

# PHHS BLOCK GRANT SUCCESS STORY 2016

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## NUTRITION EDUCATION AND OBESITY PREVENTION BRANCH

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### WE'RE MAKING OUR SCHOOL ROUTES SAFER.

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**Issue:** Many communities have room for improvement when it comes to providing safe routes for youth to walk and bike to school. Environmental conditions, such as heavy traffic and busy roads, often make routes to school unsafe to travel by foot or bike.

1. Traffic-related danger was the second most common reason cited by parents surveyed in 2010 for not allowing their children to walk to and from school<sup>1</sup>.
2. In 2013, 288 pedestrians and bicyclists ages 14 and under were killed, and approximately 15,000 children in this same age group were injured while walking or bicycling in the United States<sup>2</sup>.

Parents may believe that the safest way to school is for them to drive their children, but by driving they can contribute to the traffic congestion and traffic danger surrounding the school.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, the rate of overweight for age (this would include children who are considered obese) in California children is at 15% among 2 to 11 year olds. Parents and communities need to look for ways to help youth integrate physical activity into their daily routines, and what better way than walking safely to school every day?<sup>4</sup>

**Intervention:** The California Department of Public Health (CDPH) Nutrition Education and Obesity Prevention Branch (NEOPB) and Safe Active Communities Branch (SACB) worked closely with the Safe Routes to School National Partnership to develop a toolkit to help communities to provide a safe way for children to walk to school: the Walking School Bus Toolkit. A walking school bus is a group of children that walk together to school with an adult, often picking up others at homes or prearranged “stops” along the way. A Walking School Bus: (1) improves safety conditions and increases the number of students walking to and from school, and (2) helps reduce traffic congestion and pollution near schools<sup>5</sup>.

The Walking School Bus toolkit supportive materials: (1) help schools and parent volunteers get started, (2) aid in developing and planning walking routes, (3) provide (a) ideas to recruit students and leaders, (b) guidance on promoting and sustaining the program, and (c) liability information.

**Impact:** Implementing a Walking School Bus program gives children and adults a chance to increase their daily physical activity, socialize with their peers, improve attendance rates, and build a sense of community--all while getting to school quickly and safely<sup>6</sup>.

Momentum is growing; (1) walking to and from school increased from less than 14% of all trips in 2007-2008 to more than 17% in 2014<sup>7</sup>. (2) For each year of a Safe Routes to School program's operation, walking and bicycling increased by 5%<sup>8</sup>.

The Walking School Bus toolkit supports the establishment of these programs by taking the guesswork out of getting started. It provides a step-by-step start-up plan and considerations for program customization. The toolkit also provides useful tips, ideas, and tools, and helps program administrators anticipate and overcome challenges that may present themselves along the way.