



Best and Promising Practices to Address Violence and Personal Safety in Safe Routes to School Programs

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Advancement Project is a public policy change organization rooted in the civil rights movement. The Urban Peace Program at the Advancement Project has worked with communities across California and the United States to understand and decrease community violence. This work is informed by the Comprehensive Violence Reduction Strategy, an asset-based public health approach. Our flexible model can help your community. Visit us at www.AdvancementProjectCA.org.

This report was made possible with funding from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention through the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health, and Community Health Council's United for Health, a Center for Disease Control and Prevention Community Transformation Grant - Small Communities Program.

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Introduction

Over the past few decades, the Safe Routes to School (SRTS) movement has worked to advance the health and well-being of youth and communities through increasing the number of students walking and bicycling to and from school. Supported by federal, state, and municipal funding and implementation efforts, SRTS programs and projects aim to address the environmental and social barriers to walking and biking to school as a strategy to improve student and community-wide public health outcomes.¹

When addressing safety, the traditional SRTS model focuses on traffic issues and vehicle-pedestrian collisions. While these safety concerns exist widely across communities, many neighborhoods face the additional safety concern of violence and crime, which can pose a significant challenge to SRTS program implementation. When violence and the fear of violence are prevalent in a community, people are less likely to be physically active.²

The purpose of this document is to identify best practices and potential strategies that can be used in the development of SRTS programs and projects in communities facing additional safety barriers due to concerns about violence and crime. Pulling from case studies and promising practices of SRTS programs, Safe Passage models, and other violence prevention initiatives, the information below identifies ways in which SRTS programs can increase the success of their efforts in communities confronting such safety concerns.

Overview of Safe Routes to School

SRTS programs have been around since the late 1970s, with the term first used in Denmark as the name of an initiative aimed at reducing injuries and deaths of children walking and biking to school. SRTS has since become an international movement, with the first SRTS program in the United States initiated in 1997 in the Bronx, New York. Subsequently, Congress provided funding for two pilot SRTS projects the following year, which quickly gave way to other grassroots programs across the country. A 2005 federal transportation bill, the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU) provided dedicated funds for SRTS programs and projects. In 2012, Congress passed a new transportation bill, the Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act (MAP-21), making SRTS initiatives eligible to compete for funding in the Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP). Today, SRTS programs are administered in every state and the District of Columbia.³

The traditional SRTS model promotes the inclusion of the “Five E’s” in programs and projects:

1. **Education:** Teaching children about the broad range of transportation choices, instructing them in important lifelong bicycling and walking safety skills, and launching driver safety campaigns in the vicinity of schools.

2. **Evaluation:** Monitoring and documenting outcomes, attitudes, and trends through the collection of data before and after the intervention(s).
3. **Engineering:** Creating operational and physical improvements to the infrastructure surrounding schools in order to reduce speeds and potential conflicts with motor vehicle traffic, and establish safer and fully accessible crossings, walkways, trails, and bikeways.
4. **Enforcement:** Partnering with local law enforcement to ensure that traffic laws are obeyed in the vicinity of schools (this includes enforcement of speeds, yielding to pedestrians in crosswalks and proper walking and bicycling behaviors) and initiating community enforcement such as crossing guard programs and student safety patrols.⁴
5. **Encouragement:** Using events and activities to promote walking and bicycling and to generate enthusiasm for the program with students, parents, staff, and surrounding community.

These “E’s” provide a strong base to launch successful SRTS programs for typical neighborhoods and elementary schools. However, in neighborhoods with isolated populations and/or entrenched violence that have sought to implement SRTS, program advocates have focused on an additional “E” aimed at community: **Empowerment.** The Empowerment ethos provides further guidance on how to incorporate safety measures in communities

with isolated populations due to a lack of community cohesion or language barriers, and/or entrenched violence dynamics such as gang violence, unsafe schools, and lack of positive community-police relations.

Overview of Safe Passage

The Safe Passage model began as a stand-alone program geared towards organizing and empowering residents in high violence communities. A predecessor of Safe Passage called “Safe Corridors” was initially piloted in the early 1990’s by a group of AmeriCorps volunteers who were organizing parents in eight Philadelphia elementary schools. Funded by the Department of Justice’s Community “Weed & Seed” grants, the parent-volunteer crime reduction activity was designed to take place before school and after dismissal.⁵ Such programs now proliferate and, while more commonly referred to as Safe Passage, these initiatives focus specifically

on providing safety to students as they travel along specific streets, thoroughfares and bus stops, surrounding, near or on school campuses, before the beginning of school and after dismissal in high violence or high crime communities. In communities with isolated populations and/or entrenched violence dynamics, implementation of SRTS programs could immensely benefit from the Safe Passage model.

Safe Passage Models

There are many variations of Safe Passage with most programs falling into one of four broad models:

Professional or Para-Professional Safe Passage Model: Safe Passage programs using professionals or para-professionals often focus on high school communities, urban areas, high traffic areas, high crime areas, and/or areas with highly visible commercial corridors.

These programs are usually administered by a school, a school district, or by a community agency partnering closely with school(s). The lead party hires professional security personnel or trained community members to monitor the safety needs of students and parents along school routes—particularly in high violence or crime areas—and occasionally during other school-sponsored activities. These professionals are often



expected to, and do, intervene in potentially violent incidents. Therefore, Safe Passage workers should be trained on safety precautions, violence reduction strategies, communication protocols with school and law enforcement, incident reporting, cultural competency, and youth engagement.

Volunteer Safe Passage Model: Volunteer programs often focus on elementary schools, suburban, and rural areas. These programs are usually administered by a community-based agency or a school working with parent, resident, or business owner volunteers who are stationed in predetermined areas along highly traveled school routes.

These volunteers serve mainly in a “neighborhood watch” capacity before and after school, meaning volunteers monitor and report potentially unsafe incidents to law enforcement or school security personnel. There is rarely any formal training or compensation for these volunteers and, as such, they are discouraged from directly intervening in potentially violent incidents for liability reasons. At minimum, volunteers are trained on a communication protocol, which typically includes how to contact law enforcement or other emergency personnel.

Collaborative Model: In communities dealing with high levels of violent crime and gang entrenchment, multi-sector collaboration can be a vehicle for effective Safe Passage coordination and sustainability. This collaborative model

brings together public agencies, service providers, community groups, parents, residents, and other stakeholders to implement a multi-faceted program, which can employ various tactics to ensure student safety on their way to and from school. The collaborative’s objective will often focus on larger community-wide violence dynamics, not simply those of one school.

Tactics can include volunteer and/or professional staffed street, school, and school route monitoring, additional law enforcement patrols, and formal communication protocols between school administrators, school resource officers, law enforcement, and community stakeholders (e.g., business owners.)

School-Based Transformation Model: This Safe Passage model utilizes a comprehensive school safety strategy that includes a focus on school culture and the environment, and is most often implemented by a multi-sector collaborative effort involving schools, community stakeholders, parents, and students. When successful, it is often accompanied by a similarly aggressive Professional or Volunteer Safe Passage program along school routes and during school-sponsored activities and events. Critical to this model is understanding the on-campus and community dynamics that fuel violence in and around the school in order to implement effective strategies to increase safety for parents and students at the highest risk of violence.

Incorporating Safe Passage Practices into SRTS

There are several best practices that have emerged from Safe Passages and other violence prevention programs that directly address the physical safety of students and parents in high-violence communities. These planning and implementation practices, in addition to the “Five E’s,” can serve to strengthen SRTS initiatives in neighborhoods of high-violence and or communities that lack cohesion.

Partnership & Multi-Sector Collaboration Development

There is significant evidence displaying the need for multiple public agencies, community groups, service providers, and community involvement in and endorsement of a place-based violence-reduction or safety initiative.⁶ This is especially true in communities that face historic lack of public sector investment. Violence reduction is sustainable only when a multi-sector partnership of these key groups and leaders come together to form a collaborative with an aligned mission and clear roles and responsibilities for which there is accountability. Only then can communities garner the collective

Key Partners for Community Safety

Community Residents and Other Informal Community Leaders
Faith-Based Organizations
Family Support Service Providers
Gang Intervention & Prevention Service Providers & Agencies
Health Agencies, Local Hospital, and Clinics
Local Elected Officials
Local Law Enforcement
Mental Health Agencies
Parents and Students
Parks & Recreation Departments
Probation Departments
Public Housing Administrators and Public Housing Resident Leadership
Public Works Agencies
School Leadership, Administrators and Teachers
School Resource Officers, School Police, and School Security Agencies
Transportation Agencies
Youth Development Service Providers

resources to implement the tailored violence reduction strategies and activities necessary for long-term community safety.⁷

A multi-sector community-based collaborative should develop solutions that honor and nurture existing community assets and leadership. The Urban Peace Program's decades of research into violence reduction initiatives in hot-zone communities suggests that the successful implementation of violence reduction and prevention strategies rests upon real community input, lasting engagement, and community ownership over the solutions. Such input and ownership is achievable only through an inclusive, collaborative process.

A collaborative requires consistent organizational support, contributing to the effectiveness and sustainability of the partnership. The convener plays a critical role in supporting collaborative development. The convener must be skilled in planning, managing, and facilitating a diverse set of stakeholders to achieve consensus around the root conditions that drive violence. The partnerships formed during the collaborative process serve to increase coordination and communication across sectors necessary to build a violence prevention and safety infrastructure around the school and across the community. The collaborative can also provide training opportunities and skills development for participants. Efforts utilizing multi-sector collaboration are more cost-effective, have a larger regional impact, and are more sustainable over the long term in

communities with high or intermittently high levels of violent crime.⁸

Characteristics of a Convener

Has credibility and is trusted by community stakeholders

Possesses a strong understanding of a comprehensive violence reduction strategy

Creates a space for participants to understand each other and identify their roles as stakeholders

Guides the development of accountability and governance structures

Facilitates planning and processes towards consensus building, vision formation, goals and strategy identification and implementation

Supports stakeholders in achieving shared outcomes

*Adapted from Advancement Project. (2011) "Comprehensive Violence Reduction Strategy: A Framework for Implementing the CVRS in your Neighborhood."

Tapping Existing Leadership

Community members are experts of their own neighborhoods and can provide important contributions to a SRTS program. By tapping into existing leadership and expertise of residents and community-based organizations, SRTS programs can gain valuable insight about on-the-ground dynamics, the lessons learned from other community efforts, and strategies to overcome barriers to success.

Nonetheless, the reliance on parent participation in most SRTS projects may be one of the largest barriers for program planning and implementation in high-violence communities. Parents in these communities can be “hard to reach and engage...for a variety of reasons including the lack of free time, language barriers, and a lack of connection to the school.”^{9,10} In addition, personal safety concerns can be the greatest deterrent from engaging in community groups and activities.^{11,12}

Initiatives facing these challenges have been able to address them by reaching out through existing, trusted community and school-based groups or leaders—or engaging with existing assets. Successful initiatives first form relationships with established and trusted groups or leaders in the community as a way of connecting with parents. By engaging parents through existing channels, SRTS leaders can gain trust and credibility, and share information necessary to recruit volunteers.

This strategy is exemplified in Austin, Texas where SRTS advocates connected with the school’s parent support specialist. This

specialist then recruited parents to participate in the SRTS program to serve as “walking school bus”¹ leaders and corner captains (i.e., parents, teachers, or other volunteers serving as another set of “eyes on the street” along common routes.”¹³

Community Tailoring and Culturally Competent Outreach

While involvement from parents, students, and other stakeholders is a key element of SRTS programs, authentic engagement is hard to achieve in some communities. As previously noted, many barriers to

participation exist, and organizations must be thoughtful about how they plan and implement outreach and engagement efforts.

To be most effective in working with the community, organizations should be well-trained in multicultural practices. Staff must have the ability to work effectively and respectfully with people

from diverse cultural, linguistic, and social backgrounds.¹⁴

SRTS staff should work to know and understand the community, noting

Multiculturalism

The practice of appreciating cultural and social differences within personal interactions, group and organizational practices. Leaders and groups that operate in a multicultural framework strive to have inclusive practices, to understand and work to undo social and economic inequity, and the imbalance of power held by privileged social groups. Transformation and reconciliation are often the goal in a multicultural process.

- CompassPoint

¹ A walking school bus is a group of children walking to school with one or more adults.

language, education and backgrounds of parents and other residents as well as the community history.¹⁵ One of the core values of the Urban Peace model is to honor existing community leadership; this is essential in understanding the local community and political dynamics.

Barriers to parent engagement and participation may vary greatly from neighborhood to neighborhood, so taking into account these nuances is important in outreach efforts. For example, opportunities to participate should consider time and resource constraints of parents in the community. Typically economically disadvantaged,¹⁶ parents in these high-violence neighborhoods often face time constraints limiting their ability to get involved. One study on parent engagement found that 51 percent of low-income parents could not participate in their child's school activities due to their jobs, in comparison to 26 percent and 12 percent of middle-income and high-income parents, respectively.¹⁷ Best practice research suggests developing volunteer opportunities that minimize the required time of parents and other caretakers, such as establishing and coordinating a larger cadre of parents, grandparents, and other family members who can take turns walking children to school or serving as corner captains,¹⁸ or offering small stipends to volunteers who take on that role within SRTS programs. It is important to note that stipends or other forms of payment for parental involvement cannot take the place of community organizing and leadership development in the long run.¹⁹ For instance,

if funding for such measures is depleted without leadership development, parental involvement may decrease and volunteer bases will be weakened. In economically disadvantaged communities, parents face additional barriers to participation such as lack of transportation, lack of child-care and fear of walking across gang territories; geography, economics and language barriers can isolate families. Being able to provide child-care, transportation, live translators, translation of all documents and handouts are ways to overcome barriers for isolated or marginalized parents.

Parent Leadership and Community Resident Capacity Development

A longer-term strategy that requires organizing and training resources means that programs developed the human capital—or the individual skills, knowledge, and experience that build self-efficacy and capacity—of parents and caregivers in order to reduce their fears of engagement, while increasing their advocacy and leadership skills. In Alameda County, California, TransForm, an Oakland-based nonprofit, conducted parent leadership and advocacy trainings customized to a local SRTS program. It was necessary to build the capacity of parents in the school district to increase engagement as many parents faced language and literacy barriers and had fear associated with interacting with public agencies. As a result, parental involvement and leadership in SRTS has increased and some of the parents have started attending other neighborhood

meeting, such as convening of a local crime prevention council.²⁰

Moving Beyond the Five E’s: Best and Promising Practices for Addressing Violence and Safety

In order to be successful when working in high-violence, gang-entrenched communities, SRTS programs must intentionally incorporate a Safe Passage lens to their planning and implementation efforts for the Five E’s. Additionally, efforts should include an additional “E” aimed at Empowerment.

Explicitly addressing violence requires forging non-traditional partnerships to gain a thorough understanding of the nature of violence and on-the-ground dynamics in order to develop effective solutions. Safe Passage programs can help establish a basic level of safety so that children and families can begin walking and biking to school without the fear of violence. The following tables outline ways to expand the traditional model to include violence reduction and prevention practices.

1. EDUCATION	
Traditional SRTS Model	Applying a Safe Passage Lens
Teaching children about the broad range of transportation choices, instructing them in important lifelong bicycling and walking safety skills, and launching driver safety campaigns near schools.	Educational efforts can be expanded to include teaching children about safety strategies, such as Safe Havens ² , and training community stakeholders on how they can support children traveling safely to and from school.
Examples of Safe Passage Activities	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase safety training for youth through workshops, assemblies, as well as in-class presentations from safe routes/safe passage experts and professionals. Students should be trained in best practices, safe corridors and streets with supervision, areas to avoid, as well as how to handle unsafe situations. • Increase parent and community education about Safe Passage programs through community and school newsletters, parent and community meetings, and tabling at local community events. • Increase civic engagement training for all community residents to create awareness of issues and provide opportunities for active participation in local community efforts for potential policy reform and safety impact on the community • Increase training³ of gang intervention workers, Safe Passage workers and community volunteers about Safe Routes to School and transportation policy. 	

² Safe havens are businesses or organizations that serve as safe place where students can go and ask for help if under duress.

³ Advancement Project’s Urban Peace Academy offers a credential training program for gang interventionists and Safe Passage workers.

2. EVALUATION	
Traditional SRTS Model	Applying a Safe Passage Lens
Monitoring and documenting outcomes, attitudes and trends through the collection of data before and after the intervention(s).	Data gathering of violence and safety issues, including the perceptions of personal safety, violent crime rates, gang dynamics, areas of concentrated violence or "hot spots," and school climate.
Examples of Safe Passage Activities	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community participatory research crime-data mapping -- Using crime data, such as police data, to create hot spot maps helps identify immediate areas of need. This information can be overlaid with other data such as community assets and student-engaged mapping for greater analysis. • Community stakeholder surveys, interviews, and focus groups -- Gather primary level data from stakeholders to identify issues around safety. Talking about violence, trauma, fear, and intimidation is difficult to share; therefore, different techniques may be used depending on the need. • Community-engaged asset mapping -- Community members identify community strengths, services, and resources through a process where they collectively create maps that provide information about safety. • Student-engaged hot spot mapping -- Students gather primary data to capture a unique, on-the-ground perspective of safety issues in their community. 	

3. ENGINEERING	
Traditional SRTS Model	Applying a Safe Passage Lens
Creating operational and physical improvements to the infrastructure surrounding schools that reduce speeds, potential conflicts with motor vehicle traffic, and criminal activity; and establish safer and fully accessible crossings, walkways, trails and bikeways.	Design the physical environment to deter criminal activity and increase the perception of public safety.
Examples of Safe Passage Activities	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED)⁴ strategies. • Improve the physical appearance of the environment through neighborhood clean ups, improving walkways and alleys, transforming vacant lots, and beautification efforts. • Increase access to low-cost public transit for students. • Increase signage promoting safe school zones and safe haven businesses and organizations. • Increase safety of school facilities through better lighting and use of natural surveillances⁵. • Ensure regular service of trash pick-up, sidewalk cleaning, etc. 	

⁴ CPTED is a multi-disciplinary approach to deter criminal behavior through environmental design.

⁵ Natural surveillance limits the opportunity for crime by designing the placement of physical features, activities, and people in such a way as to maximize visibility and foster positive social interaction.

4. ENFORCEMENT	
Traditional SRTS Model	Applying a Safe Passage Lens
Partnering with local law enforcement to ensure that traffic laws are obeyed in the vicinity of schools (this includes enforcement of speeds, yielding to pedestrians in crosswalks and proper walking and bicycling behaviors) and initiating community enforcement such as crossing guard programs and student safety patrols.	Multi-sector collaboration among law enforcement, trained community members, and schools serve to prevent and reduce violent incidents and promote a safe environment for kids to travel.
Examples of Safe Passage Activities	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase community resident and parent presence. • Increase use of trained community-based safe passage workers (including gang intervention or “violence interrupters”) on campus and along school routes. • Increase training for law enforcement personnel on culturally competent service delivery, constitutional policing,⁶ youth trauma, and youth brain development. • Increase law enforcement capacity specifically dedicated to Safe Passage. • Be mindful if students (especially students of color) are feeling unsafe or uncomfortable with police presence • Increase law enforcement patrols in coordination with school administrators. • Establish periodic meetings and input sessions with law enforcement to inform Safe Passage patrols. • Increase parent patrols and deployment of community resident corner captains.⁷ • Establish local business-endorsed “student safety zones.” • Establish co-location of police substations near schools. 	

⁶ Policing that “is conducted in accordance with the constitutional parameters law enforcement officers are duty-bound to follow,” and that “observe individual constitutional protections.” (http://www.policechiefmagazine.org/magazine/index.cfm?fuseaction=display_arch&article_id=1206&issue_id=62007) The Fourth Amendment of the Constitution states: “The right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects, against unreasonable search and seizures, shall not be violated, and no warrants shall issue, but upon probable cause, supported by oath or affirmation, and particularly describing the place to be searched and the persons or things seized.”

⁷ A corner captain is a parent, teacher, or other volunteer who is stationed at designated locations along the school route.

5. ENCOURAGEMENT	
Traditional SRTS Model	Applying a Safe Passage Lens
Using events and activities to promote walking and bicycling and to generate enthusiasm for the program with students, parents, staff, and surrounding community.	Supervised group activities can reduce parental fears and promote a sense of safety and community cohesion.
Examples of Safe Passage Activities	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide incentive programs to increase volunteerism. • Train parents on mobility, violence reduction strategies, and civic engagement. • Establish Safe Havens along school routes to serve as safe places where students can go and ask for help if under duress. • Link academic programs and curriculum to community safety goals. • Create staggered arrival and dismissal times to prevent students and parents from overcrowding a street at the school, this allows for better supervision. • Tailor public bus and school bus schedules to prevent situations of potential conflict and injury, and engage transportation providers to adjust bus schedules to the needs of local schools. • Establish supervised walking school buses and bike trains to support children traveling through hot spot areas.⁸ 	

6. EMPOWERMENT	
Traditional SRTS Model	Applying a Safe Passage Lens
Empowerment is not included as a sixth element in the current SRTS model. Partnering with local residents and community based organizations to build capacity and leadership development while increasing community input and voice into local safe routes to school work.	Mobilize local residents and community based organizations to raise concerns over certain areas identified as gang hot spot zones and lift up community voice around issues of community safety.
Examples of Safe Passage Activities	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage community leaders, residents, parents, and youth to participate in Safe Passage/Safe Routes to School efforts, including providing feedback and input, being given opportunities to designate and prioritize areas for safety and concern, and training parents as volunteers and advocates for safety. • Utilize paid or volunteer community members to participate in Safe Routes to School initiatives as Safe Passage Workers, community liaisons, and school monitors. • Convene residents and agencies working in the community to develop a tailored strategic plan to address safety issues. • Utilize a community collaborative to allow opportunities for resident and stakeholder involvement and contribution through the execution of action items, particularly through a community safety workgroup focused on Safe Passage, Safe Routes to School, and Safe Havens. 	

⁸ A group of children that walk or bicycle to school together accompanied by one or more adults.

Conclusion

All children—no matter where they live—deserve to walk or bike to school without fearing for their lives. However, when addressing the health and well-being of residents in communities dealing with high violence and gang entrenchment, the crime and violence components are often inadequately addressed in a traditional SRTS model. In order to comprehensively address the needs of these communities, a community safety lens must be incorporated into the formulation of the SRTS model.

Safe Passage strengthens active living efforts by improving community-wide health outcomes. Following the SRTS model of the 5 E's—Evaluation, Engineering, Education, Encouragement, and Enforcement—Safe Passage adds a violence reduction lens. Safe Passage requires additional data analysis with crime data, a different infrastructure lens, comprehensive education with public agencies such as the local police department, encouragement through community cohesion, and enforcement through non-traditional partnerships. Safe Passage adds an additional “E” for Empowerment to the SRTS framework. The “Empowerment” frame of thought fosters further community cohesion and ownership through resident capacity building efforts that address safety measures in high violence, isolated communities.

In communities that seek to address safety concerns to an existing SRTS program, Safe

Passage can be the solution. With a comprehensive approach that requires unlikely partnerships, Safe Passage adds a new level of community understanding that can better aid a national SRTS model to transform areas to become safe, healthy, and thriving communities.

Resources

A Practitioners Guide for Advancing Health Equity: Community Strategies for Preventing Chronic Disease

Addressing the Intersection: Preventing Violence and Promoting Healthy Eating and Active Living Environments

Comprehensive Violence Reduction Strategy: A Framework for Implementing the CVRS in Your Neighborhood

Implementing Safe Routes to School in Low-Income Schools and Communities: A Resource Guide for Volunteers and Professionals

Organizational Development and Capacity in Cultural Competency: Building Knowledge and Practice

Safe Routes to School Case Studies From Around the Country

Using Safe Routes to School to Combat the Threat of Violence

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