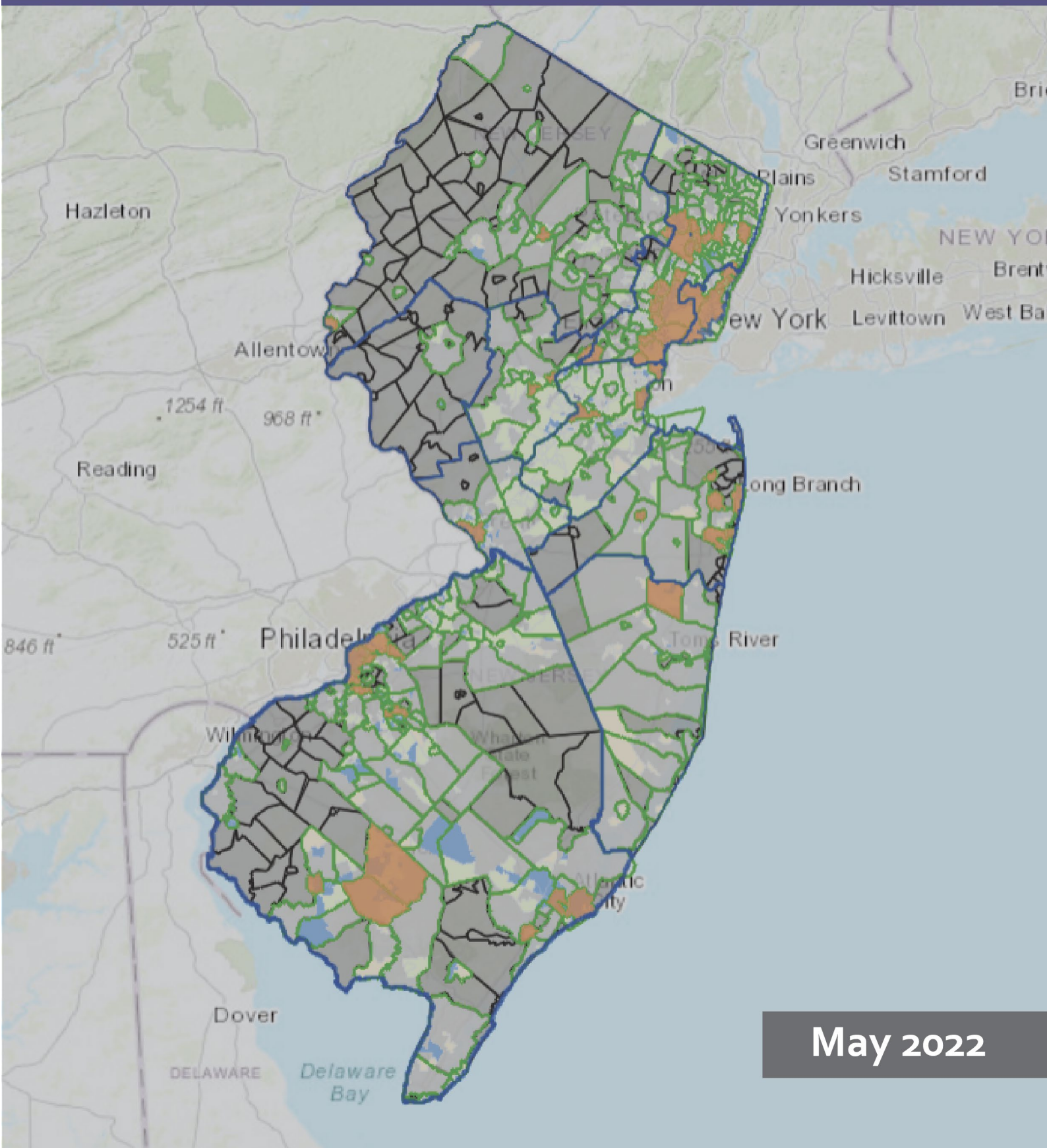


Equity Emphasis Areas for the New Jersey Safe Routes to School Program



Acknowledgements

The New Jersey Safe Routes Program, supported by the New Jersey Department of Transportation, is a statewide initiative with a mission to partner with schools and communities to prioritize and implement opportunities for people to walk, bike, or travel by other wheeled devices. By focusing on improvements to support active travel by youth, we believe we can create conditions that are safe, healthy, equitable, and appealing for all.

The New Jersey Safe Routes Resource Center assists public officials, transportation and health professionals, and the general public in creating safer and more accessible walking and bicycling environments for children in New Jersey through education, training, and research.

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Introduction

The New Jersey Safe Routes program is committed to fostering a healthy, fun, safe, inclusive, and equitable community by promoting active transportation and safety education for youth of all races, ethnicities, abilities, religions, and from all economic backgrounds. From the very beginning of the program, the New Jersey Department of Transportation (NJDOT) has been committed to ensuring that Safe Routes to School is a program for everyone by encouraging outreach to and participation of underserved or “disadvantaged” communities. Working with funding from NJDOT and technical assistance from the NJ Safe Routes Resource Center, Regional Coordinators from all eight of New Jersey’s Transportation Management Associations (TMA) have been mobilized through the Safe Routes to School Non-Infrastructure program to proactively reach out to and partner with schools, local and regional governments, and other organizations from all 21 counties throughout New Jersey to provide a variety of services, such as encouragement programs and safety education, and to implement these events and programs to encourage students to walk and bike to school. To help ensure inclusion of underserved communities, certain communities were designated as “Disadvantaged Communities” and were identified as important outreach targets to encourage SRTS participation. Regional Coordinators at each TMA were provided a list of the designated “Disadvantaged Communities” within their service area and were instructed to provide enhanced outreach efforts to these communities.

“Disadvantaged Communities”

Originally, “Disadvantaged Communities” were identified for the Safe Routes program using the New Jersey Department of Education’s (NJ DOE) District Factor Group (DFG) designation based on a community’s approximate socioeconomic status. The DFG designations used were from the 2000 decennial census, which is the most recent date they were updated. The following six variables which are closely related to socioeconomic status are used to calculate the DFGs:

1. Percent of adults with no high school diploma
2. Percent of adults with some college education
3. Occupational status
4. Unemployment rate
5. Percent of individuals in poverty
6. Median family income

Using these six variables, each municipality is given a score. This score may be weighted if some communities receive a significant share of students from other communities. Districts with similar scores are grouped into a DFG class. The eight DFG classes are A, B, CD, DE, FG, I, and J. Municipalities ranked A or B (the lowest DFG scores) are considered “Low Socioeconomic Communities” or “Disadvantaged Communities” for the purpose of the SRTS program.

While this list served the program in the past, it is no longer being updated and the information used to create it is over twenty years old. To ensure the continuation of NJDOT’s commitment to ensuring participation of underserved communities in the Safe Routes program, modernized designations based upon current data were needed to further the program. As inclusion is a key component of the Safe Routes program and the work completed by each TMA, an updated designation was needed

in May/June 2021 as NJDOT began to prepare the September 2021- August 2024 Safe Routes to School TMA Work Program.

Equity Emphasis Areas

To ensure the continuation of the TMA program, a decision regarding how underserved, or “disadvantaged communities” were identified for the Safe Routes program was needed before Strategic Highway Safety Plan equity decisions were due. Recognizing this immediate need, for the Current TMA Safe Routes work programs, the decision was made to move on from the traditional “disadvantaged communities” and to instead focus on Equity Emphasis Areas defined by the 2021 NJ Department of Community Affairs Targeted Urban Municipalities List and the NJ Department of Environmental Protection Overburdened Communities list.

NJ Department of Community Affairs Targeted Urban Municipalities are pulled from municipalities with populations greater than 10,000. They are designated “Urban Municipalities” if their municipal housing density is greater than two times the state housing density or if they wholly or partially contain a census tract with housing density greater than four times the state housing density. These municipalities are then ranked by their Municipal Revitalization Index. The top ten percent of municipalities (i.e., the first 57 on the ranked list) are considered TUMs. The NJ Department of Environmental Protection defines Overburdened Communities as any census block group in which at least 35 percent of the households qualify as low-income households (at or below twice the poverty threshold as determined by the United States Census Bureau); at least 40 percent of the residents identify as minority or as members of a State recognized tribal community; or at least 40 percent of the households have limited English proficiency (without an adult that speaks English “very well” according to the United States Census Bureau).

Equity Emphasis Areas in Practice

To better visualize the Equity Emphasis Areas, the NJ Safe Routes Resource Center has created a new Equity Emphasis Area Map in an easy-to-use web-based tool that requires no GIS skills to utilize. The tool contains municipal and county boundaries, TMA Service Area Boundaries, Targeted Urban Municipalities, municipalities with Overburdened Communities, block groups with Overburdened Communities, and School location data for all public, private, and charter schools within the state. Locations of Title 1 schools would make a useful addition to the map and Equity Emphasis Area criteria. Title 1 is the largest federally funded educational program that provides supplemental funds to school districts to assist schools with the highest student concentrations of poverty to meet school educational goals. Title 1 schools have not been included in the criteria as GIS layers for Title 1 School locations do not appear available and available school information lacks sufficient address data to be mappable. The online Equity Emphasis Area map tool can be viewed here:

<https://go.rutgers.edu/2qjqac75>

Conclusion

Using the 2021 NJ Department of Community Affairs Targeted Urban Municipalities List and the NJ Department of Environmental Protection Overburdened Communities lists to identify our Equity Emphasis Areas expands the list of target communities we are seeking to ensure are included in and benefit from the Safe Routes program.

Using these lists, there are now target Equity Emphasis Areas in each TMA Service Area. The Targeted Urban Municipalities List deals with entire municipalities, but the Overburdened Communities list focuses on data at the Block Group level, providing detailed information on blocks within municipalities with communities of low income, high minority population, and limited English proficiency. This information can help TMAs to more directly target their focus to populations in the greatest need of assistance.

Contact Us

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