

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.

Got a Brain? Get a Helmet!

Opportunities Unlimited in Sioux City, with permission, has tailored this Alberta, Canada program for the Sioux City Schools. It is a grant funded program that does receive private donations as well. The curriculum is given to the school counselor who in turn presents it to the second graders at the school. After the program has been presented, the students are asked to do an essay about bike safety and maintenance from which winners are chosen to receive a new helmet. On average, Opportunities Unlimited provides four helmets per class. During the spring of 2011, 250 helmets were passed out. The program is followed up by an assembly to review the curriculum where the winners are announced and students learn a bicycle safety song. The program is to help prevent brain injuries and to dismantle the stigma that wearing a helmet “isn’t cool.” The program teaches kids how to properly wear their helmets and encourages them to personalize their helmets with stickers. It encourages kids to think about safe bicycle riding, which in turn should encourage more kids to ride a bike to school.

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 Task Force

The Safe Routes to School Task Force began meeting in April of 2008 to try to make it safer for kids to walk or bike to school in the Siouxland area. 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.

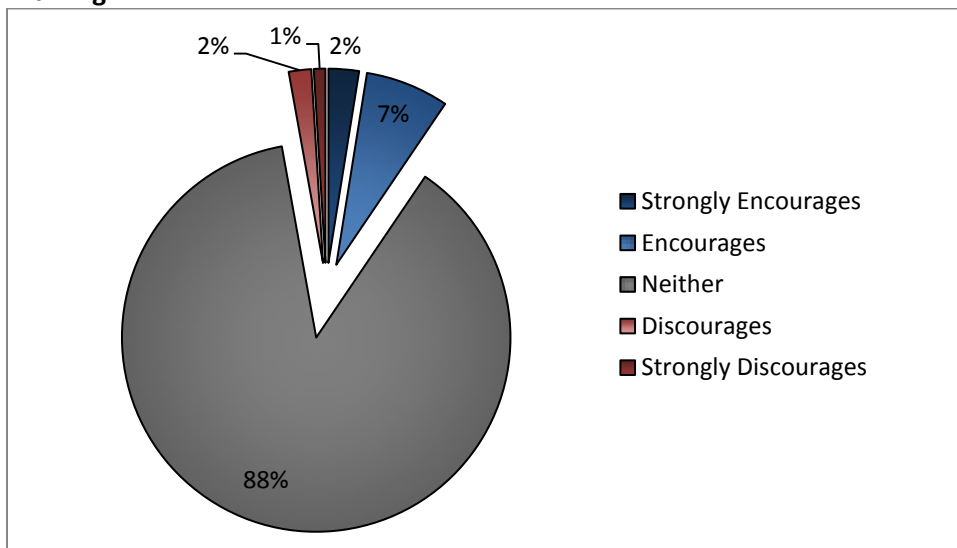
Obstacles and Deficiencies

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(ren)’s school encourages or discourages walking based on responses from the parent survey. The vast majority 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(ren)’s school discourages walking to school, many parents do not 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 in this chapter.

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



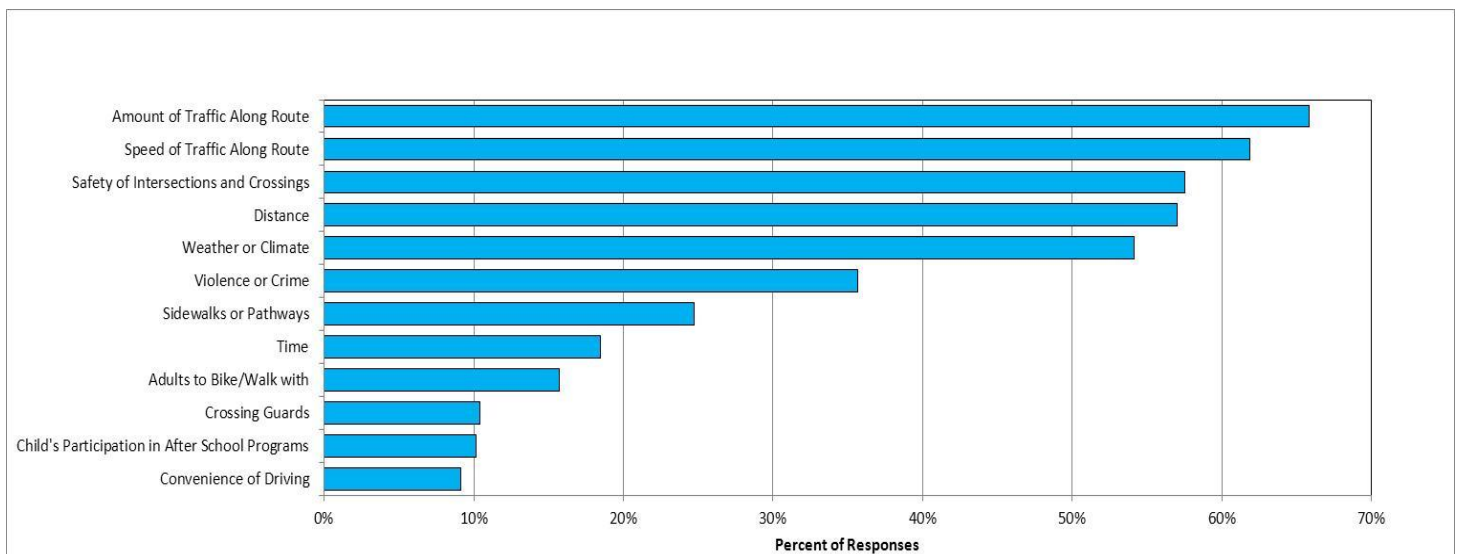
Source: 2008 Parent Survey

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 54 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/.

Walk to School Day

International Walk to School Day is held in October every year.¹ In 2010, 41 schools in the State of Iowa participated to celebrate the many benefits of walking and to urge their communities to become safer places to walk. Children, parents, and teachers can all be encouraged to get involved with this

¹ International Walk to School Day in the US <http://www.walktoschool.org/>

international event. Competitions can also be set up to coincide with the event by awarding the classes that have the most walkers, which makes the event more of a game. Schools can sign up at <http://www.walktoschool.org>.

The Safe Routes to School Taskforce discussed the option of pursuing a Walk to School Day event at one of the Sioux City Eastside Schools. The Taskforce formed a smaller sub-committee to plan a Walk to School Day event at Washington Elementary School that was held on September 28, 2011. A walkability checklist was sent home in the students' Friday Folders that provided parents and students a method of evaluating the infrastructure and atmosphere of the route they use to walk/bike to school.



St. Luke's provided t-shirts that were sent home with the students the night before the event so that everyone could wear them as they walked to school. On the day of the event, Guest Walkers were invited to stand along pre-designated paths to walk with and encourage students that were walking to school. An assembly was held for all students with a guest speaker from the Think First program that provided an interactive discussion on brain and spinal cord injuries.



St. Luke's provided a medical van for second grade students, in which they were able to sit in the driver's seat in an effort to identify obstacles that were placed around the vehicle, allowing them to visualize the difficulty adults may have when driving. Each student was pulled aside and discussed with an adult the appropriate behaviors they should exhibit when interacting with a vehicle. The event turned out to be successful, with many parents expressing interest in the event and sending their child(ren) to walk to school again.

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.² When children ride or walk to 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.

² Boltage Homepage <http://www.boltage.org/>

Table 4.1: Boltage Program Costs

Boltage Program Cost for Sioux City Eastside Schools				
	Startup Cost per School	Cost per Year	Eastside Schools Cost (7 schools)	Eastside Schools Cost per Year (7 schools)
System Hardware	\$4,890	\$0	\$34,230	\$0
Annual Maintenance (starting in second year)	\$0	\$950	\$0	\$6,650

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 three concerns that kept parents from allowing their children to walk and bike to school were: amount of traffic along route; speed of traffic along route; and the safety of intersections and crossings. The PTA/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. A walkability checklist could be handed out to parents and students while information could be compiled from the checklists to identify problem areas and routes that are felt to be safe.

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 families.³ Then, 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 shuttle kids from the meeting area to the school. Additional information can be found at:

http://guide.saferoutesinfo.org/encouragement/park_and_walk.cfm

³ 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 bike to school.⁴ 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. 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 Sioux City ordinance requires snow and ice to be removed within twelve hours, 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.

⁴ Safe Routes to School Iowa: Golden Sneaker Award <http://iowasaferoutes.org/program/encouragementguide>