

# SAFE ROUTES TO SCHOOL IN SAN MATEO COUNTY

This brief summarizes a CalFresh Healthy Living-CHOICES Project Learning Collaborative Partnership model examining Safe Routes to School (SRTS) and the School Travel Fellowship (STF) in San Mateo County. SRTS enables and encourages students to walk and bike to school, improving health, safety, and community well-being, while reducing traffic and emissions.

## The Issue

Communities that support active transportation and promote opportunities for physical activity are essential for children's health and well-being. In California, only three out of 10 children meet the recommended 60 minutes of physical activity per day.<sup>1</sup> Many students in San Mateo County are not walking, biking, or rolling to school because of unsafe streets.<sup>2</sup> In San Mateo County, 96% of high injury areas where pedestrian and bicycle collisions involving youth occur are within one mile of a school, particularly schools with a higher percentage of families with low income.<sup>2</sup> SRTS supports healthier habits by creating safe, accessible options for students to walk, bike, or roll to and from school. Physically active students can experience lasting improvements in their physical and mental health, academic performance, and long-term well-being.<sup>3</sup> Through the San Mateo County Office of Education's (SMCOE) SRTS program, schools and cities collaborate on projects that improve safety, promote active transportation, and advance health for all.

## About Safe Routes to School in San Mateo County

San Mateo County envisions a comprehensive SRTS-School Travel Fellowship (STF) program across all K-8 schools in the county. SRTS enables school children to walk and bicycle to school by implementing projects and activities that improve the health, well-being, and safety of children. The STF brings cross-sector collaboration, providing technical assistance, workshops, and support for teams to design programmatic projects or test quick-build infrastructure improvements. This modeling project looked at implementing the program across 21 school districts, supported by county, city, and school leaders, with guidance from a Community Advisory Board, Grant Task Force, and city-level Task Forces to guide the implementation of projects that advance active transportation and safety.

## Comparing Costs and Outcomes

CHOICES cost-effectiveness analysis compared the costs and outcomes over a 10-year time horizon (2025-2034) of implementing SRTS with the costs and outcomes associated with not implementing the program.

### Implementing Safe Routes to School in San Mateo County is an investment in child health and safety:



**106,000**  
**CHILDREN**

would attend schools with safer transportation environments over 10 years



**48**

**MORE ACTIVE MINUTES**

per week for children who start walking or biking to school



**\$39**

**COST PER CHILD**

per year attending schools that adopt SRTS programs



**\$230**

**ANNUAL SAVINGS PER FAMILY**

whose students begin walking or biking

# Conclusions and Implications

If SRTS-STF programs are adopted throughout San Mateo County, we estimate a 75% likelihood that pedestrian and bicycle injuries among elementary and middle school students during school travel hours could be lowered, even if more students are walking or biking than before.

Investing in initiatives that make it safer and easier for students to get to and from school boosts daily physical activity and offers additional benefits. Students who switch from passive to physically active commutes, such as walking, biking, or rolling, would engage in an extra 48 minutes of physical activity each week. Over 10 years, an estimated 106,000 students attending more than 130 schools across 21 school districts could benefit from safer environments by expanding existing programs countywide. This is urgent because students and families face unsafe street conditions around schools, including speeding, congestion, and dangerous crossings.

With the expansion of the SRTS-STF program, we estimate the annual implementation costs would be about \$39 per student and \$4.1 million countywide. However, these costs could be offset by savings from reduced vehicle travel, estimated to save \$1.85 million annually as more students walk or bike to school. Families whose students begin walking or biking—and consequently drive less for school trips—would see most of these savings, each saving \$230 annually.

Comprehensive SRTS programs may reduce the risk of pedestrian and bicycle injuries.<sup>4</sup> We estimate a 75% likelihood that, if SRTS-STF programs are adopted throughout San Mateo County, injuries among elementary and middle school students during school travel hours could be lowered, even if more students are walking or biking than before. The SRTS-STF program expands local capacity to pursue community-driven, locally responsive projects that transform school neighborhoods into healthier, safer, and more resilient places for everyone.



## Citation

Watkins J, Vallez-Kelly T, Sanchez L, Ibarra M, Chan C, Gacutan-Galang J, Beccarelli M, Evans LW, Pugliese J, Gouck J, McCulloch SM, Barrett JL, Garrone ME, Cradock AL. *Safe Routes to School in San Mateo County* {Issue Brief}. San Mateo County Health, San Mateo, CA, and the CalFresh Healthy Living-Childhood Obesity Intervention Cost-Effectiveness Study (CHOICES) Learning Collaborative Partnership; December 2025. For more information, please visit [choicesproject.org](https://choicesproject.org).

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1. Child and Adolescent Health Measurement Initiative. [2018-2019 National Survey of Children's Health \(NSCH\) data query](#). Data Resource Center for Child and Adolescent Health supported by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), Maternal and Child Health Bureau (MCHB).
2. Alta Planning + Design, Inc., San Mateo County Office of Education Safe Routes to School and San Mateo County City/County Association of Governments. [High Injury Network Report](#). 2022.
3. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. [The association between school-based physical activity, including physical education, and academic performance](#). U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. 2010.
4. DiMaggio C, Chen Q, Muennig PA, Li G. [Timing and effect of a safe routes to school program on child pedestrian injury risk during school travel hours: Bayesian changepoint and difference-in-difference analysis](#). *Injury Epidemiology* 2014; 1:17.