

Chapter Four: Encouragement



“Be cool, bike to school”

Encouragement

Introduction

Encouragement refers to the activities or contests that schools or the community participate in to gather support for walking and biking to school. These activities try to encourage students to use an active mode of transportation by making it fun and cool. They can jumpstart a trend or community interest in walking and bicycling. Activities like Got a Brain? Get a Helmet! encourage students to wear a helmet and ride safely by making it a game or competition. Other programs might encourage students to walk or ride to school by providing an activity that is visible to other kids, and looks like fun, such as a Walking School Bus.

While activities that encourage children to walk or bike are essential, parents must be encouraged as well by educating them of the benefits and helping them feel comfortable about letting their child walk or bike to school.

Current Encouragement Activities

Some activities or programs currently exist to encourage safe walking and bicycling to school, and are listed below.

Bicycle Rodeo

Mercy Medical Center has partnered with the Woodbury County Sheriff to do bicycle rodeos in the past as part of a bicycle program in each of the communities in Woodbury County. Mercy is available to do bicycle rodeos in the Sioux City area upon request.



Safe Routes to School Taskforce

The Safe Routes to School Taskforce began meeting in April of 2008 to discuss projects that had the potential to make it safer for kids to walk or bike to school in the Sergeant Bluff-Luton School District. The group took a break in late 2008 until funding was secured to develop a Safe Routes to School Plan and has since regrouped and have been meeting during the development of this plan.

Walk to School Day

In the past, the school district has organized a Walk to School Day event with the help of Mercy Medical Center. Students were encouraged to walk or bike to school that day by providing incentives, such as breakfast bars, t-shirts, and other donated items. Many parents participated by walking with their child(ren), and volunteers were placed at a number of intersections to help walkers cross the street. In addition, a special Walk to School Day activity was held. FedEx loaned a truck for the event, so that the children could get inside of it and try to identify blind spots. Along with the activity, a curriculum was

taught to students about the benefits of using active modes of transportation, as well as how to do so safely. On the day of the event, students were encouraged to walk to school for a hands-on learning experience.

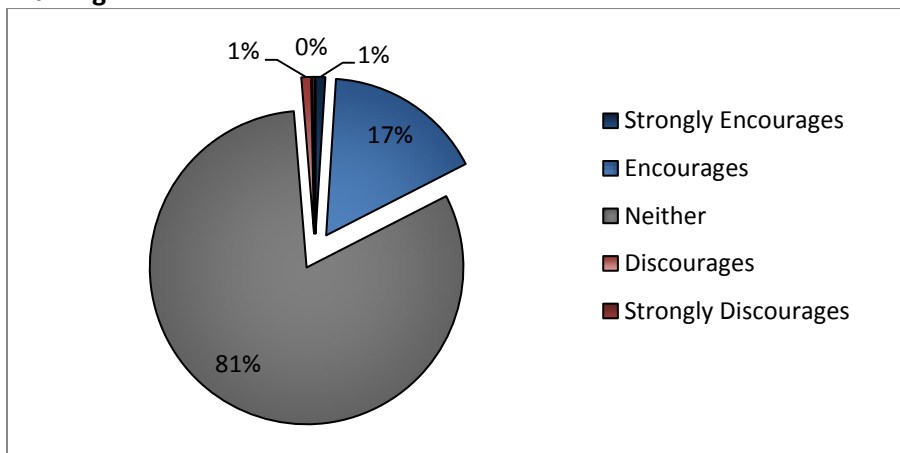
Obstacles and Deficiencies

Below is a list of obstacles and deficiencies in the encouragement portion of Safe Routes to School in the schools and community.

Parents' Perception of School Encouragement

Figure 4.1 shows the parents' perception of how much their child's school encourages or discourages walking based on responses from the parent surveys. The vast majority, 81 percent, do not feel that the school is either encouraging or discouraging walking to school. While it is positive that not many parents feel that their child's school discourages walking to school, not enough parents feel that their children are encouraged to walk by their school either. This suggests that there is an opportunity for the schools to become more active in encouraging kids to walk with various activities and events, and to get parents engaged in the activities so that the perception becomes more supportive. Several activities that schools can engage in will be recommended later.

Figure 4.1 – Parents' Opinions about How Much their Child's School Encourages or Discourages Walking



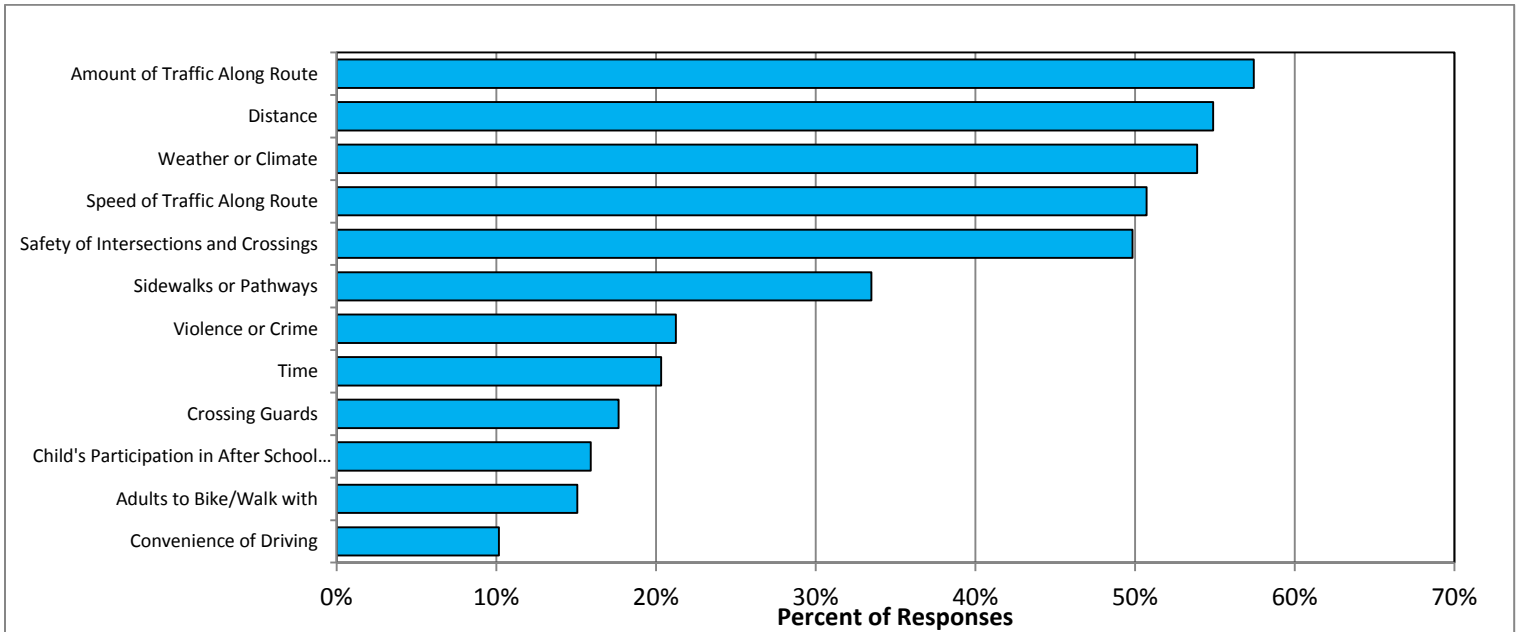
Source: 2008 Parent Survey

Parents' Encouragement

Not only do the children need to be encouraged to walk or bike to/from school, but parents need to be encouraged to let their child(ren) walk or bike. According to the parent surveys, about 48 percent of children have asked permission to walk or bike to school. However, many parents are reluctant to allow their child(ren) to walk or bike because of several concerns. Figure 4.2, summarizes many of the factors that discourage parents from letting their child walk or bike to school. Some issues cannot be altered by the schools (i.e. weather, distance), but many of the concerns can be addressed, such as traffic volumes

or speed, safety of intersections, violence or crime, and others. Addressing these concerns will ease any apprehensions and encourage parents to allow their child to walk or bike safely to school.

Figure 4.2 – Issues Reported to Affect Parents’ Decision to Not Allow Their Child(ren) to Walk or Bike to/from School – All Study Area



Source: 2008 Parent Survey

Recommended Encouragement Activities

Based on current activities being done within the schools and community and the obstacles and deficiencies noted above, a list of recommended projects has been developed.

Walking School Bus

A Walking School Bus is a fun, safe, and active way for children to travel to and from school with adult supervision. Each “bus” walks along a set route with at least one adult “driver”, picking children up at designated stops and walking them to school. The process is reversed in the afternoons and can be flexible to suit the needs of the families using it. Since there is adult supervision and group of students walking together, it can help relieve some of the safety concerns that parents have about allowing their child to walk to school. SIMPCO has produced a guide to setting up a Walking School Bus for an individual school. Additional information can be found at www.walkingschoolbus.org/.

Boltage Program

Mileage clubs and contests are an excellent way to encourage kids to walk or bike more to school. One program that uses technology to make walking or biking to school cool among kids is called Boltage. Boltage uses a little machine called the Zap that attaches to a backpack.¹ When children ride or walk to

¹ Boltage Homepage <http://www.boltage.org/>

school it reads their unique number, beeps, and flashes a light as it records their trip. Kids are rewarded for reaching a certain number of trips, which reinforces their behavior. This program tries to encourage children to walk or bike to school by making it a game. Boltage is a year-round, rather than a one-day event, so that kids make biking or walking a habit.

Table 4.1: Boltage Program Costs

| Boltage Program Cost for Sergeant Bluff-Luton Schools | | | | |
|--|--------------------------------|----------------------|--------------------------------------|---|
| | Startup Cost per School | Cost per Year | SB-L Schools Cost (3 schools) | SB-L Schools Cost per Year (3 schools) |
| System Hardware | \$4,890 | \$0 | \$14,670 | \$0 |
| Annual Maintenance (starting in second year) | \$0 | \$950 | \$0 | \$2,850 |

Source: Boltage www.boltage.org

Safe Routes Maps

Developing Safe Routes maps so that children are aware of the safest and most efficient routes to school can help to encourage more riding and walking to school. The top concern that kept parents from allowing their children to walk and bike to school was the amount of traffic along route. The PTO along with the community should develop a map of the safest routes to school for the children based on the following criteria:

- Sidewalk on at least one side of the street if it's a through street and not a dead-end;
- Sidewalk conditions – use sidewalks that meet city code;
- Crosswalks that are clearly painted and visible to motorists;
- Traffic Signals; and
- Low Annual Average Daily Traffic (AADT).

The above criteria along with local knowledge of potential dangers should be used to identify the safest routes to school for students.

Park and Walk

As mentioned earlier, traffic near schools during drop-off and pick-up times not only creates a large amount of congestion, but also helps create an environment of toxic air pollutants around the school. In addition, many families live too far away to walk or bike or have an unsafe route, but would prefer to get some exercise. Park and Walk programs take advantage of a pre-determined parking lot to act as a meeting area for families² and the rest of the way can be walked with other children and/or families. This program seems to be especially ideal for those schools that do not have very successful drop-off or pick-up zones, or those with especially high amounts of traffic congestion. Park and Walk can also be combined with Walking School Bus volunteers who supervise and walk with kids from the meeting area to the school. Additional information can be found by following the link at the bottom of the page.

² Safe Routes to School Guide: Park and Walk http://guide.saferoutesinfo.org/encouragement/park_and_walk.cfm

The Golden Sneaker Award

The Golden Sneaker Award is a contest that encourages more children to walk or bicycle to school.³ Schools can arrange a competition between classrooms that lasts a certain amount of time, and involves having the children keep track of how many miles they walked or biked to school each day. At the end of the competition, the classroom with the most miles traveled wins the Golden Sneaker. The contest can be coupled with lessons about road safety or how to live a healthy lifestyle, and is a good opportunity to teach children about teamwork. Many schools calculate the total miles traveled and combine the contest with a geography lesson about each new location that is reached. Communicating with the parents is essential for the program to succeed, because parents are the final decision-makers on whether their child(ren) can walk or bike to school. More information about the Golden Sneaker Award, including instructions on how to make a Golden Sneaker trophy, can be found at: <http://iowasaferoutes.org/sites/default/files/ch11.pdf>

The Golden Shovel Award

One of the major concerns for walkers and bikers during the colder months is having cleared sidewalks to travel on. Although a Sergeant Bluff ordinance requires snow and ice to be removed within twelve hours after the weather event, many residents are unable to fulfill this responsibility. The Golden Shovel Award is a program in Montgomery County, Maryland that recognizes citizens for going out of their way to clear snow and help neighbors fulfill this responsibility. Individuals are nominated by other residents and each winner receives some sort of reward. As a result, more sidewalks remain open and safe during the winter months, making weather less of a concern. This program might be especially beneficial near school zones where many children that walk in the winter will need a safe, cleared route.

Walking Wednesdays/Fitness Fridays

Create special days where both students and parents are encouraged to let their child(ren) get out and be active by walking/biking to school. The Walk to School Day event could be used as a kick-off to Walking Wednesdays that would be in place for the remainder of the year. By encouraging parents to let their child(ren) walk on one day a week and educating the community on Walking Wednesdays, motorists can be more aware of when more children will be out walking and biking to school. Walking Wednesdays could also be combined with Walking School Buses that would provide adult supervision for kids walking to/from school.

Fitness Fridays could be implemented to teach children healthy living and have students get out of the classroom and walk for 15 minutes and burn some afternoon energy. Students can keep track of their progress with both Walking Wednesdays and Fitness Fridays by keeping track of walking on a punch card. During the colder months, students can utilize the Sergeant Bluff Community Center to walk. These programs can be incentivized when students meet set milestones by giving out various prizes.

³ Safe Routes to School Iowa: Golden Sneaker Award <http://iowasaferoutes.org/program/encouragementguide>

Fitness Calendars

The Sergeant Bluff Safe Routes to School Taskforce discussed implementing a Fitness Calendar at the schools. The elementary school expressed interest in starting up this project. Students would be handed a monthly calendar where they would log their daily physical activity and the number of minutes spent doing it (outside of their regularly scheduled recess and P.E.). For example, students would keep track of walking, running, biking, dancing, sports practice, jumping rope, rollerblading, etc. Students can include days in which they walk or bike to school. Students would return their calendars to their teacher at the end of the month and the elementary class with the highest average number of minutes during the month would win a prize.