



SUCCESS

STORIES

Montclair, New Jersey

Rand School Builds Strong Partnerships to Form a Committed SRTS Team

During the spring of 2005, The New Jersey Department of Transportation (NJDOT) selected Rand Elementary School in Montclair, NJ to participate in a Safe Routes to School (SRTS) Demonstration Program. The program aimed to demonstrate how communities can collaborate on SRTS improvements by developing relationships among the school, municipality and community. The Rand School, an Environmental Magnet School, and the Township of Montclair exemplified collaboration by forming a diverse and knowledgeable team – several individuals who came together with the common goal of making walking and bicycling safer for the children of Montclair. Building these relationships allowed this team to lead a successful SRTS workshop, at which goals and strategies for their SRTS Travel Plan and the overall program were identified.

Because implementing a School Travel Plan requires the pro-active interest of several community members, the initial coordination team – consisting of representatives from both Rand School and Meadowlink Transportation Management Association (TMA) – sought to expand their group by reaching out to stakeholders who would be able to share insight into Montclair-specific SRTS goals. Each stakeholder was invited to become a member of the SRTS team and participate in a SRTS workshop, where the team would devise a SRTS Travel Plan.

In October 2005, twenty-three SRTS team members, including teachers, parents, community members and local government representatives, attended the SRTS “Day of Discovery” planning Workshop. The group put their heads together to identify issues and actions that promote children walking and biking to school. This brainstorming session included on-site observations of students’ arrival and departure, along with discussion of local issues.

RESULTS

The following representatives participated in the Rand School SRTS workshop:

School Representatives

Parents/PTA – Two parents, both involved in the Montclair PTA Health and Wellness Initiative, served on the initial coordination team that began building the larger SRTS team. Jodi Godfrey and Bob MacLay invested much time and effort into garnering support for the SRTS program from both the Rand School community and the School District as a whole. In addition, both used their previous involvement in public health and bicycle advocacy respectively to reach out to influential players in both fields – locally and statewide. Parents, representing both Rand School and other schools in the district, helped to identify obstacles to walking and bicycling on the various routes to school.

Teachers – Susan Bartol, an Environmental Science teacher at Rand, was also part of the initial coordination team. She rallied support for SRTS from the Rand School faculty and staff. In addition, Evelyn Gonzalez Spivey, the Principal at Rand School, encouraged support for the program by asking fifth grade teachers to include SRTS in their classes (see results in ‘students’ section). Two other teachers, along with the Rand School’s Family Coordinator, joined the workshop, providing insight into the students’ attitudes toward walking and bicycling.

Key Facts

- Municipal representatives were already on board with many SRTS goals as demonstrated through their township-wide traffic calming program and their Bicycle/Pedestrian Action Plan.
- Community concerns included:
 - Personal safety of students walking and biking
 - Adequacy of facilities on which to bike or walk
- Both health- and bicycle-related advocacy groups were engaged in the workshop planning process from the beginning.

Innovative Ideas

- Involve local advocacy group and concerned citizens in the SRTS collaboration process.
- Explore PTA and/or Board of Education committees as potential partners.
- Actively involve students in developing the SRTS vision and plan of action
 - Collect student feedback in the form of papers, art projects, etc.

Students – Fifth graders at Rand Elementary School spent the weeks before the training workshop learning about Safe Routes to School. They formed teams and created SRTS posters with mottos and tips on how to be safe walking/biking to school. They presented the posters to workshop attendees, identifying their routes to school and their perceived obstacles to walking and biking. They called their project “a patriotic stand to make it safer to walk or ride your bike to school.” A few of their safety tips included: don’t talk to strangers; wear a helmet; know where you are; and stay close to an adult.

Municipal Representatives

Montclair Township had outstanding representation at the brainstorming workshop, as representatives from the Montclair Police, Engineering and Environmental Departments participated in the meeting. Two police officers provided information on traffic safety issues in Montclair, while Kim Craft, the Township Engineer, elaborated on the role that infrastructure design can have on improving the safety of school walking routes. Finally, Gray Russell, Township Environmental Coordinator, offered insight into how SRTS can improve the environmental quality of life in Montclair; an example involves reducing diesel bus emissions.

The SRTS Program for the Rand School fits well with some of the other initiatives in which the Township has been involved. For several years, the Township has been engaged in streetscape and traffic calming enhancements. They have also recently completed a NJDOT-funded Bicycle and Pedestrian Action Plan that outlines several township-wide improvements needed to make bicycling and walking more safe and appealing.

Community Representatives

Representation from community and regional advocates for bicycling and walking also shared their input at the brainstorming meeting. *Bike Montclair* sent several members who were able to comment specifically on bicycle issues that may affect the development of safer routes to Montclair’s schools. Other *Bike Montclair* initiatives include the annual “Tour de Montclair” bicycle ride each

May and the “Drive 25” campaign. In addition, a crossing guard from the Rand School area shared her stories, which illustrated a need for motorists to show greater respect for and awareness of pedestrians and cyclists. Finally, a representative from Meadowlink Transportation Management Association (TMA) provided a regional perspective on SRTS.

The Vision for Rand School, which was developed at the *SRTS Day of Discovery Planning Workshop*, reflects the team’s diverse interests:

Rand School and Montclair Township envision a Safe Routes to School Program that enables children to walk to school safely; increases the amount of physical activity the children perform daily; encourages adult residents to help children become familiar and comfortable with their community in the form of Safe Havens and Neighborhood Watch Groups; urges motorists to respect non-motorized forms of transportation; and contributes to a more environmentally sustainable community, including a reduction in diesel bus emissions.



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Resources:

- Safe Routes to School Toolkit (NHTSA)
www.nhtsa.dot.gov/people/injury/pedbimot/bike/Safe-Routes-2002/toc.html
- Safe Routes to School “Practice and Promise” (NHTSA)
www.nhtsa.dot.gov/people/injury/pedbimot/bike/Safe-Routes-2004/
- Safe Routes to School Guidance (FHWA)
<http://safety.fhwa.dot.gov/saferoutes/srtsguidance.htm>

Montclair, Essex County

Population (2000)	38,658
Area	6.16 square miles
Density	6,186 people/sq. mile
Public School Participant:		
Rand Elementary School (grades K-5)	approx. 390 students



NJ Department of Transportation

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