

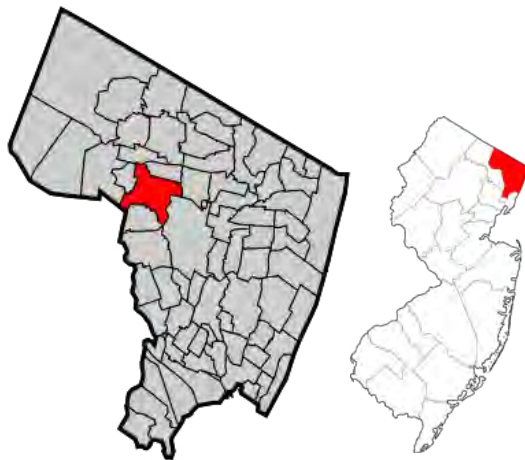
NJ SRTS: RIDGEWOOD



INTRODUCTION

New Jersey Safe Routes to School (NJ SRTS) Resource Center, created and supported by the New Jersey Department of Transportation (NJDOT) with funding from the Federal Highway Administration, enables and encourages safer and more accessible walking and bicycling environments for children in New Jersey through education, training, and research. Safe Routes to School projects result in physical improvements to the environment as well as encouragement programs that promote walking and bicycling to and from school.

NJDOT contracts with the Alan M. Voorhees Transportation Center at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey (VTC), through support of the NJ SRTS Resource Center and Transportation Management Association (TMA) Regional Coordinators, to contact federal-aid Safe Routes to School funding recipients to assess grantees' experiences in applying for and implementing SRTS-funded programming in their community. VTC used this information to assess the program's effectiveness and to identify strategies for improving access to the program in the future. In 2015, the NJ SRTS Resource Center conducted phone interviews with recipients awarded SRTS



Ridgewood Village, Bergen County, NJ

grant funds from 2007 to 2015 and queried them about grantee experiences, progress, challenges, and plans for the future. These interviews yielded: 1) an analysis of the grant implementation process, and 2) case studies detailing grants awarded to

four NJ municipalities—Brick Township, Garfield City, Montclair Township, and Ridgewood Village.

BACKGROUND

Founded in 1894, the Village of Ridgewood, New Jersey, is a dense suburban community located in Northern New Jersey-New York City metropolitan region, north of the City of Paterson and northwest of the sprawling suburb of Paramus. Its earliest European settlement dates to the 1700s when the Dutch inhabited the area. Ridgefield is well-served by major roadways (NJ Route 17, the Garden State Parkway, and NJ Route 208) and by NJ TRANSIT's Main and Bergen County rail lines, both of which stop at the downtown Ridgewood Station, located at Garber Square.

THE PROBLEM

In 2002, local residents recognized that despite the nearby locations of neighborhood schools and designated walk-to-school routes for each of these facilities, a large number of parents drove their children to school each day. Many of the District's elementary and middle schools are located on roads that have become major thoroughfares in the years since building construction and some routes experience heavy vehicular traffic. Wishing to find ways to encourage more walking, the Village of Ridgewood contracted Vollmer Associates LLP (acquired by Stantec in 2007) to document conditions affecting the walk to school and to prepare school walking plans for each elementary and middle school. The Ridgewood Schools Walking Plan documented deficient pedestrian conditions (narrow sidewalks and a need for more prominent markings); traffic safety issues (volume including commuter through traffic, drop-off/pick-up and other siting conflicts, and congestion); sun glare; and parental concerns regarding personal safety.

GETTING STARTED

Under a contract with Ridgewood, Vollmer Associates LLP produced school walking plans for the eight elementary and middle schools in the district. Vollmer conducted field assessments to record conditions and determine plan specifications. Representatives from each of the schools, the School Resources Officer, and Village police traffic officers informed plan development,

offering their concerns and experience with pedestrian and vehicular safety issues at each location. Each plan included a schematic map with school location, types of streets around the school (local, major artery, etc.), posted speed limits on road segments, road segments lacking sidewalks, arrows indicating the travel routes for students, school crossings and crossing guard locations, and the location of school pavement markings. Plans also provided recommendations for improvement such as the designation of alternate drop-off locations to alleviate congestion in present locations, the addition of more visible pavement markings/signage, the removal of sight distance obstructions to raise driver awareness and increase safety, and regular maintenance of storm drains to prevent flooded crossings that forced students into traffic.

KEY ACTORS

The Ridgewood “Get to School Safely” team formed to advance pedestrian and bicycling education and awareness campaigns aimed at K-8 students. Members of the team included the Deputy Mayor, the Village Engineer, a former mayor, the Chief of Police, a traffic safety officer, the Interim-Superintendent of Ridgewood Public Schools, a member from the Board of Education, a local businessman, a local attorney and one local parent who was a member of the Community Safety Citizens Advisory Committee. An early champion, Jeanne Johnson, was hired in 2008 to serve as Ridgewood’s Get to School Safely Project Coordinator. She and Jovan Mehandzic, Ridgewood Assistant Engineer, collaborated with Vollmer Associates LLP to develop the walking plans and worked to secure SRTS support to implement the recommended improvements.

RIDGEWOOD SRTS GRANTS

Ridgewood received four grants through the NJ SRTS program. In 2007, Ridgewood received two grants: an infrastructure improvement and a non-infrastructure programming grant with a combined total of \$158,000. The first grant focused on Ridge Elementary School and George Washington Middle School. The non-infrastructure grant complemented this effort and extended engagement to the entire district. In 2008 Ridgewood received a non-infrastructure grant of \$42,000 to address congestion and safety issues

Ridgewood Demographics

	Ridgewood Village	Bergen County	New Jersey
Population	25,370	926,330	8,904,413
Population 5 to 14 years (%)	20.4%	12.5%	12.7%
Median age (years)	41.8	41.5	39.4
Households	8,298	335,550	3,189,486
Median household income (\$)	\$147,823	\$85,806	\$72,093
Per capita income (\$)	\$72,674	\$44,002	\$36,582
Persons below the poverty line (%)	3.50%	7.4%	10.8%
Persons with Bachelor's degree or higher (%)	72.2%	44.0%	34.2%
Land area (sq mi)	5.75	233.01	7,354.22
Population per square mile	4,412	3,975	1,211

2011-2015 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

Ridgewood Race & Ethnicity

	Ridgewood Village	Bergen County	New Jersey
White	80.7%	70.4%	68.3%
Black	1.9%	5.8%	13.5%
Asian	14.3%	15.6%	9.0%
Other race	0.9%	5.9%	6.6%
Two or more races	2.2%	2.2%	2.5%
Hispanic or Latino	7.2%	17.9%	19.0%

Ridgewood School Characteristics

	Ridgewood Village	Bergen County	New Jersey
Students in targeted schools	3895	NA	NA
Students in area or district	5,640	133,773	1,372,755
Students receiving free or reduced lunch (count)	127	27,520	516,704
Students receiving free or reduced lunch (%)	2.3%	20.6%	37.6%
Spending per student	\$19,012	\$20,561	\$19,651
NJ District Factor	J	NA	NA

NJ Department of Education. Enrollment Data, 2015.

<http://www.state.nj.us/education/data/enr/>

across all schools and to further the adoption of walking and bicycling to school by more Village families. In 2012, Ridgewood was awarded an additional infrastructure grant of \$175,000 to continue crosswalk and sidewalks upgrades. The community declined to use this award and the grant has since been rescinded by NJ DOT.

GET TO SCHOOL SAFELY (2007)

Grant type: Infrastructure

Grant amount: \$117,825

**Purpose: Crosswalk improvements * Sidewalk improvements
* Safety signage installation * Traffic calming**

The problem

The Vollmer School Walking Plan identified infrastructure improvements for George Washington Middle School and Ridge Elementary School. The gateway area to a school can be defined as the interface between the school property and the adjacent street. The George Washington Middle School gateway area is located along South Monroe Street between Godwin and Ridgewood Avenues with a designated drop-off area on Washington Place. These major arterials experienced congestion when school-related traffic conflicted with general through-traffic.

The intersection of Washington Place and Monroe Streets posed particular concern due to vehicles stopping a distance from the curb or failing to pull up to the designated drop-off and pick-up areas. This behavior blocked traffic traveling through the area and created hazards for students. Vehicle back-ups at the traffic signal at Monroe Street and

PARTNERS

“Get to School Safely” Team

Bergen County Department of Planning and Economic Development

Bergen County Engineering Department
Chamber of Commerce

Community Safety Citizens Advisory Committee
Deputy Mayor’s Office

Federated Home and School Association
Girl Scouts

Local Public Access cable television

Meadowlink Transportation Management Agency

National Center for Bicycling & Walking (NCBW)

NJDHHS Pedestrian Safety Grant

NJDOT Bikeway Project

NJDOT Safe Routes to Schools

Ridgewood High School Television Station

Ridgewood Police Benevolent Association

Ridgewood Public Schools

Village of Ridgewood Board of Education

Village of Ridgewood Council

Village of Ridgewood Managers Office

Village of Ridgewood Police Department

Vollmer Associates

Alan M. Voorhees Transportation Center,
Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy,
Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey

William Paterson University

Typical Ridgewood traffic



Ridgewood Avenue during peak times impeded safe crossing at two major crosswalks in front of the school and a lack of a traffic signal at Monroe Street and Godwin Avenue restricted safe turning onto Monroe Street. Additionally, some students arrive at school by way of an NJ TRANSIT bus stop on Monroe Street dedicated to this purpose. Buses stopped at this location and dwelled long enough that passing drivers often pulled around the vehicle, blocked oncoming traffic, and endangered students. Heavy traffic volume and unsignalized crossings on busy streets prevented students from safely walking or bicycling to school, particularly at the intersection of Monroe Street and Washington Place and at the intersection of Monroe Street and Godwin Avenue. These intersections were frequent locations of pedestrian-vehicle conflicts.

Located a third of a mile west of the George Washington Middle School, the Ridge Elementary School gateway area is located on West Ridgeway Avenue. This thoroughfare is a major arterial with heavy vehicular traffic during student arrival and dismissal times. Motorists access the school and its parking lot solely from West Ridgeway Avenue, at a location at the crest of a hill. This limited access, combined with decreased sight distance, created back-ups that extended two blocks east to North Hillside Place.

Vehicles parked illegally on the south side of the Avenue decreased the lane width for through traffic and worsened conditions at the parking lot during afternoon pick-ups. Parents who arrived early and waited in the parking lot often double parked, further diminishing space and creating a situation where drivers could not maneuver through the congested lot. At dismissal, all these cars attempted to leave at the same time, but had difficulty.

Students walking or bicycling to school utilized sidewalks on both sides of this heavily traveled roadway. Although students crossed with crossing guard assistance, the speed of cars on Ridgewood Avenue, poor sight distances down the hill, and vehicles exiting the parking lot contributed to pedestrian-vehicular conflicts during peak hours. Further, many sidewalks in the area were broken and raised, narrow, or had poor sight lines to traffic.

What they did

Using SRTS funding, Ridgewood Village enhanced its streetscapes. One improvement was the

installation of “street print” crosswalks, i.e., pigmented and patterned asphalt in the infield area of the intersection mimicking red brick. The purpose of the improvements was to promote the appearance of a residential neighborhood where children would be present and thus increase awareness among drivers. Ridgewood pursued several improvements to slow drivers and increase pedestrian safety including:

- Hatched crosswalks
- Street print crosswalks
- “School Zone” markings
- Flashing beacon warning lights

The streetscape improvements conformed to the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD) standards with high visible striping to indicate the crosswalk. This application was considered a test by Ridgewood. If it proved successful in curbing speeding and distraction, the Village of Ridgewood would construct more of these types of crosswalks pending funding.

To better understand student travel behavior, the George Washington Middle School and the Ridge Elementary School, with assistance from the Voorhees Transportation Center, collected data using the National Center for Safe Routes to School Student Travel Tally questionnaire.

As documented in the George Washington Middle School Student Travel Tally Report, in October 2009, an equal share of the 5,098 student trips counted occurred by walking (39%) or arrival by family vehicle or carpool (39%). Other modes of travel included the use of public transit, i.e., NJ TRANSIT bus, (15%), bicycling (3%) and by school bus (3%). At Ridge Elementary School, of the 2,172 student trips counted, 62% of students arrived by family vehicle or carpool, 27% walked to school, 10% arrived by school bus, and 1% bicycled to school. Elementary students did not travel to school on public transit.

Challenges

Ridgewood representatives noted dissatisfaction with the amount of paperwork required to utilize grant funds. As the information collected was associated with a particular school, many of the required forms were redundant. Limited staffing posed concerns during the implementation phase of the grant.



Ridge Elementary School infrastructure improvements

Above: Crosswalks and curb cuts, S Monroe St and W Ridgewood Ave

Below: Street-print crosswalk, W Ridgewood Ave



Impacts & achievements

The project achieved its goals of reducing vehicular speeds and congestion in the George Washington Middle School and Ridge Elementary School gateway areas. Equally important, development and implementation of the grant fostered improved teamwork and collaboration among Ridgewood stakeholders and helped to build a community supportive of SRTS.

GET TO SCHOOL SAFELY II (2007)

Grant type: Non-Infrastructure

Grant amount: \$40,175

Purpose: District-wide education and awareness programs * SRTS coordinator * Events* Increased police presence * Online parent survey

The problem

The aim of this grant was to support and encourage more and safer walking and biking by promoting a better understanding of SRTS issues within the school community and to improve safety throughout the Village. Paired with the 2007 Get to School Safety infrastructure grant discussed above, this grant supported the development of a Village-wide education and awareness campaign.

What they did

The grant team conducted extensive outreach with school and district administrators, starting first with a meeting of principals of all eight schools to identify concerns for Safe Routes to School. This meeting was followed by a similar gathering with the Ridgewood Superintendent of Schools and School Resource Officers. These meetings documented SRTS issues to be addressed through the education and awareness program.

The grant supported a number of efforts and activities including:

SRTS Coordinator Stipend. One person at one-half day per week for the school year to lead the “Get to School Safely” project and work in conjunction with the project team to coordinate education, encouragement, enforcement, engineering and evaluation between the schools and stakeholders

Training workshops. Conducted in the Fall and Spring at each of six elementary and two middle schools to educate the school community about the SRTS initiative and provide training for

participants to manage and sustain their local “Get to School Safely” program. Trainings contracted through the local TMA (Meadowlink) and National Center for Bicycling and Walking

Media campaigns. Used local newspapers, magazines and the local Public Access cable television station to promote the “Keep Kids Alive Drive 25” and “Reduce the Need to Speed” safety campaigns and featured an elementary school design contest illustrating safe pedestrian and driving behaviors

Bicycle Rodeo. Conducted in the Fall and Spring to reinforce safe bicycling habits for children at the middle schools

Walk-to-School Wednesdays. Informational kick-off assemblies at six elementary and two middle schools; provided information on what routes to use, time to walk the route, etc.

Frequent Walker/Rider Club. Encouraged elementary and middle school children to track miles walked or biked to school with awards for meeting distance-traveled targets

Increased Law Enforcement Presence. Increased enforcement of existing traffic safety laws, focusing on speeding, cell phone use, seat belts, yielding to pedestrians, and safe pedestrian crossing and bicycling behavior

Online parent survey and tabulation. Tracked changes in attitudes and behavior of parents regarding their children walking and bicycling to school

In 2009, VTC conducted a survey of 156 parents in support of this effort. The survey asked about student travel behavior and parental concern about walking and biking to school. More than half of respondents (53%) reported that their child(ren) walked or biked to school and about 56% of children traveled less than one-half mile. Nearly two-thirds of respondents (65%) indicated that their child(ren) had asked permission to walk or bike to/from school. While 15% of respondents indicated they would not feel comfortable letting their child walk or bike to school without an adult regardless of the child’s age, 75% would let their child travel unattended in Grade 3 or higher. Parental concerns regarding whether their child walked or biked to school were: safety of crossings and intersections (13%), speed of traffic along the school route (12%), amount of traffic along the route (12%), distance (11%), and a

lack of sidewalks or pathways (9%). A majority of respondents (51%) felt that their school encouraged walking or biking to/from school; another 20% said they felt their school strongly encouraged this activity. Nearly two-thirds of respondents (63%) expressed that walking or biking to school was a very healthy activity. Four out of five offered that it was fun (49%) or very fun (30%) for their child to walk or bike to school.

Challenges

The challenges in applying for this grant were similar to those experienced in earlier grants. The grant applicants felt that the volume of paperwork was onerous.

Impacts & achievements

Ridgewood achieved all the intended purposes of this grant. The Village hired Ms. Johnson to serve as SRTS Coordinator, managing stakeholder efforts and program implementation. Ridgewood contracted Ridgewood Press and North Jersey Media Group to advertise weekly safety tips provided by the Ridgewood Police and promote SRTS activities. The representatives from the Newspapers in Education program and the Ridgewood YMCA worked together with the director of the Ridgewood School District Health and Wellness program to create other newspaper-based SRTS activities that tied to the NJ Core Curriculum Standards. Additionally, the Ridgewood News printed student responses to essays included in the SRTS Program.

Recent Ridgewood graduates attending NYU and Manhattan Film Schools supervised Ridgewood Middle School and High School students in the creation of a 30-minute film that focused on safe walking and biking practices and highlighted poor motorist behavior. The film played at the George Washington Film Festival, the Ridgewood Guild Film Festival, and the Ridgewood Public Library.

The Village worked with the Police Department, the National Center for Biking and Walking, and Bike New York to conduct a bike rodeo to teach cycling safety to riders in grades K-8. The safety clinic included safety inspections, rules of the road, helmet fittings, and an obstacle course where riders learned how to apply biking rules. Bike inspections were held at each school in the Spring.

The grant supported training of Ridgewood public school physical education teachers and

volunteers. Teachers learned methods to teach children safe biking and walking behaviors and to incorporate the learning of these behaviors into the core curriculum. Safe biking and walking lessons are intended to be presented Fall and Spring to students in grades 1-8. Parent volunteers received training to support Walking School Buses at Ridgewood's six elementary schools.

The grant was also to include a targeted pedestrian and bicycle safety education initiative for each school. "Kids Write Now" was selected to facilitate customized classroom workshops led by professional writing coaches. The sole source contractor dissolved business operations and was unable to fulfill its commitment.

Ridgewood learned from the parent survey that many felt that walking to school resulted in academic improvements. Physical activity allowed students to arrive at school feeling more settled, focused, and ready to learn.

GET TO SCHOOL SAFELY III (2008)

Grant type: Non-Infrastructure

Grant amount: \$42,000

Purpose: District-wide education and awareness programs *
Events* Online parent survey

The problem

The aim of this grant was to further improvements gained under Ridgewood's 2007 non-infrastructure grant and continue its effort to address congestion and safety issues at schools in the district.

What they did

Ridgewood advanced its SRTS program through education and engagement. To this end, Ridgewood conducted:

Informational workshops to educate the school community about Safe Route to Schools initiatives, pedestrian safety issues, and Walking-School Bus programs

Bike and helmet inspections at each school each Spring at school campus

Bike rodeo held in the Spring to teach proper riding skills and etiquette

Poster contests through which schoolchildren related safe pedestrian and driving behaviors

Challenges

No specific challenges, other than those noted for the previous grants, were encountered in the execution of this grant.

Impacts/Achievements

The 2008 Get to School Safely Grant continued the work advanced under earlier grants. These programs were well received and achieved the intended results. The grant team reported that the structure of the program addressed Ridgewood's many needs, and got the Village, business

Leigh Ann Von Hagen, NJ SRTS Resource Center, Rutgers University, leads discussion about Travell Elementary School Walking School Bus Routes.



community, and school community working together. The team received very positive feedback from key stakeholders throughout the community.

One anecdote is particularly illustrative. The Ridgewood Chief of Police, who grew up in Ridgewood, told the grant team that people would not embrace this program, get out of their cars, or walk their children to school. After the program, he offered that he had “Never seen anything like it!”

GET TO SCHOOL SAFELY IV (2012)

Grant type: Infrastructure

Grant amount: \$175,000

Purpose: Crosswalk improvements * Sidewalk improvements

The problem

Following the successes of earlier grants, NJDOT awarded the Village of Ridgewood a grant to upgrade crosswalks and sidewalks to improve safety conditions for pedestrians. In Summer 2016 Ridgewood declined the allocated funds, citing difficulties in the authorization process and with local administrative costs. NJDOT subsequently rescinded the grant.

LESSONS LEARNED

Building on success * Community involvement * District-wide approach * Integrating SRTS into curriculum

Ridgewood incrementally built a culture where walking and bicycling to school is a viable alternative to arriving by car, and executed an extensive series of programs involving numerous stakeholders. Many facets of the community contributed to Ridgewood’s SRTS successes. Representatives from the school, government, and business communities, including teachers, administrators, students, and parents, as well as members of the Ridgewood Public Schools Health and Wellness Committee, Community Safety Citizens Advisory Committee, and the Ridgewood Police Department played a part. Their efforts resulted in changes in thinking about walking and biking to school that are now embedded in school curriculum, incorporated into school activities, and permeate the community. These changes took place in conjunction with significant improvements to the gateway areas of two schools, the George Washington Middle School and Ridge Elementary School.



Ridgewood SRTS Crosswalk Rally

Ridgewood has also learned that limited resources—both financial and human—can affect its ability to execute program objectives. The Village was interested in making further infrastructure improvements but felt constrained in its ability to oversee management of design and construction projects. There was also support for continued programmatic activity, i.e., those kinds of events that were most often supported by volunteers. However, key stakeholders shared that Ridgewood’s commitment to SRTS programs was crowded out by other more “glamorous” causes. The Ridgewood SRTS Team observed that parental commitment lagged over time and required constant refreshing. That said, for students who have grown up with SRTS, the lessons learned have become ingrained. Ridgewood’s challenge now is to reach a new crop of parents and students.

PLANS FOR THE FUTURE

Though the Village declined use of a grant awarded in 2012, the community still has interest in improving the infrastructure that supports students walking and bicycling to school safely. In 2017, NJDOT, through its Local Aid and Economic Development Program, awarded the Village of Ridgewood a new SRTS \$400,000 grant to be used for additional infrastructure improvements.

RESOURCES

Vollmer Associates LLP, Ridgewood School Walking Plans, February 2003.

Voorhees Transportation Center, 2009 NJSRTS Survey of Village of Ridgewood Parents.

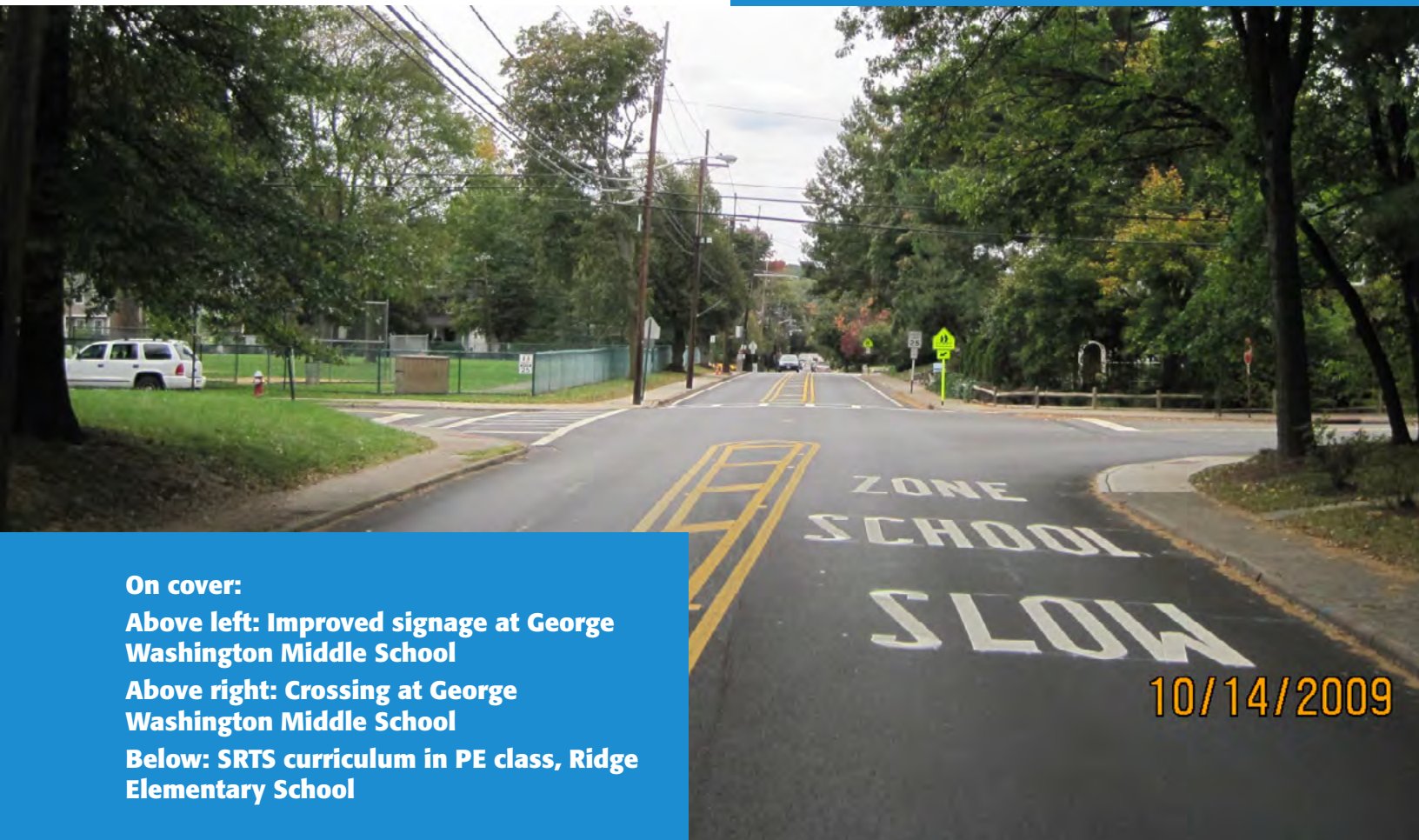
Voorhees Transportation Center, 2009 George Washington Middle School Student Travel Tally Report.

Voorhees Transportation Center, 2009 Ridge Elementary School Student Travel Tally Report.

The NJ SRTS Resource Center supports public officials, transportation and health professionals, and the general public in creating a safer and more accessible walking and bicycling environment through primary research, education, and dissemination of information about best practices in policy and design. The NJ SRTS Resource Center is supported by the NJ Department of Transportation with funds provided by the Federal Highway Administration. The NJ SRTS Resource Center is managed by the Alan M. Voorhees Transportation Center, at the Edward J. Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey.



Above: In-school SRTS education program
Below: New signage, George Washington Middle School



On cover:

Above left: Improved signage at George Washington Middle School

Above right: Crossing at George Washington Middle School

Below: SRTS curriculum in PE class, Ridge Elementary School

10/14/2009