

Chapter Seven: Evaluation



“Be safe, be seen”

Evaluation

Introduction

Evaluation is an important and often overlooked step. Over time, needs may change in the community and may require reexamining in order to ensure that education, encouragement, engineering, and enforcement strategies are working as planned and increasing the number and safety of children walking and biking to school. In addition, funding is always a limiting factor and must be spent in the most efficient way possible. Evaluation is the way to make sure that progress is being made and that efforts are paying off.

Efforts must be made to evaluate not just quantifiable measures, such as the total number of children walking and biking to school, but also subjective measures, such as increase in the safety of pedestrians and bicyclists.



Current Evaluation Activities

The current activities that can help with evaluation in Sioux City's Eastside schools are listed below.

Parent Survey and Student Travel Tally

Copies of the student travel tally and the parent survey were distributed in the September 2008, when applying for Safe Routes to School funds to develop the Safe Routes to School Plan. The student travel tally was distributed to every classroom, where the teachers asked students their particular mode of travel and documented weather conditions; results were then uploaded to the Safe Routes to School National Database. A parent survey was sent home with each student for the parents to fill out and return. The parent survey was distributed both in English and in Spanish. Once a significant number of surveys had been returned, the results were again uploaded to the Safe Routes to School National Database. The student travel tally and parent surveys showed the same information regarding student travel so the parent survey results are used in the plan to identify the typical mode of arrival to and departure from school. They can also be used as a baseline to compare with future survey results.

Safe Routes to School Taskforce

The Safe Routes to School Taskforce began meeting in April of 2008 to try to make it safer for kids to walk or bike to school in the metropolitan area. The group took a break in late 2008 until funding was secured to develop a Safe Routes to School Plan and have since regrouped and have been working and meeting throughout the development of the plan.

Recommended Evaluation Activities

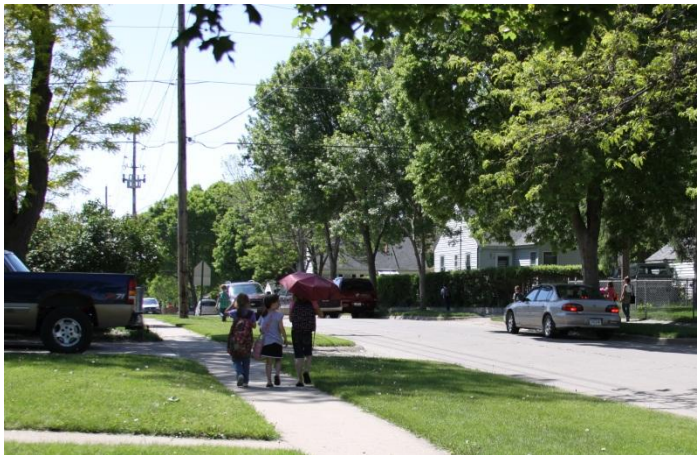
A list of recommended evaluation ideas and methods is shown below.

Continuation of the Parent Surveys and Student Travel Tallies

Surveys could be administered once a year or when a new Safe Routes project is being done as a way to evaluate the overall success of efforts made by schools to encourage safe walking and biking to school. Time and funding requirements to do this are very minimal. Student travel tallies can be done quickly by teachers in the classroom. The parent surveys can be sent home in “Friday folders” with the students. The results are then entered into the Safe Routes to School database. Some of the responses will show how many students are using active modes of transportation to get to/from school. Other responses will give insight into the perception of walking and biking to school. Over time the survey results will show if progress is being made.

Continuation of the Safe Routes to School Taskforce

While monitoring absolute numbers from surveys can provide many insights, there is much that surveys cannot quantify. The Safe Routes to School Taskforce should continue to meet to evaluate progress



from both a quantitative and qualitative perspective. If one activity or method seems to be more beneficial than another, then the task force can begin focusing their efforts elsewhere. If something does not seem to be working, perhaps it needs to be coupled with another program (i.e. an education program paired with a new engineering project) to be more effective. These decisions need to be made by a group of leaders and advocates for the Safe Routes to School program.

Program Evaluation/Data Reevaluation

Several recommended programs and activities can produce useful data for the evaluation step. For example, Walk to School Day can evaluate the success of the program by counting the number of schools to sign up. The Boltage program can track the number of children who walk or bike to school throughout the year, in order to track their behavior over time.¹ Whenever activities related to Safe Routes to School are undertaken, data should be collected so that coordinators and the task force can evaluate which activities the children respond to the best.

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

Walkability/Bikeability Checklists

Walkability and bikeability checklists are cheap and a useful way of evaluating the walking and bicycling condition of the roads, as well as for gathering important public input from the users of the network. Templates from The Pedestrian and Bicycle Information Center ask questions about the ease and safety of the route that was taken to school, including the locations of problem areas along the way.² The walkability checklist can be found at <http://www.walkinginfo.org/library/details.cfm?id=12> and the bikeability checklist can be found at <http://www.bicyclinginfo.org/library/details.cfm?id=3>. These checklists can be coupled with encouragement or education programs as well. For example, distributing these checklists to parents before an annual Walk to School Day might provide sufficient data for the year, and aid officials in making decisions about where to spend limited funds. The first walkability checklist was passed out to students and parents during the Walk to School Day event at Washington Elementary on September 28, 2011.

² <http://www.walkinginfo.org/> and <http://www.bicyclinginfo.org/>