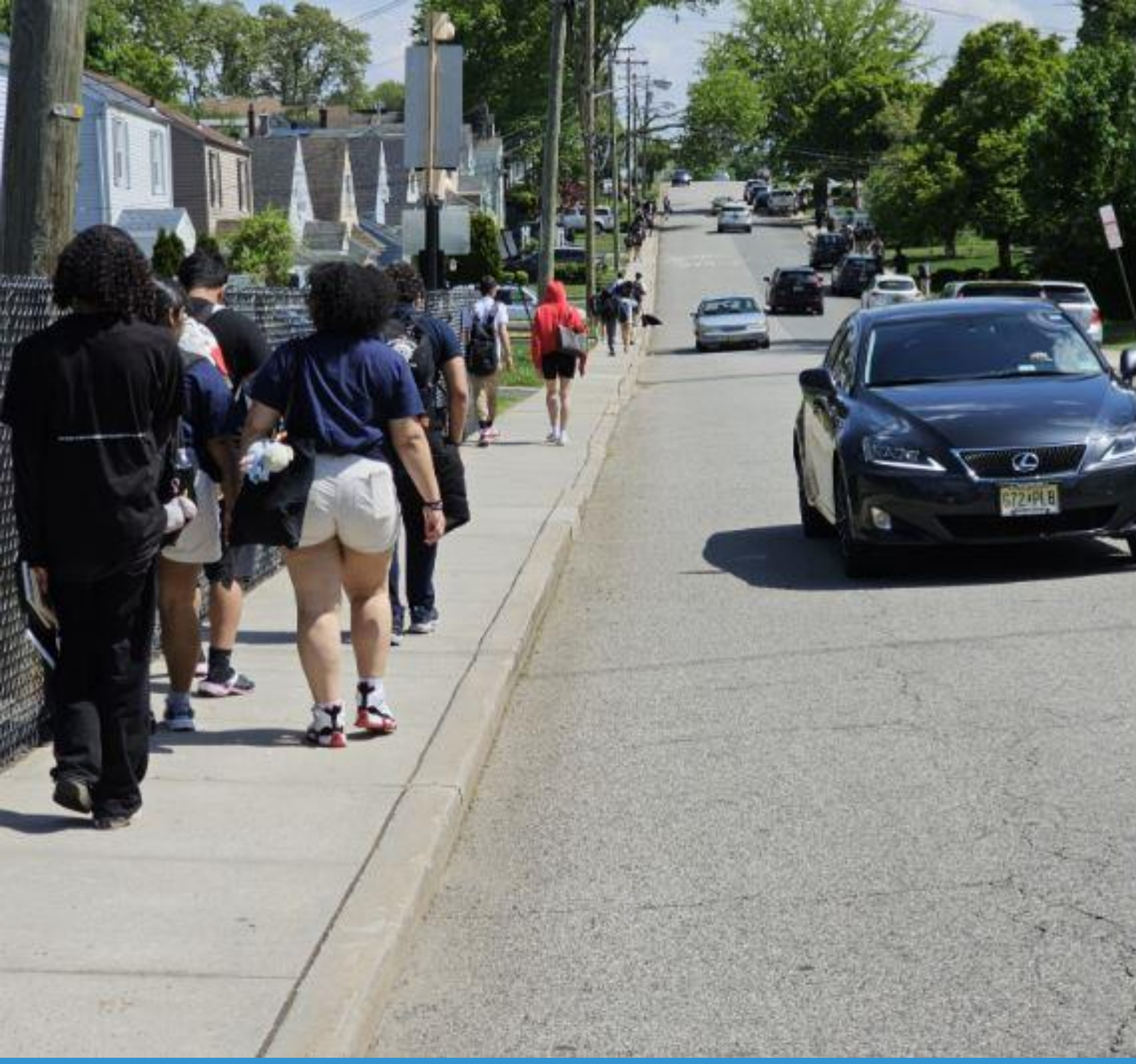

Expansion of the Safe Routes to School Program to High Schools in New Jersey:

A Study of High School Level Programs in the United States

NEW JERSEY Safe Routes to School
www.saferoutesnj.org

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The New Jersey Safe Routes to School 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 can create safe, healthy, and appealing conditions 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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Executive Summary

Safe Routes to School (SRTS) programs have been traditionally limited to students in grades K-8. Section 11119 of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) recodified the SRTS Program at the national level. It amended it to extend through 12th grade, expanding the program to encourage high school students to safely walk and bike to school. To prepare for this expansion to the high school level, the New Jersey Safe Routes Resource Center and Voorhees Transportation Center (VTC) partnered with CHPlanning, LTD. to investigate opportunities for and develop recommendations to expand SRTS programs to the high school level effectively. The project team engaged and interviewed 18 Safe Routes to School program coordinators and partner organizations to inform the development of program recommendations.

Participants of this study provided valuable insights into the execution of their high school programs, which were fundamental for the teams' development of the program recommendations for expanding SRTS programs to the High School level. Program representatives shared information about their funding sources, engagement strategies, educational initiatives, and some barriers and challenges they have encountered in expanding to and working at the high school level.

The program recommendations are categorized under the SRTS 6-Es: Engagement, Ensured Impartiality, Engineering, Encouragement, Education, and Evaluation. The recommendations recognize that high school-age youth can take on a more active role compared to programs at the middle and elementary school levels and incorporate considerations and successful strategies utilized by the programs that participated in the study.

Introduction

Understanding the Safe Routes to School (SRTS) Program

Safe Routes to School (SRTS) is a federal, state, and local effort that creates safer and more appealing conditions for active transportation. SRTS programs enable and encourage youth, including those with disabilities, to travel to school by foot, bike, or other wheeled devices. Promoting walking and bicycling as safer and more attractive transportation options can foster and sustain a healthy, active lifestyle from a young age. SRTS programs help plan, develop, and implement projects and activities that enhance safety for individuals of all ages, abilities, and backgrounds while also reducing traffic, fuel consumption, and air pollution. Safe Routes to School projects can include physical enhancements to the environment and non-infrastructure initiatives, such as encouragement and educational programs, to promote increased walking and biking within the community.

Importance of Engaging High School Students

Traditionally, SRTS programs have been intended for younger students, excluding high school-aged students from programming opportunities. However, as students transition to high school, the conditions their transportation needs for traveling to and from school and throughout their community continue to change. Therefore, it is crucial to continue educating and engaging them regarding active transportation topics to help them adapt to their evolving needs. Participation in SRTS programs can also provide high school students with valuable professional development and skill-building opportunities to bring into the next chapter of their lives.

Methodology of Interviews

The CHPlanning team conducted a national scan of existing and planned SRTS programs, resulting in a list of over 49 potential interview candidates. Using limited publicly available information, the team created profiles for a subset of these SRTS programs, capturing information on community demographics, land area, funding source, program description, and contact information for program coordinators. The team then developed a methodology to select 15 SRTS Programs or related organizations to be included in the interview process. This selection methodology was driven by metrics that represent the varied communities of New Jersey communities, ensuring a comprehensive examination of candidate programs. The metrics chosen to narrow down a subset of the 49 programs were characteristics of the geography (i.e., urban, rural, suburban), distance to transit stops, walkability level, and poverty level. Additional programs that operate at the state level were included in the final list of programs to ensure that experiences from different SRTS scales are incorporated into the recommendations.

The interviews aimed to gain insights into program execution that could not be understood through desktop research alone. Most importantly, the results of the interview process aimed at developing better-informed recommendations for the state of New Jersey.

Initial engagement with the final 15 programs yielded fewer responses than expected, with some programs no longer active or their contact information not current. After discussions, the team pivoted to include more programs, including some programs that were in the original list of 49.

Figure 1. Distribution of Participating Programs Across the Nation

Figure 1 shows the general location of the programs included in the study, with 3 programs on the East Coast, 4 in the South, 1 in the Midwest, 2 in the Western part of the country, and 8 on the West Coast.

At the beginning of each interview, the interviewers read a consent form to the participants, which included details of the study. They asked participants if they would be okay with being video and audio recorded. Participants and the findings are kept completely anonymous throughout this report.

Literature Review

High School Level SRTS Programs

A desktop review of High School level programs reveals that programs have adopted an array of strategies to engage high school students effectively. Some of the approaches are highlighted below.

Richfield, Minnesota's Safe Routes to School program established a Comprehensive Plan that recommends integrating walking and bicycling education into the physical education curriculum while leveraging existing high school and middle school clubs to support these activities and involve elementary school students.

The Marin County SRTS initiative in California stands out for its innovative strategies. These initiatives make active transportation appealing and exciting for students, fostering a positive attitude towards alternative commuting methods. Some of the strategies employed by the Marin County Safe Routes to School program include:

- Utilizing engagement events to encourage participation among high school students.
- Using bike rides and community celebration activities to capture students' interest and make active transportation appealing.
- Developing a teen toolkit to empower students to actively promote and participate in initiatives, encouraging ownership and involvement.
- Organizing field trips with hands-on experiences, such as bike field trips, that help students build practical skills and are fun.
- Organizing events that utilize bike blenders to make the educational aspect of these initiatives more fun and memorable.
- Offering mobile bike maintenance removes barriers and ensures that students have everything they need to use their bikes.
- Incentivizing active transportation through competition:
    - Example: Marin County uses the Transit Race to provide a fun and interactive opportunity for high school students to obtain youth Clipper cards (reduced fare cards for transit), utilize Google Maps for transit planning, and navigate transit routes in friendly competition. This engaging event fosters independence and confidence in public transit use. It involves teams traveling by public transit to designated locations while collecting points by taking selfies for a chance to win prizes.

Similarly, the Cupertino Safe Routes to School program in California collaborates with many stakeholders, including high school students, city staff, educators, parents, and community members in monthly meetings. This collaborative effort empowers students to take an active role in promoting safe commuting practices.

In Colorado, the Fort Collins SRTS program not only promotes biking but also hosts fundraising events to raise funds for necessary bicycle equipment for students. The program's most popular fundraising event is the "FoCo Fondo Benefits Youth Bike Programming," which is a 12-mile family-friendly bike ride held annually.

Empowerment through Active Participation

Empowering youth with knowledge has been a main strategy for some of these programs. The Montgomery County Youth Vision Zero Ambassador program in Maryland educates high school students about traffic safety and the principles of Vision Zero. Similarly, the Bicycle Coalition Youth Cycling program in Philadelphia focuses on building leadership, independence, and healthy habits through cycling education. Although no longer active, the Youth Ambassadors for Local Spokes program in New York City engaged students in internships and summer programs to understand their peers' motivations and challenges in utilizing active transportation, encouraging youth-led data-driven studies and decisions to improve biking experiences.

National Collaborative Networks

On a larger scale, collaborative networks, or partnerships between like-minded organizations, have been established to drive the increase of safe youth cycling across the country. Most notably, the Youth Cycling Coalition (YCC) exemplifies such an initiative. This coalition brings 10 organizations together that promote access to biking infrastructure, advocate for better biking conditions, and provide introductory biking experiences. Through collaborative efforts, the YCC supports the broader adoption of effective strategies and initiatives aimed at youth aged 6-18.

The YCC is currently piloting this effort with all 10 organizations, including the Safe Routes to School Partnership, in Morgantown, West Virginia. They intend to bring the initiative to other cities across the country. The YCC is partnering with West Virginia University, an institution that has in the past successfully administered different youth educational programming and has the resources to perform research-based evaluations and provide support as needed to the pilot.

Interview Findings

The team performed outreach to several programs with the goal of interviewing 18 Safe Routes to School coordinators or representatives. The interviews included 16 SRTS programs from different parts of the country and two non-traditional programs - one youth-led organization and one university-affiliated Youth Transportation Safety program.

Common Themes and Insights from Interviews with SRTS Programs

Funding Sources

Several funding sources were identified during interviews with high school level Safe Routes to School (SRTS) programs.

#	Participating Programs	Non-Infrastructure Program Funding Source	Infrastructure Program Funding Source	Staff Funding Source
1	Institution backed Youth Transportation Safety Program	Funding from Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) Private Sector Funding: Motor Vehicles Insurance		National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) Funding for staff coverage

#	Participating Programs	Non-Infrastructure Program Funding Source	Infrastructure Program Funding Source	Staff Funding Source
2	State Level SRTS (DOT) Program	Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP): funding needs such as SRTS planning. State SRTS non-infrastructure grants to local partners for: • Planning • Programmatic grants (e.g., bike fleets) and • Engineering support grants.	State SRTS infrastructure grants for infrastructure projects without a cost share requirement.	TAP for: • Consultants to develop SRTS plans across the State and education curriculum • SRTS Coordinator and • SRTS Planner staff positions within State Department of Transportation (DOT) State SRTS non-infrastructure grants for: • Coordinator grants, and • SRTS incentives for event days
3	State Level SRTS (DOT) Program	Federal funds distributed to the SRTS program through the DOT		
4	State Level SRTS (DOT) Program	Programs funding from the Highway Safety Improvement Program (HSIP) from the Federal Highway Administration (FHA)		
5	State Level SRTS (DOT) Program	Federal funds are primarily from TAP, while state funds come from the Motor Vehicle Account and Climate		

#	Participating Programs	Non-Infrastructure Program Funding Source	Infrastructure Program Funding Source	Staff Funding Source
		Commitment Act revenue.		
6	County Level SRTS Program	Grant funded through the State DOT- DOT does SRTS funding on a 2–3-year grant cycle	Reliant on partnerships with the DOT and schools to encourage changes.	SRTS coordinators are grant-funded through the State DOT. One permanent position in the state. Funding received cannot be used for infrastructure because the program is in the public health department which limits the changes that can be made.
7	County Level SRTS Program	Program funded by the County's Transportation Authority. Supplemental grants used for specialty components of the High School program		
8	County Level SRTS Program	The County's Transportation Commission funds the Program through a Transportation Sales Tax measure adopted to fund transportation improvements in the County	-	-
9	County Level SRTS Program	City County Association of Governments: the	-	-

#	Participating Programs	Non-Infrastructure Program Funding Source	Infrastructure Program Funding Source	Staff Funding Source
		county's congestion management agency County's Transportation Authority State's Office of Traffic Safety		
10	City Level SRTS Program	The City's general fund, the main operating budget for all city services/programs, funds most SRTS programming	Grants such as the State's DOT SRTS grant program, for infrastructure and other special projects	-
11	City Level SRTS Program	Funded by a FHWA grant which funds program for four years and that is supplemented by local match of about 11.6% provided by local sales tax	-	-
12	City Level SRTS Program	The program is primarily grant-funded.		The program uses internal transportation staff for some tasks. School district funds SRTS coordinator position
13	City Level SRTS Program	City's General Fund. Sales Tax: partially funded through a 30-year 0.5% sales tax collected at the county level for traffic improvement, allocating $40-50K/year for Bike/Ped		City's General Fund: for coordinator and crossing guards' salaries

#	Participating Programs	Non-Infrastructure Program Funding Source	Infrastructure Program Funding Source	Staff Funding Source
		education and encouragement. State Office of Traffic Safety Grant: for in-school education programs. Additional Grants		
14	City Level SRTS Program	State DOT		
15	City Level SRTS Program	Education and Encouragement programs are funded through: • State's Traffic Safety Commission grants which come from the NHTSA • State's Department of Social and Human Services (DSHS) aimed at preventing Traumatic Brain Injury- (revenue from speeding tickets across the State)- programs focus on helmet safety.	State and Federal DOT.	
16*	School District Level SRTS Program	-	-	Staff bill time to their regular programs. Council members receive a $100/month stipend for attending

#	Participating Programs	Non-Infrastructure Program Funding Source	Infrastructure Program Funding Source	Staff Funding Source
				monthly meetings, funded through a transportation options contract (combination of federal and state funds).

*Note: 2 study participants did not provide funding information programs.

Engagement Methods

Common outreach methods for engaging high school students in these programs include involvement through school clubs such as environmental and science clubs, youth advisory councils, honors societies, working groups, and after-school programs. Some programs also collaborate with competitive teams, like mountain bike clubs, and utilize peer-to-peer outreach to foster participation.

In some cases, students serve as members of working groups that meet regularly with stakeholders from schools, transit agencies, local organizations, and other community members. Their roles can include representing the interests of their peers, applying for small grants to organize school events, leading outreach efforts, and presenting their achievements to the working group. Similarly, some programs utilize a Youth Advisory Council as the primary means of engagement.

Other engagement strategies include in-school marketing through posters around school campuses and tabling at locations students frequent, such as malls. Some programs also organize contests to incentivize students' participation. A few programs organize video contests where students make short educational videos with transportation safety themes and have a chance to win prizes, with prizes ranging from gift cards to stickers designed by local artists to MacBook laptops.

Several coordinators highlight that collaboration with different stakeholders affects students' engagement levels. Working with teachers, advisors, counselors, administrators, and principals at schools has been effective in engaging students in different SRTS initiatives. Parental involvement varies across the programs in the study. While direct parental engagement tends to be less frequent than elementary and middle school levels, some programs encourage parents to participate. Program coordinators aim to increase parent involvement through working groups.

Programs with robust middle school initiatives tend to achieve lasting high school engagement. This success is attributed to the early connections formed during middle school, which continue to benefit students as they progress to higher grades. These programs emphasize continuity in maintaining relationships with students and encourage ongoing participation as they advance through school.

Digital Engagement

In addition to in-person engagement, programs use digital tools to connect with students and gather necessary data.

Social Media Engagement: The use of social media varies across programs, often shaped by student involvement and local agency regulations. Some programs, including a youth-focused bicycle group, either rely heavily on social media as their primary engagement method or actively develop social media

engagement strategies tailored to high school students. Programs use platforms such as Instagram and TikTok and have developed an understanding of platform-specific algorithms and optimal posting times to expand their reach. Other programs do not have digital engagement strategies, and the use of social media platforms is dependent on the initiative of student representatives. Some programs face challenges such as city or county agency restrictions and resource limitations. Some coordinators note that not having SRTS dedicated accounts and sharing platforms with broader agencies limit the effectiveness of SRTS messaging and limit engagement, as youth may not be interested in other agency initiatives. Overall, the adoption of these social media strategies is inconsistent, with some programs struggling to maintain an active and targeted presence.

Technology and Survey Platforms: Some programs utilize survey platforms and school district communication channels like email and program websites to reach students. Many programs use survey platforms to assess students' needs and gather data necessary for the further development of their programs. One program administers annual surveys to evaluate its programs and to assess students' progress in understanding safety topics covered within the different initiatives. This allows programs to identify effective engagement methods and issues that need a particular focus.

Customized Apps: A few programs explored the development of customized apps for student engagement. One program uses a customized application developed for youth aged 16-25 that drive. Users can download the mobile application and log their driving trips for a chance to earn points and win gift cards. Each logged trip starts with a score of 100 points, and 20 points will be deducted for each driving infraction, such as distracted driving (a phone call, texting, etc.) or speeding. If the user scores less than 100 points, they will not earn any points for the trip but will be notified of their driving score, the points lost due to unsafe driving behavior, and where the infractions took place along the route. Only a driving score of 100, or "Safe Trip", will earn points for the user. Other program efforts to develop customized apps were often hindered by high costs and logistical challenges, such as requiring parental consent for minors to use certain apps, which reduced participation. Additionally, some programs highlight that relying on mobile devices with data plans for these resources can exclude students who lack access to these resources.

Privacy concerns were highlighted in a few interviews as a challenge in directly reaching high school students both digitally and in person. Some programs are restricted in accessing students' phone numbers or other contact information, limiting their ability to communicate through social media or direct messaging. Some programs do not directly engage with students and offer support to individual schools in their SRTS programming by providing resources and toolkits.

Education

Programs employ various approaches to promote SRTS and educate high school students on transportation safety. The focus of these educational efforts varies, with some programs emphasizing bicycle and pedestrian safety while others concentrate on safe driving practices, especially in areas lacking alternative transportation infrastructure. Key educational topics covered by these programs are outlined below:

Driving Safety and Broader Traffic Education*:* Many programs operate within jurisdictions that have limited infrastructure for alternative transportation options beyond single-occupancy vehicles. Consequently, their education strategies prioritize broader traffic safety topics. These include distracted driving, defensive driving, Driving Under the Influence (DUI) prevention, and awareness of and interaction with pedestrians and cyclists while sharing the road. Some programs highlight that they often use "scare tactics" by showing videos of the consequences of vehicle crashes when educating high school students. Some programs find this method effective, while others are making efforts to find other

strategies to teach students safe driving. While scare tactics can provoke an immediate emotional response, they often fail to equip students with the practical skills and critical thinking needed for real-world decision-making. Instead, approaches that engage students through interactive discussions and hands-on experiences tend to foster a deeper, more lasting commitment to safe driving behaviors.

***Bicycle and Pedestrian Safety*:** Some programs focus on bicycle and pedestrian safety and cover several topics. For bicycle safety, programs teach defensive bicycling skills, on-road bicycling safety skills, including hand signals, bike maintenance and repair, use of bicycling safety equipment, including helmet fitting, and practical skills for navigating traffic safely, including in difficult roadway conditions. Many programs use existing curricula developed by bicycle advocacy organizations. Several programs mentioned using the League of American Cyclists' Smart Cycling curriculum as part of their educational programs.

Educational efforts extend beyond classroom instruction to include interactive workshops and hands-on activities. Common offerings include bicycle repair workshops, mapping sessions for students to identify and address commuting challenges, and bicycle-friendly driver training. In some cases, cities organize bicycle events, traffic gardens, or bicycle safety workshops in collaboration with public health representatives to underscore the link between transportation and overall health.

For pedestrian safety, most of the programs focus on teaching pedestrian safety basics. Several programs conduct walk audits to educate youth about pedestrian safety. Students, in collaboration with program coordinators, then perform three weeklong targeted educational messaging on distracted walking and perform post-messaging observations to assess any changes in behavior.

Other educational initiatives include unique components such as bike giveaways for students who cannot afford bikes and courses that combine cycling education with other practical skills like route planning and community engagement. Additionally, youth-led programs play a key role, with students participating in self-guided projects such as installing temporary bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure near their schools. Students also participate in data collection activities such as safety studies and mapping activities. One program partners with a local university for an initiative that helps students become citizen scientists. They utilize a discovery tool application and a multi-step process that guides participants through gathering data. Students take pictures, conduct research, and add comments to a shared platform to determine the conditions that make bicycling and walking to school challenging or easy in their localities.

Stakeholder or Adult Workshops

One program offers workshops for teachers to become more knowledgeable about road safety issues and become program champions who can work with youth in and out of the classroom. These workshops also gather insights from teachers, which inform other iterations or improvements to specific initiatives.

The methods of delivering education range from traditional classroom lectures about different safety topics to interactive games and hands-on activities to deliver the message. One program developed an online game to teach youth about relevant state-specific traffic laws.

Curriculum Integration Challenges

The ability to embed these topics into regular school schedules varies across the different programs. While some programs have successfully integrated their educational components into school curricula, often within Physical Education (PE) classes, others face challenges in achieving the same level of integration at the high school level. Some programs have incorporated elements of bicycle awareness and defensive bicycling into driver's education classes. One program provides a mandatory bicycle course in

PE class that covers topics such as bicycle maintenance, riding skills, and safety information, equipping students with practical skills for navigating traffic safely.

Community Partners

Programs leverage a range of community partnerships to enhance their efforts in promoting SRTS and transportation safety among high school students. These partnerships often include local businesses, non-profits, advocacy organizations, and government agencies that align with the program's goals.

Several programs team up with bicycle and pedestrian advocacy organizations, such as the League of American Bicyclists, local bicycle shops, and Non-Profit Organizations, which provide apprenticeships and practical skill development opportunities for high school students. These collaborations are key to delivering hands-on learning experiences and promoting bicycling and walking as viable, safe transportation options.

Additionally, programs have partnerships with school clubs such as environmental clubs, mountain bike teams, and other student-led groups, effectively integrating transportation safety efforts into broader activities. One program partners with a youth Vision Zero Ambassadors program to engage students and encourage them to lead peer outreach. Youth leaders utilize their own understanding of what resonates with their high school peers to craft compelling messages. By involving students directly, this program ensures that the safety messages are relevant and effectively communicated within the school environment.

Programs also work with broader community entities, including Rotary Clubs, school districts, city departments (such as traffic operations and engineering), and regional planning organizations. For instance, partnerships with city departments and regional coalitions provide critical support in areas like infrastructure planning and traffic safety education. Some programs involve public health departments and local transit agencies, directly addressing safe transportation barriers. For instance, transit agencies have offered discounts for transit passes or waived all fees for students, while public health departments have assisted SRTS programs in launching walking school buses. Involving strategic partners like these can extend the programs' reach, particularly to underserved communities.

Many programs also collaborate with local businesses often to provide incentives or rewards for their program participants. Bakeries, mini-golf venues, and pizza places are the most common local business partners.

Barriers Expanding to High Schools

Expanding Safe Routes to School (SRTS) programs to high schools presents various challenges, as identified by multiple interviewees. A major barrier is funding restrictions, with many states still working on expanding SRTS funding to the high school level. There are also recurring issues with limitations of other resources, such as insufficient staffing and the absence of dedicated personnel to focus on high school programming. For instance, some areas only have one staff member to cover extensive school districts, making it difficult to provide direct support to students and teachers. Moreover, many programs struggle with finding committed champions within schools, such as teachers or administrators, who are willing to spearhead SRTS initiatives. Without such champions, programs can take years to gain traction. The ongoing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has also diverted resources and attention away from expansion efforts.

Administrative hurdles also play a significant role. Some high school administrations show a lack of enthusiasm for programs not directly tied to academic requirements, and integrating SRTS into the school

day, rather than just after-school activities, remains a challenge. Additionally, the perception among high school students that walking or bicycling is "uncool" in a car-centric culture further impedes the promotion of active transportation.

Given the limited examples of existing SRTS programs at the high school level, efforts to expand initiatives beyond middle school often require beginning from scratch. Programs find the lack of existing program infrastructure hard to navigate and add that the lack of best practices to follow extends their implementation timeline and requires additional resources.

Some barriers are specific to topics covered in education initiatives. A program coordinator highlighted that broader traffic education has historically focused on raising awareness of impaired driving. As a result, the program has had difficulties pushing for education initiatives that raise awareness around other risks, such as speeding and distracted driving.

Some programs have had privacy concerns and state legal requirements that limit or complicate outreach efforts, as communication with high school students often requires navigating district protocols and local Memorandum of Understandings. These concerns necessitate working through school administration or adhering to strict communication protocols, which can impede effective outreach. Some also find that the lack of parental involvement at the high school level further diminishes the influence of SRTS messaging as students make more independent transportation choices compared to younger age groups.

Challenges to Working with High School Students

Engaging high school students in SRTS programs presents a unique set of challenges. One significant hurdle across the various programs is the prevalent driving culture among high school students, who often prefer driving to school over alternative modes of transportation like walking or bicycling. This preference is reinforced by the independence that high school students correlate with acquiring a driver's license, making it difficult to shift their habits towards other commuting options. Additionally, high school students' perception of driving as a status symbol and the nationwide lack of adequate alternative transportation options reinforces car dependency among students, particularly in their junior and senior years.

Engagement levels vary significantly, with many students showing limited interest in non-academic programs. High school students are often busy with academic and extracurricular commitments, leaving little room for participation in SRTS activities. Programs focusing on after-school initiatives often encounter low turnout due to students' competing schedules. Moreover, some programs highlight that gaining the attention of high school students requires tailored messaging that resonates with their interests, with some finding that traditional approaches like 'scare tactics' around traffic safety are often ineffective.

Scheduling challenges further complicate engagement efforts. High schools often have rigid structures, and some programs face obstacles, such as needing to align with existing clubs or leadership activities in which not all students are involved. Communication methods also present a barrier, as students are not always accustomed to checking emails or other formal communication channels, leading to missed opportunities for involvement.

Integration with Public Transportation

Integrating SRTS programs with public transportation involves collaborative efforts to make transit a more accessible and appealing option for students. Programs focus their initiatives on equipping students with the skills and knowledge needed to use public transportation effectively.

Key strategies programs use include teaching students how to use public transit, such as reading transit maps, selecting routes, and combining bicycling with bus travel. Some offer practical training, with lessons on loading bicycles onto buses, which help students seamlessly integrate bicycling with public transportation, extending their travel opportunities and reachable destinations. By emphasizing the connectivity between different transportation modes, these efforts aim to make public transit a natural part of students' daily travel.

Programs often incorporate engaging, hands-on activities to build students' confidence in using public transportation. For example, a few programs use interactive events like scavenger hunts and the "Amazing Race" to familiarize students with bus routes and transit options in a fun and practical way. These events provide valuable experiences and make learning about public transit enjoyable, fostering a positive association with these services.

In some areas, initiatives have included offering zero-fare transit for youth, which has effectively increased ridership by removing cost barriers. This approach is particularly beneficial for students with after-school jobs or activities, making public transportation a convenient and cost-effective option for their varied schedules.

Efforts also extend to education campaigns that utilize social media and in-person outreach at transit stations to engage students and encourage them to explore public transit. Programs in urban areas, which often have robust transit networks, focus on providing comprehensive training and support to ease the transition from traditional school buses to public transportation, especially where school bus availability is limited.

Accommodations of Different Needs

Some programs make efforts to accommodate the various needs of SRTS program participants. These include language considerations, physical accommodations, and socio-economic considerations.

Language Availability: Many programs offer initiatives in select languages as needed, while a few others always translate their materials to the dominant non-English language spoken in their respective areas. Materials translated include written resources, surveys, and online content. One program has a bilingual instructor for all the educational lessons they offer their participants. They are working on hiring more to ensure that non-English-speaking students and their families can fully participate in all their initiatives. Overall, there is a recognized need for broader language inclusion in some areas, with ongoing efforts to expand these resources in others.

Physical Accommodations: Programs express that ensuring that students with disabilities can participate is a priority. However, many programs acknowledge that accommodations are not built into their programs but are addressed as needed. A few programs have strategies in place to ensure that students with disabilities can take part in different programs. One program has a disability consultant involved in all their programming, while a few others always provide adaptive bicycles and modified tricycles for students with different physical needs. Programs often collaborate with local schools to offer these resources and ensure all students are included in any SRTS programming.

Socio-Economic Considerations: Addressing economic barriers is also crucial. Some programs focus on providing bicycles to students who may not be able to afford them, often partnering with local organizations to facilitate this support. Additionally, one program offers sliding scale fees for biking and outdoor camps that they organize to make their initiatives open to all students, regardless of their financial situation.

Infrastructure and Accessibility: A few programs highlight that they prioritize accessibility through their ongoing efforts to improve road infrastructure, such as enhanced pathways and crossings. They see these initiatives as a vital way to ensure that all students can safely and easily reach schools and public transportation.

Community Engagement: Some programs have targeted engagement efforts for different communities, particularly in underserved areas. One program, operating in the context of a high concentration of mobile homes, has a targeted engagement effort for students and their parents in these areas that are otherwise harder to reach with their regular outreach efforts. Consequently, the program does outreach to these communities to provide supplemental programming and support for students.

Opportunities for Professional Development and Career Exploration

Recognizing that high school students are often focused on their future, some programs provide experiences that enhance resumes and prepare students for college or careers, encouraging their participation in the SRTS program. These opportunities offer participants different skills while also promoting safe driving, bicycling, and walking behaviors. By aligning with students' aspirations, SRTS initiatives effectively engage them in activities that benefit their personal growth and community safety. Programs attract high school students to SRTS initiatives by offering opportunities for professional development, career exploration, leadership roles, and, in some cases, college credits.

Leadership Development: Many programs offer students leadership roles and responsibilities that help them develop essential skills. For instance, students can take on ambassador roles or participate in leadership positions within environmental and transportation clubs. These roles often involve leading outreach activities, promoting programs, and working with data. Students gain hands-on experience in program management and community engagement by participating in these activities.

Career Exploration: Some SRTS programs integrate career development components into their curricula. Students are exposed to various professions through internships, apprenticeships, and summer jobs. These experiences allow them to interact with professionals in fields such as urban planning, transportation safety, and bike repair. For example, one program offers high school students an opportunity to intern at local bike shops, gaining practical retail and bicycle maintenance skills. Another program partners with the city to provide a mentor position to high school students, who can work with students at the middle school level on road safety issues in and around the school.

Ambassador and Advocacy Roles: Some programs include roles that provide students with platforms to advocate for safe transportation practices and engage in community initiatives. These roles enhance students' leadership skills and prepare them for future careers in public safety and urban planning. Students in ambassador programs might also be eligible for internships and service-learning credits, further supporting their professional growth.

Vocational Education: Some programs incorporate vocational education into their curricula, offering courses related to the bicycling industry and urban planning. These courses introduce students to relevant skills and knowledge, preparing them for careers in these fields.

Networking and Exposure: Events such as summits and workshops provide students with opportunities to interact with professionals from various sectors. These events often include activities like walkability tours and media outreach, allowing students to apply their skills and knowledge in real-world contexts. Networking with professionals and participating in media campaigns helps students build connections and gain insights into potential career paths.

In addition to formal programs, some initiatives support students in other means. This might include writing letters of recommendation, helping students secure jobs, or offering certification programs in bicycle mechanics. This support contributes to students' career readiness and professional growth.

Recommendations for High School Level SRTS Program

Based on the study's findings, SRTS programs at the high school level require different considerations to be effective in their implementation. The engagement, education, encouragement, and evaluation methods at this level differ from those used in programs for younger students. The following recommendations are informed by the interviews conducted during this study, and they offer suggestions that, while focused on high school programs, may also apply to other SRTS initiatives at lower levels. The recommendations are organized according to the 6 “Es” framework often used by SRTS programs.

Engagement

- Emphasize Youth-Led Engagement Initiatives
    - Engaging a wider student population through varied youth-specific and youth-led efforts can be particularly beneficial for high school students.
    - ***Example:*** Programs can assign students key roles such as developing programs or program messaging, mentoring younger peers in developing leadership and organizational skills in active transportation-related initiatives, leading bike buses for middle schools, or even holding paid jobs with the city or school related to active transportation. These jobs can be with city transportation planners, bicycle maintenance, or active transportation advocacy organizations. These roles can offer students a financial stipend, school credit, and valuable training in community engagement.
- Establish Youth Advisory Councils and Working Groups
    - Youth advisory councils focused on transportation safety, provide students with a platform to discuss mobility issues related to commuting to and from school as well as travel throughout the community. Working groups can allow youth representatives to share the concerns of their peers with other stakeholders who can work together on finding solutions and leading initiatives.
    - ***Example:*** SRTS programs can support the creation of youth advisory councils at the high school or district level and include youth representatives from the council into SRTS working groups. The Youth Advisory Council members can also gather concerns from their younger peers that they engage through the mentorship program and represent a wider student body. Members of the Council can potentially receive stipends for their participation, with members rotating annually.
    - Youth advisory council members can participate in working groups alongside parents, principals, transit agency representatives, and other stakeholders and actively participate in SRTS program development and implementation.
- Utilize Existing or New School Club Infrastructures to Engage Youth
    - Environmental and bike clubs are already active in many schools and can be leveraged as an engagement tool for initiatives. Additionally, expanding engagement to other clubs can reach a broader audience and incorporate transportation safety themes into various activities.
    - ***Example:*** SRTS programs can support clubs like theatre, drama, film, and technology to develop transportation safety-themed content, such as videos or websites, which can be both educational and entertaining, making the safety message more appealing to students.

If there is an interest, programs can encourage the formation of School SRTS clubs dedicated to SRTS initiatives.

- Establish Dedicated SRTS Social Media Accounts
    - Create dedicated SRTS social media accounts to serve as focused hubs for program-related content, ensuring that messages are not lost among broader agency posts. Individual schools can also set up their own accounts to share updates on school-specific SRTS initiatives, with students leading these efforts.
    - ***Example***: Programs can support youth in developing social media toolkits with templates, guidelines, and strategies for platform-specific content. Students can use these resources to manage SRTS-specific social media accounts. Social media can be utilized to advertise SRTS campaigns. Using a hashtag, students can post and upload stories related to SRTS and ask questions based on their travel experience to and from school. Their participation can get them entered into a raffle for an opportunity to win a gift or a benefit.
- Leverage Existing School Communication Channels
    - Not all students have access to digital platforms, so using existing school communication channels ensures inclusivity when disseminating SRTS-focused information.
    - ***Example:*** Programs can collaborate with school newsletters, announcements, and parent-teacher organizations to reach a broader audience, ensuring all students and families stay informed. Similar content from social media can be posted around different school areas, especially where students congregate.
- Develop a Community Assets List Early on in the SRTS Program Development
    - Identifying potential partners and community assets early on can be crucial for program success and the development of outreach strategies. Planned and structured outreach efforts allow for smoother implementation as programs progress.
    - ***Example:*** Participants, alongside coordinators, can work to identify potential program partners, such as local businesses and organizations that align with their interests to provide incentives, mentorship, or other forms of support for SRTS programs.
- Establish Working Relationships with Local Higher Educational Institutions
    - Higher education institutions are often well-resourced and equipped to assist SRTS programs through data collection, student mentoring, and resource sharing. Partnering with them can enhance the reach and effectiveness of the program.
    - ***Example:*** Collaborate with local universities or community colleges for data collection efforts, support in program evaluation, and mentorship of high school students involved in SRTS leadership roles.

Ensuring Impartiality

- Provide Proactive Translation to Program Materials
    - Ensure a consistent and proactive translation of all program materials into multiple languages if needed.
    - ***Example:*** Instead of offering translations on an "as-needed" basis, programs should ensure that SRTS initiatives are automatically translated into at least the top two languages spoken by the school's student population.
- Incorporate Accommodations from the Start to Support Students with Disabilities and Neurodivergence
    - Working with disability-focused organizations or consultants during the planning phase helps ensure accessibility is integrated into all aspects of SRTS programs. This includes

providing adaptive equipment, organizing accessible events, and training staff to meet participants' needs.
    - ***Example:*** SRTS programs can collaborate with local disability organizations to develop structured accessibility procedures and ensure thoughtful planning from the outset.
- Remove Financial Barriers to Participation for Students
    - Programs should eliminate financial barriers by ensuring all events are free or offer a sliding scale fee structure, making sure students from varying economic backgrounds can participate in activities.
    - ***Example:*** Programs can collaborate with local businesses, such as bike shops, to offer giveaways or loan programs for bicycles and bicycle accessories. Additionally, these local businesses can financially support through donations or sponsor programs for events, camps, or workshops, so they are free to students or have a flexible fee structure, which minimizes the burden on students and families.
- Develop Targeted Outreach Strategies to Engage Opportunity-Limited Communities**:**
    - Identifying and developing targeted outreach strategies ensures that students in opportunity-limited communities can participate in SRTS programs.
    - ***Example:*** Partner with community organizations that have existing relationships with groups in neighborhoods lacking transportation infrastructure to co-host SRTS events in these areas. Programs can partner with local bike shops to host learn-to-ride events.

Engineering

- Advocate and Prioritize Infrastructure Improvements that Benefit Students with Varying Medical Conditions
    - Prioritizing access for students with disabilities improves infrastructure for everyone. Features like smooth sidewalks, curb cuts, and proper crossings benefit students with permanent and temporary ailments, younger siblings/children, parents with strollers, and the public, making the entire environment more user-friendly and safer for all.
    - ***Example***: Work with SRTS participants to prioritize infrastructure improvements that focus on universal design principles to ensure easy navigation for all users.
- Include Participants in the Design and Implementation of Temporary Infrastructure Projects
    - Engaging students in the planning and implementation of pilot or pop-up traffic calming infrastructure projects offers an opportunity for youth to address safety concerns around their schools. By participating, students can gain hands-on experience in testing and refining solutions that directly impact their daily environment.
    - ***Example***: Students involved in a SRTS program can take part in the creation of a temporary safety infrastructure, such as traffic calming projects. They might assist with on-site measurements and contribute to activating the space by adding street art, such as chalk drawings.

Encouragement

- Expand the Use of Contests to Engage Students
    - SRTS programs can involve students through art and video competitions with themes related to transportation safety.
    - ***Example***: Offer incentives for participation in these competitions, with varied prizes provided by local partners. Prizes could include vouchers from local businesses, tickets to local events, or opportunities for students to showcase their work at school assemblies.

Involving youth representatives in choosing the incentives offered can also increase overall engagement.

- Strengthen the Continuity of SRTS Programs from Middle to High School
    - SRTS programs can encourage program continuity by fostering collaboration between middle and high school participants.
    - ***Example***: High school students can mentor middle school students or lead walk-to-school and bike-to-school initiatives at the middle school level. This collaboration can inspire middle school students to remain engaged with SRTS programs as they enter high school, eventually taking on the same leadership and mentorship roles that encouraged their ongoing participation.

Education

- Tailor Educational Content to the SRTS Program Context
    - Educational content should reflect the varied transportation realities of high school students, including walking, bicycling, driving, and using public transit. Lessons should cover safety tips for each mode, recognizing that students' transportation needs vary widely.
    - ***Example***: In car-dependent communities, SRTS programs can still emphasize bicycle and pedestrian safety, even where infrastructure is lacking, ensuring students are prepared for any mode of transportation. Similarly, in areas with adequate multimodal infrastructure, the curriculum can be expanded to include safe driving lessons, ensuring comprehensive transportation safety education for all modes of travel.
- Explore Opportunities for Curriculum Integration of SRTS Education
    - High school students often prioritize academic subjects over non-academic activities. Integrating SRTS topics into required courses ensures all students receive essential transportation safety education. It also allows students who cannot attend after-school activities to participate in SRTS topics and activities.
    - ***Example:*** SRTS programs can identify courses where SRTS topics fit well, such as integrating bicycle and pedestrian safety into Physical Education classes or transportation safety data analysis into computer or social studies classes. Projects could involve examining local crash data or map infrastructure issues, providing insights that aid the development of SRTS programs.
- Offer Workshops for Teachers, Parents/Guardians, and Other In-School Champions
    - Building relationships with in-school champions and parents/guardians is key to successful SRTS initiatives. Even if they have some knowledge, workshops can streamline efforts and improve outcomes. These sessions also provide a platform for gathering feedback to refine initiatives.
    - ***Example***: SRTS programs can train school staff on transportation safety, youth engagement, and event logistics, ensuring smooth and inclusive program execution. Similar workshops or presentations can be offered at PTA meetings for parents.".
- Offer Interactive Events for Different Educational Topics
    - Organizing interactive events can engage high school students more effectively than traditional transportation safety lessons.
    - ***Example:*** Programs can host scavenger hunts, safety drills, or biking competitions that combine education with hands-on experiences. These events teach students how to navigate public transit, bicycle and walk safely to school, and practice safe driving. Students can also meet with local transportation agencies to learn about traffic calming,

sidewalks, curb cuts, and the broader role of transportation planning in safety. This exposure not only reinforces the connection between transportation planning and SRTS but also introduces students to the field of Transportation Planning.

Evaluation

- Establish Ongoing Assessment Methods to Evaluate the SRTS Program
    - Develop ways to track SRTS program progress, including behavior changes, mode shifts, and infrastructure improvements. Define success measures to evaluate the effectiveness of initiatives.
    - ***Example***: Students, with the help of SRTS coordinators, can conduct surveys, walk and bike audits, and create data dashboards to monitor outcomes. This measures success and builds students' data collection and analysis skills.

Conclusion

Insights from 18 interviews with SRTS coordinators and safety-focused organizations highlighted both the challenges—such as securing sustainable funding and effectively engaging high school students—and the potential for innovative, youth-centered approaches within the high school context. Based on these findings, this report recommends the early integration of accessibility considerations and active youth participation in the planning stages of SRTS projects. The interviews provided valuable insights into current strategies, funding mechanisms, and operational challenges unique to high school environments. This strategic direction not only enhances safety and mobility for high school students but also supports broader community goals, such as reducing traffic congestion, lowering environmental impacts, and fostering healthier, more active lifestyles.

Appendices

Interview Questions

The interviews were conducted with Safe Routes to School program coordinators at the State, County, City, and School district levels. In addition to the SRTS programs, one interviewee, not connected to any SRTS programs, is from a youth-led organization focused on educating youth on alternative transportation options. Questions asked during the interviews were slightly altered depending on which type of program was being represented. The overall goal of the interviews was to understand strategies and tactics that programs use to educate and engage high school students in non-infrastructure and infrastructure initiatives to expand alternative modes of transportation and increase transportation safety.

The questions used to guide the conversations with the interviewees are provided below.

Youth-Led Organizations

1. Can you give a brief overview of the program including the main functions of the program?
2. How long has the program been in operation?
3. What type of communities does your program intend to serve?
4. What are your main outreach and encouragement or engagement avenues? Do they differ when engaging younger students versus high school-aged participants?

5. What kind of role does digital engagement have in your program? How does it compare to in-person engagement strategies?
6. Can you speak more about the safety education programs that you put together such as the types of topics you cover? Have you had opportunities to integrate them into existing high school curricula or driver's education?
7. Do you engage high school students in safety studies, traffic studies, or seeking their input on transportation-related solutions?
8. Do high school students take on leadership or ambassador roles within your program?
9. Are there career exploration or professional development components within your high school youth transportation program?
10. Who have been your most effective community partners for this program?
11. Do you have bicycle and pedestrian-related initiatives for high school students that you integrate into existing public transportation systems in the areas you serve?
12. What are the current challenges that are impeding the expansion of your youth transportation program to more high schools?
13. What challenges do you face when working with high school students, especially regarding their varied transportation needs and preferences?
14. Can you highlight some of the accessibility considerations you make for your program or your specific initiatives?
15. Do you engage high school students' parents and guardians?

Local (City, County, School District Level) Safe Routes to School Programs

1. How long has your program been active?
2. Which regions or communities does your SRTS program serve? Ex- Density-wise, type of school, and public transportation.
3. Can you give a quick overview of your program and some of your main functions? Do you operate at the high school level?
4. What funding source do you utilize for your program?
5. What are the main outreach methods you use for the high school level SRTS program and how do they differ from elementary and middle school level?
6. What existing structures do you utilize to carry out these activities?
7. How do you incorporate technology and social media into your program's engagement efforts at the high school level?
8. Who are the community partners you collaborate with for high school level SRTS programs? Any youth-led groups? / What are your most valued or most effective partnerships?
9. What are some impediments or barriers that the program is facing in the effort of expanding SRTS programs to more High schools?
10. What resources do you believe would be beneficial for expanding the program to more high schools?
11. What are some challenges you have faced working with high school students?
12. Are there specific programs or methods you employ to teach bicycle and pedestrian safety to high school students, and how do they compare to SRTS programs at lower grade levels? What topics do you address?
13. Do you integrate them into school curricula?
14. Are there opportunities for students/youth to do safety studies, traffic studies, or other ways of seeking their input in terms of data collection?
15. How do you integrate SRTS programming with the use of public transit to encourage connectivity between different modes of transportation?
16. Are there opportunities for youth to take on leadership or ambassador roles, career exploration, or professional development opportunities in these programs?

17. Are there considerations that are made in program development to accommodate students with after-school jobs or responsibilities for younger siblings that may affect their schedules and travel patterns?
18. Do you have measures in place to improve accessibility of your programs for people with disabilities (adaptive biking programs) or students who may be new (language inclusion) to the US?
19. Do you engage parents/guardians throughout the program?

State-level Safe Routes to School

1. How long has your program been active?
2. Which regions or communities does your SRTS program serve?
3. Can you give a quick overview of your program and some of your main functions?
4. What funding source do you utilize for your program?
5. What are the main outreach methods you use for the high school level SRTS program, and how do they differ from those at the elementary and middle school levels?
6. What existing structures do you utilize to carry out these activities?
7. At what stage do you want applicants to be with their program at the time of applying for funding?
8. How do you incorporate technology and social media into your program's engagement efforts at the high school level?
9. Who are your community partners you collaborate with for high school level SRTS programs?
10. What are some impediments or barriers that the program is facing in the effort of expanding SRTS programs to more High schools?
11. What resources do you believe would be beneficial for expanding the program to more high schools?
12. What are some challenges you have faced working with high school students?
13. Are there specific programs or methods you employ to teach bicycle and pedestrian safety to high school students, and how do they compare to SRTS programs at lower grade levels? What topics do you address? Do you integrate them into school curricula?
14. Are there opportunities for them to do safety studies, traffic studies, or other ways of seeking their input in terms of data collection?
15. How do you integrate SRTS programming with the use of public transit to encourage connectivity between different modes of transportation?
16. Are there opportunities for youth to take on leadership or ambassador roles, career exploration, or professional development opportunities in these programs?
17. Are there considerations that are made in program development to accommodate students with after-school jobs or responsibilities for younger siblings that may affect their schedules and travel patterns?
18. Do you have measures in place to improve accessibility for people with disabilities and language inclusion in messaging or programming?
19. Do you engage parents and guardians throughout the program?

Methodology of Choosing Interview Candidates

Identifying interview Candidates

To facilitate this project, the CHPlanning team conducted a national scan of existing and planned Safe Routes to School programs, resulting in a list of more than 40 potential interview candidates. Using limited publicly available information, the team created profiles for a subset of these SRTS programs,

capturing information on community demographics, total community land area, funding sources, program description, and contact information for program coordinators.

CHPlanning developed a methodology to select 15 Safe Routes to School (SRTS) Programs and related organizations to include in an interview process. These selections were driven by metrics that represent the varied communities of New Jersey communities, ensuring a comprehensive examination of candidate programs.

These interviews were pivotal for supplementing the desktop research conducted in this project. Engaging with representatives from current and planned programs provided additional insights into program execution and led to better-informed recommendations for the state of New Jersey. The metrics chosen for this selection process aimed to center three important factors in designing these programs for New Jersey high schools: social determinants, safety, and health.

Key Metrics:

The metrics focus on specific mobility and demographic indicators that represent different communities across the State of New Jersey. By utilizing these metrics, we identified programs across the country operating within communities that share similar characteristics:

1. **Low walkability**: Students often face safety challenges in low-walkability areas and rely more on motorized transportation, leading to environmental and health concerns. By addressing these challenges, such programs can expand transportation choices, encourage physical activity, and foster community connections. Furthermore, innovative solutions for low-walkability areas can serve as models for transportation planning, providing long-term benefits for both students and the broader community.
2. **Urban or rural community settings**: Understanding the differences between urban and rural settings is essential, as they present distinct challenges and opportunities for Safe Routes to School Programs. Analyzing both environments allows for the development of tailored solutions and broadens the applicability of findings.
3. **Poverty Levels**: Counties in both the southern part of New Jersey, such as Cumberland County and Salem County, and the north, including Passaic County and Essex County, are characterized by high poverty rates while other counties in the north are characterized by high-income levels. The varying income levels may mean that these communities have varying qualities of infrastructure or resource availability to build and maintain safe transport. Successful implementation of SRTS programs in communities with varying income levels may necessitate tailored program approaches.
4. **Distance to Transit Stops**: Efficient last-mile connectivity solutions, such as safe pedestrian pathways and dedicated bike lanes, ensure that students can seamlessly transition from the transit stop to their school. While public transportation integration reduces vehicle reliance, it's crucial to consider extended distances to transit stops, a common challenge for many New Jersey schools.
5. **Unique Engagement**: CHPlanning prioritized including SRTS programs and youth-led organizations that employ engagement techniques to encourage participation among high school students, empower youth through active participation and leverage national collaborative networks.

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