

# Safe Routes to School™

## Safe Routes to School: Preparing for a Harvest

### Part 3

#### SOWING SEEDS FOR THE FUTURE...

Residents may overlook the importance of good school systems within their community; more so, the positive impact that a good school system has within a neighborhood and the greater community. As planners, our purpose is to prepare communities for future growth. Because we recognize the importance of the school system to a community, it must be a priority to incorporate schools into neighborhood revitalization projects and community master plans. Schools must be located and sized for easy access on foot or bicycle; connected to the neighborhoods by sidewalks and pathways; and function as arteries leading the lifeline of the future, our youth, on a safe and healthy path to knowledge.

As communities continue to grow and age, it is not uncommon to experience some blight and degradation of infrastructure including roads, sidewalks, and bike paths. Here is a perfect opportunity for planners and Safe Routes to School (SR2S) to play an important role. Planners have an intimate knowledge of the communities in which we live and work. We are armed with the knowledge required to plan healthy and sustainable growth in the future. As Michigan prepares to leap into a new knowledge economy, it is within

our hands to help ensure that communities grow in a manner that is healthy, safe, and attractive, as well as fosters the school system as an anchor in the community. By using solid planning principles and working with a network of citizens and professionals (as prescribed by the SR2S program), we can help build those communities.

In order to assist our schools and our future generations make change, we need to plant the seeds before we can reap a harvest. As professional and community planners, here are some actions that start to realize a difference.

#### SOW THE SEEDS OF ENCOURAGEMENT

The SR2S program is a grass roots effort that requires the ownership of students, families, school staff, and community members. As planners that assist communities, we can provide our professional support and expertise to SR2S volunteers. Specifically:



Photo credit: www.bikepedimages.com

**As a planner with an intimate knowledge of the communities in which you live and work, you are a valuable resource for a successful Safe Routes to School (SR2S) program. Volunteer your time to the program by becoming a member of the SR2S team, participate in the Walk to School Day, or help record the "Walking Audit." Find out how to get involved today by calling your local school.**

- Find out if your local school district is involved in SR2S or is interested in the SR2S program. If the district is not involved in the program, encourage them to look into the program. Give the school district a copy of this flier with the contact information for the SR2S Web site at [www.saferoutesmichigan.org](http://www.saferoutesmichigan.org).

- Promote SR2S in your communities as a small step in part of the transition to Michigan's knowledge economy.
- Encourage the incorporation of SR2S program elements into master plans/comprehensive plans, and parks and recreation plans.

- Discuss funding options (limited funds available through SR2S) and identify critical areas within the community that may benefit from the implementation of the SR2S program. Incorporate these findings directly into the plan maps, goals, and policies, and include within Capital Improvement Plans.

- Encourage your communities to require sidewalks for all new and infill development.
- Review subdivision and condominium ordinances to determine if sidewalks are required. If not, recommend that the ordinance be amended to include the provision of required sidewalks.

#### SOW SEEDS OF KNOWLEDGE

Use your knowledge of the public process, group organization, and data/resource management. You do not always have to be leading the effort to be effective; help identify some short cuts and provide contacts to those who may be able to participate more fully. In

some instances, multiple stakeholders might better coordinate efforts in a more regional manner; the planning profession is well suited to identify these opportunities. Identify how various issues can be addressed through current planning tools, ordinances, etc. If a change needs to be made, help identify the methods for getting it done. Note that part of the technical assistance available to schools includes tabulation of survey data that is collected by the schools. Planners can provide an additional layer of understanding to what this data means and how it can be applied to generate solutions. Specific tasks include:

- Volunteer to facilitate SR2S groups within your home community and/or identify other key individuals or peers to assist.
- Identify hindrances (zoning, utilities, transportation, etc.) and discuss alternatives that may have worked in other communities in which you are familiar. This may include traffic calming examples with photos, sample ordinances, and plans.
- Get your client communities involved. Talk about SR2S to the planning commissions and legislative bodies within your client communities. Give them examples of what can be done in their community and tell them about available grant dollars. Knowledge is the best asset!
- Identify other potential funding sources such as Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality, Transportation Enhancement funding, or other foundation funding.



### SOW SEEDS OF TIME

Yes, time is our most precious commodity. Invest this wisely. A great opportunity to contribute your time is by participating in the Walking Audit. You can provide valuable insight as various groups report back. As a planner you can help link separate issues to a larger picture and bring an informed perspective and understanding to those involved. For example, the 2007 Safe Routes to School National Conference spotlighted a group of students who worked side by side with a local professional to map elements

from the Walking Audit route into a GIS database. This offered the students a chance to be a part of the SR2S process, as well as gain insight into the planning profession. Specific tasks include:

- Enlist the help of others and provide training if necessary.
- Volunteer your time. Be the champion within your community. You may be the push needed to get the school system on board with SR2S.
- Participate in a Walking Audit and highlight problem areas.
- Be prepared for the commitment. SR2S is a community-wide effort, with a large commitment to time. However; in time and with solid cooperation from all parties involved, SR2S can and will work within your communities.
- Volunteer the resources of your firm, agency, and/or department as appropriate. This is an invaluable asset to a community looking to get SR2S off the ground. This may include meeting facilitation, mapping, ordinance or master plan preparation, and grant writing. This is what we do best, so put your knowledge to good use!

For information on schools near you to become involved with, visit [www.saferoutesmichigan.org](http://www.saferoutesmichigan.org).



### ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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### FOR MORE INFORMATION

For additional information contact the Governor's Council on Physical Fitness, Health and Sports/Michigan Fitness

### LOOK HOW FAR WE'VE COME...

- In late January 2008, the Granholm administration announced that nine Michigan elementary and middle schools will receive more than \$1.6 million in federal Safe Routes to School funding for safety improvements and education programs that will encourage students to travel safely between home and school.

The schools receiving Safe Routes to Schools funding are:

Christa McAuliffe Middle School, Bangor Charter Township, Bay County;  
Winans Elementary School, Delta Township, Eaton County;  
George Long Elementary School, village of Grass Lake, Jackson County;  
Frost and Cascades Elementary Complex, city of Jackson, Jackson County;  
Jackson Arts and Technology Academy, city of Jackson, Jackson County;  
Northeast Elementary School, city of Jackson, Jackson County;  
Springport Elementary and Middle School, village of Springport, Jackson County;  
Clear Lake Elementary School, Oxford Charter Township, Oakland County, and Lincoln Elementary School, city of Cadillac, Wexford County.

- At a ceremony in the nation's capitol in October 2007, Lauren Marchetti, director of the National Center for Safe Routes to School, presented the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) the first annual national "James L. Oberstar Safe Routes to School Award." This first-ever award recognizes exemplary effort on the part of a state department of transportation in developing and launching the program.
- In November 2007, Michigan hosted the 1st Safe Routes to School National Conference in Dearborn. Over 400 people attended the conference from 47 states including over 150 Michigan attendees.

Foundation at (800)434-8642 or visit the Web pages: [www.michiganfitness.org](http://www.michiganfitness.org) or [www.saferoutesmichigan.org](http://www.saferoutesmichigan.org).

