WISCONSIN: Safe Routes to School (SRTS)

CHOICES Learning Collaborative Partnership

East Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission ECWRPC

WISCONSIN DEPARTMENT of HEALTH SERVICES

This brief summarizes a CHOICES Learning Collaborative Partnership model examining the expansion of a regional Safe Routes to School program in K-8 public and private schools in Wisconsin. Safe Routes to School Programs help children safely walk and bike to school by incorporating principles of the six E's: engagement, encouragement, equity, engineering, education, and evaluation.

The Issue

In Wisconsin, just three out of every 10 children achieve the 60 minutes of physical activity recommended daily for health.[1] Over recent decades, the number of students walking and bicycling to school has declined,[2] eliminating an important physical activity opportunity. Adopting programs that make it safer and easier to walk or bike to school can increase the number of students using these physically active travel modes and can also allow students to incorporate physical activity into a daily routine.[3] Every child should have the opportunity to be healthy, and all kids need opportunities to be physically active, no matter where they live or where they go to school. This study estimates the cost-effectiveness of increasing funding and diversifying funding sources to expand a regional model for Safe Routes to School programs for those schools that have not yet implemented comprehensive Safe Routes to School programs in Wisconsin.

About Safe Routes to School

Safe Routes to School programs that adopt the six E's, including improvements to local sidewalks and roads around schools, providing pedestrian and bike safety education, and offering encouragement and promotion activities, can increase the number of students walking and bicycling to school.[2] This study looked at the scaled expansion of East Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission's Safe Routes to School program to other regional planning commissions across Wisconsin. A state-wide Safe Routes to School Program Coordinator would work with regional SRTS Coordinators and advisory committees, providing oversight and administration of the allocated funding to support projects in their region. Each regional planning commission would coordinate education, encouragement, and promotion activities across funded schools in their region. Local municipalities would lead projects to improve the safety of sidewalks and road infrastructure.

Comparing Costs and Outcomes

A CHOICES cost-effectiveness analysis compared the costs and outcomes of expanding Safe Routes to School in Wisconsin with the costs and outcomes associated with not implementing the program over 10 years (2020-2030).

Implementing Safe Routes to School in Wisconsin is an investment in child health. By the end of 2030:

151,000 CHILDREN

would attend schools with safer transportation environments over 10 years

$58 ANNUAL COST PER CHILD

attending schools that adopt SRTS programs

48 MORE ACTIVE MINUTES PER WEEK

for children who start walking/biking to school

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Safe Routes to School Family Fun Night Event. Neenah, WI. May 2018.

Conclusions and Implications

Every student should be able to walk or bike to school safely. Expanding East Central's regional Safe Routes to School model in Wisconsin could support safer walking and biking environments and provide programmatic education and encouragement initiatives for 151,000 elementary and middle school students over 10 years. We estimate that the Safe Routes to School program, which includes education and promotion activities, improvements to sidewalks and road infrastructure, and coordination support, would cost $58 per student per year. Over 10 years, these activities to expand the regional SRTS model in Wisconsin would cost about $215,000 per school. At the same time, more than 8,000 students would start walking and biking to school, and they would get 48 more minutes of physical activity per week. This translates to better health outcomes and more kids at a healthy weight in Wisconsin, with 16 fewer cases of obesity in the year 2030 alone.

In addition to getting students more active,[4,5] SRTS initiatives may also reduce the risk of pedestrian and bicycle injury, exposure to unsafe traffic, and air pollution.[3,6,7] Greater safety, improved health from increased physical activity, and lesser environmental impact from decreased automobile use provide economic benefits to the community.[8] In Wisconsin, the costs of implementing SRTS projects could be offset by savings associated with reduced vehicle travel, potentially amounting to $2.19 million in environment-related cost savings over 10 years. Further, families whose students start walking or bicycling would also drive less and could save an average of $1,120 by not driving their students to school. Walking and biking are great ways for kids to be active, and this program invests in ways to ensure that more students can do so safely while developing healthy lifestyle habits that would continue into adulthood.

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