A Contextual Look at Safe Routes to School Implementation in Texas

Heather Atteberry, MPH
Michael & Susan Dell Center for Healthy Living
University of Texas School of Public Health
Project Overview

Purpose: To gain a more comprehensive understanding of the implementation of the SRTS program in Texas.

Sample: 34 interviews with community-level and state-level SRTS stakeholders
  – 31 community-level interviews with stakeholders from 8 communities
  – 3 state-level interviews with members the TxDOT Bicycle Advisory Committee

Design: Structured phone interviews with open-ended and multiple-choice follow-up questions about:
  – Planning
  – Implementation
  – Sustainability
Results - Planning

• Why did communities apply?
  – Saw a need to improve safety at their schools, especially in low-income neighborhoods; and/or
  – Wanted to increase opportunities for physical activity by enhancing the built environment around the school.

• SRTS Teams included multiple city/community partners.

• All sought public input and received
  – strong opinions; or
  – very little input.
Results - Implementation

• Achievements:
  – Improved infrastructure
  – Perceived increased walking to/from school
  – Enhanced neighborhood pride
  – Improved commitment from schools

• Barriers:
  – Lack of communication with granting agency/community
  – Changes in construction design standards
  – Regulatory issues
  – Lack of up-front funding
Results - Implementation

- Mostly positive reactions from parents, students, and teachers.
- SRTS Plan used through process but seen as a “living document.”
- Multiple outreach strategies:
  - School presentations,
  - Community meetings, and
  - Advertising/PSAs.
- Most did not conduct formal evaluation.
- Believe environment safer for students to walk/bike to/from school.
• Continue to look for more funds:
  – Sustain safety/education programs, and
  – Create improvements at other campuses.
• Use grant writers or city/district staff to locate and write grants for more funds.
• Believe the program is important and needed in Texas:
  – Need dedicated funding, and
  – Open to more communities.
Conclusions and Policy Implications

• The SRTS program is needed and valued by communities in Texas

• Challenges with communication and navigation through approval processes and policies caused delays in the completion of the project.

• Implementation without subsequent technical assistance and support is difficult and inefficient.

• Communities that had dedicated grant writers or resources, viable partnerships with local decision-makers, and community support were more likely to report more favorable results.

• Future grants should include at least partial funding up-front, rather than relying totally on cost reimbursement policies, especially in smaller communities with less resources.
Grant Partners:
• Michael & Susan Dell Center for Healthy Living
• The University of Texas School of Public Health
• Texas A&M Health Science Center School of Public Health

Project Members:
• Principal Investigators: Deanna Hoelscher and Marcia Ory
• Co-Investigators: Sandra Evans, Chanam Lee, Lisako McKyer, Suojin Wang
• Project Director: Diane Dowdy
• Project Staff: Heather Atteberry, Tiffni Menendez, Abi Oluyomi, Carolyn Smith, Christine Tisone
• Policy Advisors: Camille Miller, Donna Nichols, Michelle Smith

Contact Information
Deanna M. Hoelscher, PhD, RD, LD
Deanna.M.Hoelscher@uth.tmc.edu
Twitter: @DeannaHoelscher

Diane Dowdy, PhD
Dowdy@sph.tamhsc.edu

Project Funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation