



## Creating Policy, Systems, Environmental Change: Safe Routes to School

### Student-Led Advocacy for a Safe and Healthy Environment at Ruby Drive Elementary School

#### Intervention Summary

Walking to and from school is one of the easiest ways to increase daily physical activity and, along with good nutrition, maintain a healthy weight. Safety has been a concern for the parents of students at Ruby Drive Elementary after a child was hit by a car as she crossed the street. According to local data, this school has one of the highest rates of pedestrian collisions in Orange County.

As part of HCA NEOP's Safe Routes to School (SRTS) implementation, 105 students and parents from Ruby Drive Elementary completed the *National Walkability Checklist* to assess their walk to school. The most commonly cited issue was not having enough room to walk safely, due to problems such as broken or cracked sidewalks. In order to make the physical environment safe and appealing for children to walk and bike, HCA NEOP led the Ruby Drive students on a walkability audit to identify barriers to walking and biking to and from school. The students were equipped with cameras, notepads, pencils and rulers to capture the issues they encountered along their routes. With the help of HCA NEOP, students then prioritized the issues and compiled a report. A copy of the report, along with an invitation to hear the students present their findings, were sent to the City of Placentia Traffic Engineering and Code Enforcement, City Hall, Placentia Police Department and the school board.

On May 14, 2015, the students held their presentation at the school and advocated for changes to be made. During the event, one change to the fixed environment was announced by Mark Miller, City of Placentia Traffic Engineer. In 2016, a new signal will be installed at the intersection of Ruby Drive and Placentia Avenue, the site of the previous accident and an intersection that currently has only one crosswalk with 4 lanes to cross and a 40 mile per hour speed limit. The new signal will make it safer for the many students who cross the street at this location. Addressing the numerous barriers to safe, active mobility is the first step to promoting the multiple health benefits of walking and bicycling. In addition to structural changes, the

students received pedestrian safety lessons from the Placentia Police Department as well as nutrition education from the Orange County Department of Education's NEOP staff. This obesity prevention effort is a collaboration that stands to impact not only Ruby Drive Elementary, but also the surrounding community.

## Description of Barriers Encountered and Identified or Proposed Solutions

Time constraints were the main challenge encountered during the implementation of the intervention strategy. Working with schools, specifically teachers and students, requires a lot of flexibility. Most school days are packed full of required elements, leaving very little time for other programs. Accessing the students requires buy-in from the teachers, principals, and often times the school district. Helping a site make changes and scheduling events takes time and requires persistence. To overcome these barriers, NEOP staff adopted a flexible attitude and partnered with organizations like the Placentia Police Department to help the site make changes. Another barrier was parent involvement. Many parents find it difficult to take part in activities such as the ones detailed above, due to work and other family obligations. Additionally, participation in the Walkability Checklist (gathering of baseline data) was lower than desired. Finally, many of the students who participated in SRTS implementation during 2015, have since graduated and left Ruby Drive. Continuing the efforts requires training another group of students, teachers, and parents. In the future, it might be ideal to engage 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> graders, as opposed to 6<sup>th</sup> graders who will be graduating.

## Future Directions/Sustainable Success

**Short-term goals:** promotion of events like Walk to School Day, enhanced nutrition education, SRTS poster contests, pedestrian safety lessons and other related events to encourage walking/biking and healthy eating. For sustainability, integration of SRTS into the nutrition or physical education classes is advised.

**Long-term goals:** include those changes being made to the fixed environment. The aforementioned stakeholders will continue to address the issues identified by the students. The students and parents will be surveyed again in FFY16 to assess whether or not the changes to the fixed environment have increased the walking score for that community.

## Contact information about this Narrative

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