



December 2013

**Coordinator's Corner**

This fall has been a great success for Virginia's Safe Routes to School. The state has had its highest ever participation in both Student Travel Tally Week, and International Walk to School Day. As a state, we're taking great steps forward to bring bicycle and pedestrians safety into communities through the QuickStart Mini-Grant program, which as of this month has awarded over 100 grants to support local SRTS programs. Awarded grants have been used for walk to school events, bicycle rodeos, student pedometers, bicycle racks, and school walkabouts. We're offering more Mini-Grants in 2014. The next deadline is February 20th so be sure to regularly check the website for more details.



We can't let the cold weather slow down our momentum, so let's take advantage of it to hold Safe Routes to School events that emphasize the importance of safe walking and biking in winter weather - being mindful of slippery roads, roads and sidewalks that are covered in snow, and lower light conditions. Be sure to read the article on Winter Safe Routes programs and learn what Berryville did last year and what Alexandria is doing this year. You'll get some great ideas for keeping the 'heat' on SRTS during the next few months.

Thinking about apply for a non-infrastructure grant, but not sure you can make the December 17 deadline? The good news is that we've extended the deadline to February 14, 2014. These grants can be used for SRTS coordinators for 3 or more schools (area coordinators), for a coordinator for all schools in a school division (division coordinator), Safe Routes to School promotional materials, crossing guard trainings, and neighborhood watch initiatives, among many other great Safe Routes opportunities. A VDOT-approved SRTS Activities and Program Plan is required to apply for a non-infrastructure grant. More details are in this newsletter and on the Virginia SRTS website under School Travel Plans and Grants.

We also want to encourage schools to reach out to local community partners to enhance a Safe Routes to School program. In the Friends and Faces column, we'll talk with Becky Johnston, who helps encourage active living and Safe Routes to School through her work with Rockingham Memorial Hospital in Harrisonburg.

Read on!  
-Rob Williams  
VDOT Safe Routes to School Coordinator

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**CALENDAR  
DECEMBER**

**27:** Last day to submit SRTS Activities and Programs Plan (APP) drafts for VDOT preliminary review (optional)

**JANUARY**

**10:** VDOT completes optional preliminary review and provides comments to applicants

**20:** Last day to submit final SRTS APP to VDOT for review and approval.

**25:** Outstanding Crossing Guard nomination due date

**FEBRUARY**

**7:** VDOT completes all SRTS APP reviews and approvals

**12:** Crossing Guard appreciation day

**14:** SRTS Non-Infrastructure grant applications due

**20:** QuickStart Mini-Grant applications due

## **Friends and Faces**

*Often times, schools, parents, and SRTS advocates initiate and implement a Safe Routes to School program on their own, and don't think to reach out to community organizations. However, building support and partnerships within the community is key to developing a sustainable Safe Routes to School Program. Becky Johnston is the Health Promotion Specialist at Rockingham Memorial Hospital (RMH) in Harrisonburg and works with schools in the community to encourage walking and bicycling to and from school. We spoke with her to discuss how schools can partner with local organizations - such as hospitals and health organizations - in the community.*



### **How did you get involved with Safe Routes to School?**

Rockingham Memorial Hospital (RMH) wrote a grant to secure funding from Virginia Foundation for Healthy Youth to reduce childhood obesity in Harrisonburg and Rockingham County. We were awarded a \$73,000 grant over two years to develop a Safe Routes to School program (mainly focusing on 3 of the E's- Education, Encouragement and Evaluation). As a commuter cyclist, I love the idea of making our community safer for pedestrians and cyclists -- especially around schools.

I currently work with 6 schools in our area, and each has their own unique program and goals for the future. We are also looking forward to a new middle school being built by 2016 and we have the support of the school board and city council to make it biking and walking friendly on the school's opening day.

### **How do you work with Virginia Safe Routes to School program?**

I work with Virginia Safe Routes to School program

mostly through the Quick Start Mini Grants. I encourage all schools that I work with-- along with law enforcement, SafeKids Coalition and other community partners -- to apply for this vital funding. So far we have been given \$17,000 for everything from bikes, bike racks, bike helmets for low income households, educational materials, bike rodeo equipment, Walk and Bike to School day events and more. The program's webinars, in-person workshops, and help with collecting student travel tallies and parent surveys have also helped our program tremendously.

Nathan Barge, our Harrisonburg City Public Schools SRTS Coordinator, funded through the Virginia SRTS program is a huge asset for us. He came on at the beginning of the 2013-2014 school year and has jumped right into the walking and biking initiatives, helping to develop our program further. It's great to have a partner to work with! We are now collaborating on the non-infrastructure grant application with much-needed technical support from our LTAC (Local Technical Assistance Coordinator). We have been truly grateful to the Virginia SRTS program for these opportunities.

### **As a Health Promotion Specialist, how do you encourage schools to participate in Safe Routes to School?**

Each school has its own unique challenges and advantages. Some schools already have things in place like crossing guards, while others struggle with basics such as a sidewalk or shoulder to walk or ride on. I start with the principal at each school to find out which school staff members would be involved in supporting SRTS activities like Walking Wednesdays and bike rodeos during PE class, versus a school-wide event. I talk with parents next, since they are the key to walking and biking to and from school. They not only agree to allow their children walk and bike to school, they provide the essential supervision for them to do so, especially at the elementary school level. I have a team of parents in each school that I rely on to tell me how things are going, how we can improve, and ways to get more parents involved.

## How does Safe Routes to School fit into the community's public health goals?

Community wellness and outreach are the cornerstones of RMH's primary mission. Our goal is to benefit the most people with available resources. We want to ensure that participants in our program have a well-rounded understanding of our program from where the sidewalks and safe crossings are, how to use them safely, and how to encourage others to join in the fun, so we focus on improving infrastructure, with a complementary emphasis on education, encouragement, and enforcement. The ultimate goal is to increase the numbers of children who enjoy walking or biking for transportation so that they will eventually become adults who use active transportation. This model, in theory, will lead to a healthier community.



Students at Thomas Harrison Middle School in Harrisonburg walk around the school's track as part of a monthly walking event

## What's the easiest way for a school to connect with someone at a local health organization?

Our goals intersect with schools when it comes to the health of students. So, we encourage schools to connect with us! We know from recent research that students who exercise before school learn better and have in-

creased attention spans. Schools who are interested in folding student health issues into their SRTS program can start by finding a local person or group working towards chronic disease prevention or more specifically obesity prevention. They would love to hear from you, the school!

Are there other community organizations that you connect with to support Safe Routes to School? Absolutely! We would not be successful without community support and collaboration. We partner with the Harrisonburg Fire Department who sponsors our local SafeKids Coalition to educate children and families about how to ride and walk safely. We also partner the Harrisonburg Police Department and parent groups at each school to support enforcement and education efforts. We depend on our local Public Works and Planning departments to assist with creative solutions to infrastructure challenges, as well as to partner with us on infrastructure grants. Also, the Shenandoah Valley Bicycle Coalition is a fantastic supporter of our work. They have assisted us with marketing, gathered volunteers for events and even provided additional funding when needed. I also sit on the Bicycle & Pedestrian Committee for the Harrisonburg-Rockingham Metropolitan Planning Organization as we collaborate to design a more biking and walking friendly area together.

More from Becky on page 8

## *Virginia Walk to School Day is the biggest yet!*

Walk to School Day 2013 was a huge success in Virginia. The state surpassed its own 2012 record for October's Walk-to-School month, with 187 registered Walk- and Bike-to-School Day events - 73 more events than last year. This 64% increase in Walk-to-School Day events provides Virginia with the honor of having the fastest growth in participation nationwide. There's still a lot of room to grow for next year, though. The 187 participating schools represent just 9.2% of all schools in the state.



Students, parents, and teachers of Van Pelt Elementary School proudly participate during Walk to School Day in Bristol.

Walk-to-School Day is an international event held during the entire month of October to celebrate walking and biking to school. The event brings students, parents, teachers, and community groups together to raise awareness about pedestrian and bicycling safety, encourage physical activity, and learn about the health, environmental, and community benefits of walking and bicycling.

### Student Travel Tally Week Results

This year's Student Travel Tally Week was a huge success! In all, 332,574 trips were counted from 163 schools, in 52 different cities and towns, and across 18 school divisions. Approximately 83,144 students from across the state contributed to Student Travel Tally Week. This huge turnout gives us the first statewide snapshot of how many students travel to school each day.

Want to know more about the results from Student Travel Tally Week, regardless of whether your school participated? Did you miss the November 6 Student Travel Tally Webinar during which was held November 6? A summary of the results is below, but you can also view the November 6 webinar at the Virginia SRTS Website. Participants from across the state learned how to access

and create student travel tally reports and see how their school compared with others in the state.

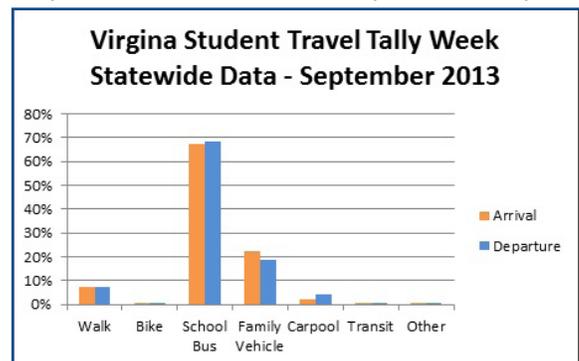


Students from Dominion Trail Elementary School in Ashburn Display their school's Safe Routes to School banner, which was awarded for participating in Student Travel Tally Week.

Here's a brief summary of the statewide results. When traveling to school:

- 68% of students take the bus
- 22% of students ride in a family vehicle
- 7% of students walk to school
- 2% of students ride in a carpool
- 1% of students bike to school
- < 1% of students take transit or other modes

The next best step to learn more about the travel patterns at your school is to conduct a parent survey. These



surveys are a great way to confirm and expand upon your school's Student Travel Tally and it's perfect for reaching out to parents and generating Safe Routes to School awareness.

More Student Travel Tally information and survey print-outs surveys are at [www.saferoutesdata.org](http://www.saferoutesdata.org).

### **Healthy Living in all Seasons - Winter Safe Routes to School Activities**

Don't let cold weather and snow freeze the Safe Routes to School program at your school. Use this time to teach safe walking and biking in winter weather. Emphasize the importance of dressing appropriately for cold weather and being mindful of slippery conditions and blocked sidewalks, as well as decreasing day light conditions. Help cold weather walkers and bikers with a winter routes map to identify which roads are plowed first and which are left covered, or have a winter walk day with hot



A Berryville Primary School student practices safe cycling during Berryville's February Bike Rodeo

cocoa and cider to reward participants. And if it is still too cold, hold the Safe Routes to School event indoors. For example, bicycle rodeos are a great way to keep active, learn about bike safety, and stay warm during the winter. Last February, the City of Berryville held a bike rodeo indoors, where local police officer taught bicycle safety to

students from the Berryville Primary School and Johnson Williams Middle School.

In Alexandria, Mount Vernon Community School encourages walking to school in all types of weather! During the Winter Walking Challenge, registered students use their Boltage Zap tags to count and keep track of how many times they walk to school. With the Boltage system, students receive RFID tags to attach to backpacks; each time they walk or bike to school, they go by the "Zap pole"; it lights up and beeps. When students walk and Zap at least half the



school days in a month, they receive the token of the month to add to a keychain. At the end of the 3 month winter walking challenge, a raffle is held for scooters, bike computers and other fun, active prizes. Bus riders can also take part in the walking program and can choose to walk at least 10 minutes at recess and visit the Zap pole. We are all about changing habits and rewarding repetition to encourage walking as part of a healthy lifestyle!

### **Deadline for Non-Infrastructure Grants Extended to February 14, 2014**

Interested in turning up the volume on your SRTS program? Consider applying for a non-infrastructure grant. We've extended the deadline for applications so to provide more time to complete the required SRTS Activities and Programs Plan. For example, you may want to fund a part- or full-time SRTS coordinator for all schools in your school division. Our pilot program this year has proven to be so successful, that we're encouraging others to consider it.

In the past, non-infrastructure grants have funded community walkability audits, bicycle safety education courses, student safety patrol programs, crossing guard recruitment and training, and area-wide Safe Routes to

School coordinators, who work alongside the community to promote Safe Routes to School activities for schools in the area over the course of a year. Grants range from \$5,000 to \$100,000 and cover 100% of a Non-Infrastructure project or staff to support local SRTS programs. Non-Infrastructure grants target the education, encouragement, enforcement, and evaluation aspects of a comprehensive Safe Routes to School program.

To apply for a non-infrastructure grant, applicants are required to have a Safe Routes to School Activities and Programs plan, which outlines the intentions for enabling and encouraging students to engage in active transportation.

More information on Non-Infrastructure grants and Safe Routes to School Activities and Programs plan are available on the VDOT Safe Routes to School Website.

### ***Do You Have Questions about the Upcoming SRTS Non-Infrastructure Grant and Activities and Program Plan?***

We're adding a new Frequently Asked Questions section added to the VDOT SRTS website. Check here for more information regarding the SRTS Non-Infrastructure Grant and Activities and Program Plan.

And feel free to contact your Local Technical Assistance Coordinator at our toll-free hotline: 1-855-601-7787

### ***Schools and Cities are awarded SRTS Infrastructure Grants***

Twenty-one schools across fifteen cities have been awarded infrastructure grants for pedestrian and bicycle improvement projects. They are:

- **Clark Elementary**, Charlottesville
- **North Elementary**, Colonial Heights
- **Galax Elementary** and **Galax Middle**, Galax
- **Stone Spring Elementary**, Harrisonburg
- **Bass Elementary**, **Linkhorne Elementary** and **Linkhorne Middle**, Lynchburg
- **Fox Elementary** and **Munford Elementary**, Richmond
- **Berkeley Glenn Elementary**, Waynesboro
- **Graham Road Elementary**, Falls Church
- **Auburn Elementary** and **Auburn Middle**, Riner
- **Belview Elementary**, Radford
- **Antietam Elementary**, Woodbridge
- **Johnson-Williams Middle**, Berryville
- **Herndon Elementary**, Herndon
- **Kenbridge Elementary**, Kenbridge
- **Flint Hill Elementary** and **Vienna Elementary**, Vienna

In total, over \$3.5 million have been awarded for Safe Routes to School Infrastructure projects. These schools and cities are working on projects to upgrade and build high visibility intersections, new sidewalks, ADA ramps and crosswalks, enhance bicycle and pedestrian visibility with additional signage and pavement markings, pedestrian signals, new raised crosswalks, and traffic circles. All of the infrastructure projects will help improve pedestrian and bicycle safety near schools.

### ***QuickStart Mini-grants***

\$1,000 Quick-Start-Grants were awarded to nine schools in Virginia for the 12th round of the Quick-Start Grant program, increasing to 105 the total number of awards since the fall 2013. Recipient schools used their Quick-Start grants for a variety of projects, including new bicycle racks at school; pedometers for students who participate in "Walking Wednesdays" events; student participation incentives like pencils, reflective bracelets, and water bottles; bicycle helmets; and new crossing guard safety equipment

Quick-Start Mini-Grants are a great way to energize a Safe Routes to School program, encourage active transportation to and from your school, and improve safety. The application process has been slightly altered to ensure that all awardees are implementing projects that go beyond active living and encourage walking and biking to and from school. The October grant recipients are:

- **Stonewall Middle**, Manassas - Student pedometers
- **Park View Elementary**, Alexandria - Bicycle Racks & Safety Equipment
- **Victory Elementary**, Portsmouth - Bicycle Racks
- **Dumbarton Elementary**, Richmond - Walk to School Events & Active Living Challenges
- **Lake Anne Elementary**, Reston - Walk to School All Year Events
- **George Washington Middle**, Alexandria - Walking School Bus Project
- **Cunningham Park Elementary**, Vienna - Walking Wednesday Events
- **Norge Elementary**, Williamsburg - Student Pedometers
- **Glebe Elementary**, Arlington - Walk, Ride & Roll to School

Winners for the final round of QuickStart Mini-Grants will be announced in early December. If you haven't applied yet, don't worry! The due date for the first round of the 2014 QuickStart Mini-Grants is February 20, 2014.

### ***Fairfax County School Board Policy Makes a Big Difference for Walking and Biking to School***

Walking and biking policy changes have taken place in Fairfax County! Last year, the Fairfax County School Board granted to parents the decision of whether their children can walk or bike to school. Prior to the change, a school's principal decided whether a student could walk or bike. This small change in policy can have a big effect on student transportation and a community's Safe Routes to School program.

Jeff Anderson, a parent and SRTS advocate talked about this policy change at last month's Regional Safe Routes to School Workshop in Washington DC. "In January 2012, the Fairfax County School Board unanimously approved putting the decision on how children get to school in the hands of parents, where it rightfully should be. No longer will a child be banned from riding their bike to school let alone walking."

The Washington, DC regional workshop was hosted by the Safe Routes to School National Partnership and discussed the benefits of an SRTS program and how to generate interest and action within the community. The Safe Routes to School National Partnership advocates for policies to help agencies and organizations help implement Safe Routes to School Projects. You can view all



Students participate in a Bike Rodeo at Graham Road Elementary School in Fairfax County.

of the presentations from the Regional Safe Routes to School Workshop, here.

### ***What's New for 2014?***

#### **Crossing Guard Appreciation Month**

This February, we'll be celebrating crossing guard appreciation month across the state. Crossing guards provide a great service to teachers, parents, and students - arriving at school before sunrise, protecting students as they cross in front of buses, trucks, and cars. This February VDOT Safe Routes to School wants to remind crossing guards just how much we appreciate and value their service. Be sure to start planning how your school can thank their crossing guards.

More information about Crossing Guard Appreciation Month will be available in early January.

### Updates to the VDOT SRTS Website

In the coming months we'll be restructuring our website to help schools across the state get access to even more Safe Routes to School resources. There'll be a new Local Program Resource section to help schools, SRTS coordinators, and interested community stakeholders to find SRTS partners, such as health and safety organizations, within the community that can offer technical assistance, help set and achieve goals, and maybe even help secure project funding. There will also be a new Webinar Library to give schools and communities access to past VDOT SRTS webinars. Finally, we'll update the Student Travel Tally Section to incorporate new findings as well as add additional guides and resources for creating a robust data-driven Safe Routes to School program for any school.

### Two More Webinars Planned for Spring 2014

We are excited to offer two webinars in the spring of 2014 aimed at helping local SRTS programs. Consider attending one or both of these upcoming webinars:

#### *Rural and Small Towns SRTS- Wednesday, February 5, 2014*

Schools in rural areas and small towns may not have the traffic volumes that urban or suburban schools deal with, but they face their own Safe Routes challenges, including missing sidewalks, long travel distances, and limited pedestrian networks. This webinar will introduce SRTS challenges specific to schools in rural areas and small towns, and identify approaches to address these issues.

#### *Walking School Bus and Bike Train Best Practices - Wednesday, April 9, 2014*

Walking School Buses and Bike Trains are some of the best activities that students, parents, and schools can participate in to teach the importance of pedestrian and bicycling safety. We'll hear from Safe Routes to School experts and advocates regarding their experiences and learn how to best implement a walking school bus and bike train.

### More about Beck Johnston and Harrisonburg's Safe Routes to School Program

#### Is there an SRTS project you're particularly fond of?

Keister Elementary was the first school in our area to be granted a SRTS infrastructure grant and now their students enjoy sidewalks and bike lanes around the school. The school principal instituted a "Walking Fridays" event where each child, no matter their mode of transportation to school, walks around the track before school each week. In September, Walking Wednesdays were added, along with two new walking school buses. The walking school buses only happened because of school staff willing to walk to nearby neighborhoods and walk with children to school. This small change from dedicated school staff has eliminated the need for an entire bus route on Fridays because so many students are walking to school. We're hoping the successes at Keister will inspire other schools in our area to do the same.

Another project I'm fond of is at Thomas Harrison Middle School. Because of increased interest in biking and walking to school the principal instituted a "Bike/Walk Committee" with interested school staff, parents and community members. This eager group then took on a monthly walk/bike to school event with great success. Once students arrive at school, regardless of how they get there, they all walk the track before school, then eat a grab-and-go breakfast outside with their friends. The bike racks have been overcrowded on these mornings with up to 83 bikes in October. This school is setting records and more importantly, gaining attention from press and local decision makers, convincing the public that biking is important to our families and our children. There is much momentum and enthusiasm towards the Safe Routes to School program in Harrisonburg thanks to many parents, principals, and committed community members.

**Remember to Visit [VirginiaDOT.org/SafeRoutes](http://VirginiaDOT.org/SafeRoutes) and join our mailing list!**