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PROGRAMS PROMOTING SAFE TRAVEL TO SCHOOL

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You asked for examples of programs that offer students safe routes to and from public schools in high-crime neighborhoods.

SUMMARY

Two program models that assist students with safe travel to and from school are monitored routes and escorted caravans. Monitored routes, commonly known as “safe passage” or “safe corridor” programs, rely on police and community volunteers to protect students with their presence on designated travel routes. Escorted caravans, commonly known as “walking school buses,” use adult volunteers to escort students in a group to and from school. Connecticut school districts and other districts across the country have used variations of these models.

Also, the Safe Routes to School (SRTS) program provides resources and links to federally funded programs through the U.S. Department of Transportation. SRTS primarily focuses on removing traffic and infrastructure impediments to student walkers and bicyclers; however, it also provides tips on overcoming neighborhood crime and violence as an obstacle to student travel. The Connecticut Department of Transportation has administered the STRS program at the state level since 2006, awarding over \$8 million for 20 construction projects that serve 29 schools in 16 communities around the state.

MONITORED ROUTES

Monitored routes use police officers and community monitors, both paid and unpaid, to protect students on designated travel routes. Chicago, Los Angeles, and Philadelphia use monitored routes to help students get to school safely in high-crime neighborhoods.

Safe Passage, Chicago

Chicago's Safe Passage program began after the 2009 beating death of a 16-year-old student after leaving his school one afternoon. The Chicago Public Schools system and the Chicago Police Department (CPD) Office of Safety and Security use community workers, officers, and other city staffers to secure 92 routes to schools, many of which cross dangerous gang areas.

The Safe Passage routes are marked with reflective yellow signs and staffed by approximately 1,200 unarmed workers wearing neon vests. The workers carry cellular phones and are trained to watch routes as students pass by. To prepare the routes for the 2013-14 school year, city employees demolished 41 vacant buildings, trimmed 4,900 trees, removed graffiti in 2,800 places, and fixed hundreds of streetlights.

Safe Passage monitors work about two and a half hours in the morning and the same amount of time during dismissals for \$10 per hour. Monitors are hired by vendors that the school district assigns to schools. Most vendors are community groups and nonprofit organizations that have signed a yearlong contract to staff the routes. These vendors collect applications, conduct interviews and background checks, and train monitors before the first day of the school year. The monitors are assisted by the CPD, which commits hundreds of police to cleaning up and guarding the Safe Passage routes.

City officials report that the Safe Passage program has led to a 20% decline in criminal incidents around Safe Passage schools, a 27% drop in incidents among students, and a 7% increase in attendance over the past two years in high schools that have the program.

Belmont School Safe Passages Initiative, Los Angeles

The Safe Passages model is also used by the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) in the Belmont area of the city. Launched in 2011 by Advancement Project California's Urban Peace program, a public policy activist organization, the initiative uses parents, teachers, police, and local business owners to staff street corners and patrol routes to school in areas with high gang activity.

In conjunction, LAUSD institutes comprehensive safety and violence prevention curricula in the classroom. The school district creates and distributes multilingual public education materials about ensuring safety in and around schools and trains teachers to implement the anti-violence curriculum.

WalkSafePHL, Philadelphia

WalkSafePHL, a "safe corridors" program, is coordinated by Town Watch Integrated Services (TWIS) in multiple Philadelphia neighborhoods. It was created for the 2013-14 school year in response to safety concerns of families and communities with students attending schools that are outside of their immediate neighborhoods. TWIS coordinates the program in partnership with the Philadelphia Police Department, Philadelphia School District, the mayor's office, and several nonprofit organizations.

TWIS is responsible for recruiting volunteers and performing criminal background and child abuse checks on candidates. Volunteers receive training on observation skills, communication, report writing, and appropriate behaviors for interacting with children. They staff safe routes from 7:30 a.m. to 9 a.m. and 3 p.m. to 5 p.m. each school day, wearing neon vests and photo identification so children can easily identify them. They observe, document, and report suspicious or alarming activity along their assigned routes.

The TWIS website lists the designated safe routes, which are grouped by school. The safe routes also identify which neighborhood businesses are "safe havens" where children in trouble can find an adult to dial 9-1-1.

ESCORTED CARAVANS

Escorted caravans, or "walking school buses," use community volunteers to escort students in a group to and from school. The New Britain School District is currently using the walking school bus model.

Walking School Bus; New Britain, CT

New Britain's Walking School Bus program was launched in time for the 2013-14 school year. New Britain's attendance director proposed the program after hearing about the idea from Massachusetts educators. New Britain is trying the program because the city is switching to a neighborhood school plan, which creates more walkers and fewer buses than in the past.

Led by pre-screened parent volunteers, students meet at a pre-designated spot and then walk as a group to school. In the afternoon, the parent volunteers meet them at school, and the group walks back to the starting place together before the children fan out in different directions to reach their homes.

NATIONAL AND STATE SRTS PROGRAMS

SRTS is a federal program that funded school transportation initiatives in an effort to get more children to walk and bicycle to school. Each state received annual federal funding to implement the program, with shares based on the number of children enrolled in grades kindergarten through 8. Each state was required to have a full-time SRTS Coordinator to administer the program. In June 2012, Congress combined the SRTS program into a new program called Transportation Alternatives. SRTS projects are eligible for Transportation Alternatives funding.

The Connecticut DOT awards SRTS grants for construction projects that make student travel safer. In 2012, six Connecticut communities received SRTS [awards](#). These awards funded the installation of concrete sidewalks (Coventry, Southington, and Vernon), crosswalks and school zone warning signs (Southington and Waterbury), grass and brick medians (Plainville), and four-way stops and curb bump-outs (Stratford).

SRTS admits that its programs cannot independently solve complex crime issues in neighborhoods. Instead, it suggests various techniques that can make traveling safer for walking and bicycling students.

1. *Partnerships with law enforcement agencies, decision makers, and related organizations.* State associations of sheriffs, highway patrol, police chiefs, and school resource officers can help with new initiatives at the local level.

2. *Partnerships with other advocacy groups and programs.* Senior, neighborhood revitalization, community development, and other groups can promote SRTS programs and projects to their networks and the public.
3. *Graffiti abatement.* Graffiti can instill fear of crime among parents and students, reducing their willingness to walk on neighborhood streets.
4. *Cleaning up abandoned houses.* Neglected and poorly maintained properties are conducive to criminal activity.
5. *Crime prevention through environmental design (CPTED).* Walkway and pavement treatments, fences, lighting, signage, and landscaping can decrease the opportunity of crime, increase visibility, and create a perception of community control that discourages criminal behavior.

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