT approval.

## Update and Develop Resources to Increase Inclusion

SRTS Regional Coordinators expressed interest in TIP sheets and FAQs that would provide information on the following: overview of the SRTS program goals and activities; how SRTS can benefit children with disabilities; example of SRTS activities that children with disabilities can participate in; success stories of those activities in NJ and other states; and strategies to ensure safe participation. VTC's December 2012 report, *Broadening Outreach Efforts of Safe Routes to School to Children with Disabilities – Assessing Opportunities in New Jersey*, details the benefits of SRTS inclusion and offers specific strategies to help achieve increased inclusion in SRTS programs based upon the type of disability (physical, sensory, cognitive/developmental and mental/emotional/behavioral) which can be incorporated into the TIP/FAQ sheets. Examples of inclusive SRTS events and success stories from New Jersey and throughout the country collected from the NJ SRTS Coordinators feedback from this questionnaire as well as from *The Discover Inclusive Safe Routes to School Guidebook* written by Dr. Tanya Whitehead from the University of Illinois resulting from a collaboration of the National Center on Physical Activity and Disability, and the Illinois Department of Transportation, can further contribute content to the TIP/FAQ sheets. Subject to approval from NJDOT, VTC could develop these TIP/FAQ sheets and distribute them to all TMAs. The TIP/FAQ sheets would also be appropriate to distribute to and share with school administration, teachers, staff and parents.

VTC could also review existing marketing, outreach, as well as bicycle and pedestrian safety presentation materials to ensure they stress the importance and benefits of inclusion and included the appropriate and sensitive language and terminology.

VTC could also work with SRTS Coordinators to help adapt the existing school travel plan process so that the process includes identification of barriers to walking or bicycling to school for students with disabilities. Identification of goals and actions schools can pursue to improve pedestrian and bicycle travel to and from school for all students, including those with disabilities, will also be a critical component of the revised school travel plan process.

## Implement Training

VTC could develop and implement a training session for all SRTS Coordinators and TMA staff to discuss benefits, strategies and success stories on broadening outreach to children with disabilities and special needs, pending approval from NJDOT. The training could also provide an opportunity to share any TIP/FAQ sheets developed and serve as a forum for Coordinators to

share experiences and brainstorm ideas to foster more inclusion and continue the discussions from the previous two trainings.

## Plan and Implement Inclusive SRTS Events

VTC could work with the SRTS Coordinators who expressed interest during the interviews to plan an inclusive event. VTC in partnership with NJDOT and NJTIP@Rutgers (NJ Travel Independence Program whose instructors have the knowledge and experience of working with persons with disabilities to travel safely and independently) and possibly an organization(s) affiliated with a disability category (e.g. autism) could work with the SRTS Coordinators in implementing one or more (decided by NJDOT) SRTS events such as a walk to school day, bike rodeo and/or walkability audit. VTC and NJDOT could also work with a TMA to develop a School Travel Plan including students with disabilities and by identifying and incorporating goals to improve the safety of active travel for students with disabilities. Working with the SRTS Coordinator to plan each event and/or School Travel Plan, discuss and strategize accommodations for students with disabilities, and implement each event and/or School Travel Plan would enable the development of best practices that could be disseminated to and utilized by all SRTS Coordinators.



Students participate in a Walking School Bus event

## Research Purchase of Equipment

SRTS Coordinators should include when planning their annual budgets purchase of any equipment (such as black out glasses, walkers, wheelchairs, etc.) that would enable them to implement inclusive events. VTC can also assist in identifying and/or applying for grants to purchase more costly equipment such as adaptive bicycles that can be shared and used with the SRTS Coordinators throughout the state when conducting bike rodeos and bike to school days for students with disabilities to use.

## CONCLUSION

Through the information gathered from interviews with the SRTS Regional Coordinators representing all eight of the TMAs throughout the state, recommendations were proposed that will help to advance the goal of including more students with disabilities and special needs in the NJ Safe Routes to School program. SRTS Coordinators are interested in planning and implementing inclusive SRTS events and could be more proactive if they were equipped with the proper informational tools and training.

The overall time frame for implementing these recommendations is not presented here since that is dependent on which recommendations NJDOT opts to approve. However, it is suggested that the TIP/FAQ sheets be developed first, followed by implementation of the training session. Planning and implementation of inclusive SRTS events could follow. Purchase of equipment is at the discretion of each TMA, and VTC could assist in pursuing grant funding opportunities to purchase adaptive bicycles which could be shared among the TMAs.

Providing the support and resources recommended in this report for the SRTS Coordinators to proactively plan and implement inclusive SRTS events and activities will enable the advancement of the federal SRTS goal of including more children with disabilities in SRTS and evolving the NJ SRTS program toward becoming a national model of inclusiveness of students with disabilities and special needs in statewide SRTS programs.



CCC TMA conducts a Walk to School Day in Margate, NJ

## APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE FOR SRTS COORDINATORS

### Questions for SRTS Regional Coordinators – Disability Task

Hello, as you may recall from a training we presented back in 2014, VTC conducted research and prepared a report in December 2012 called **Broadening Outreach Efforts of Safe Routes to School to Children with Disabilities**.

The report discussed the benefits of SRTS inclusive activities and shared suggested strategies to achieve successful inclusive programs that were gathered from our literature search and from a series of interviews we held with 13 organizations representing stakeholders with a variety of disabilities including physical, cognitive/developmental, sensory and mental/emotional.

Moving forward, we would like your input on what types of presentation materials/resource tools would be most useful to you and colleagues when organizing more inclusive SRTS activities in New Jersey. After we gather your input from all Regional Coordinators, we will focus efforts on creating some of these tools/resources.

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### Questions

- 1. When planning SRTS events/activities, have you discussed accommodating students with disability either individually or as a group?**

***IF NO (GO TO Q2)***

***IF YES:*** Please describe that or those activity(s):

- Was it conducted at a school specifically for children with disability or at a neighborhood or regional school?
- Did the children with disability participate in the activity with the students without disability or did they participate separately? Did the children have an aid, paraprofessional, parent or adult assist them with the activity?
- Do you consider the activity successful – why or why not?
- Would you change any part of it if you could organize and convene the activity again?

2. **Thinking about the SRTS events you have held, have you encountered a situation where you realized after the event that students with disability were accommodated without your involvement? (If yes, please explain)**
3. **Still thinking about the SRTS events you have held, have you been made aware of an event where students with disability were not accommodated? (If yes, please explain)**
4. **Do you have any suggestions how NJ's SRTS program could become more inclusive for children with disabilities? What challenges to doing so have you experienced or do you anticipate experiencing?**
  - a. **For SRTS planning activities:** (e.g. SRTS school travel planning; Walkability/bikeability assessments)
  - b. **For SRTS events:** (e.g. Walking school bus, Bike rodeo, Safety assembly, Contests)
5. **Now we would like to discuss with you what types of information & resources would be most helpful to TMAs as you work with communities and schools to promote inclusive SRTS activities:**
  - a. If we create Talking Points for your use, what specific types of information would be most useful for us to include?
    1. SRTS overview – program goals & common activities
    2. How SRTS can benefit children with disability
    3. Examples of SRTS activities children with disability can participate in
    4. Success stories of those activities in NJ or other states
    5. Strategies to ensure safe participation of children with disability
      - a. Addressing real and perceived concerns (stranger danger, bullying, supervision, skill instruction)
    6. Other?
  - b. How would you like those Talking Points to be shared with you?
    1. Promotional flyers
    2. SRTS fact sheet
    3. Tip sheet and/or FAQ sheet that answers commonly asked questions on the SRTS program and issues related to including children with disability be helpful?
    4. Other means?

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- c. What audience(s) should these Talking Points be targeted to?
1. PTA/PTO
  2. Special educators and members of child study team
  3. School administrators
  4. Municipal officials
  5. Disability stakeholder orgs (Arc, SPAN)
  6. SEPAC (special education parent advisory committees)?
  7. Other?
- 6. Would working with you to plan and implement an inclusive event be helpful?**
- 7. Any concluding thoughts or suggestions to share with us as we strive to increase involvement in SRTS activities among children with disability?**