

# Road Map for Getting Started with SAFE ROUTES TO SCHOOL (SRTS)

The Champion Provider Fellowship is funded by CalFresh Healthy Living through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program and the California Department of Public Health Oral Health Program. CalFresh Healthy Living promotes healthy food choices and physical activity consistent with the most recent *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*. In order to achieve this, we align our work with and support efforts to address social determinants of health. Our three-year plan calls for putting our work in the context of specific, locally determined need, leading with and encouraging sustained community engagement in planning and implementation, and embedding partnership/coalition work across every strategy. The Oral Health Program strives to improve the oral health of Californians also through prevention, education, and organized community efforts.

The Road Map for Safe Routes to School provides a set of steps that Champion Provider Fellows can take, and useful background information for initiating Safe Routes to School programs and policies. In addition to the Road Map, other resources in the SRTS Implementation Toolkit, namely the modifiable PowerPoint *Slide Deck* with talking points and the *Fact Sheet*, provide Fellows with resources that will help them to jump start their work on Safe Routes to School initiatives.

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## BACKGROUND

This section provides a brief introduction to 1) policy, system, and environmental (PSE) change and 2) PSE and Safe Routes to School.

### Introduction to Policy, System and Environmental (PSE) Change

PSE change interventions that affect the upstream causes of health are vital to creating healthy communities across California. The [PSE Playbook \(bit.ly/36JGGhk\)](https://bit.ly/36JGGhk) provides definitions of each level of PSE change and then highlights the differences between each. Fellows can refer to pages 3 and 4 of the PSE Playbook for more information on PSE change.

### PSE and Safe Routes to School (SRTS)

The impact of SRTS can be advanced through a variety of policy, system and environmental change interventions. Example of PSE interventions could include:

- Create or improve walking, biking, or public transit infrastructure, including sidewalks, crosswalks, protected bike lanes, and bus stops.
- Improve safety conditions near schools by designing safer streets and enacting enforcement mechanisms that deter unsafe driving behaviors.
- Make walking, biking, and public transit more affordable and enjoyable by providing free or reduced public transit fares for students to get to school and by hosting events such as a “Walk to School Day.”
- Educate students and their families to encourage them to walk, bike, or use public transit to get to and from school.
- Create remote drop-off locations where students can be dropped off by bus or car and safely walk the remainder of the way to school.

Policy interventions have the capacity to institutionalize change and can further dictate adoption of other system and environmental interventions. Policy interventions regarding SRTS could involve changes to local school wellness policies (LSWP), adoption of a local government resolution (LGR), or inclusion of SRTS goals, policies, and objectives in planning documents, such as general plans or active transportation plans:

- **Local school wellness policies (LSWP)** provide a mechanism for communities to engage with local school districts and create healthier policies, systems, and environments. They are written documents that guide a school district to create supportive school nutrition and physical activity environments. These policies can set goals, require procedural changes, and create long term accountability regarding SRTS program implementation. *Example: As part of a LSWP, establish a voluntary “walking school bus” program in which adults walk with groups of children between specific neighborhood locations and their school. (Systems Change)*
- **Local government resolutions (LGR)** can be used to express a municipality’s support for SRTS and can include specific commitments, such as the assignment of SRTS-related responsibilities to municipal staff. Resolutions can support SRTS by establishing the local government’s commitment to SRTS. *Example: Utilize an LGR to express support for continuing to improve walking, bicycling, public transit, and safety infrastructure around schools.*
- **General plans, active transportation plans, and bicycle and pedestrian plans** can also include policy goals and actions related to SRTS. These planning documents establish a community’s vision for its future growth and development, which includes specific goals around transportation investments. *Example: Adopt a master bicycle plan that directs funding to projects that create and improve bicycle infrastructure near schools with high injury rates. (Policy Change)*

## WHAT IS THE ROLE OF CHAMPION PROVIDER FELLOWS IN SRTS PSE CHANGE?

There are many ways that Champion Provider Fellows can work to advance SRTS through PSE change. The roles that Champion Provider Fellows play may differ based on the community and the nature of intervention. It is important to always prioritize listening to community needs when engaging in community change efforts.

The PSE Playbook includes a discussion of the potential roles Fellows can play to support PSE change on page 6. In the context of SRTS work, Champion Provider Fellows will often play the roles of:

- **Team expert** by joining an existing collaboration or partnership or by providing subject matter expertise on community health;
- **Educator** by sharing information on the health-promoting benefits of a specific policy, decision, or change.

## PSE KEY ELEMENTS APPLIED TO SRTS

The PSE Playbook outlines 7 key elements of PSE change on pages 9-15. Below we highlight considerations for each element as applied to SRTS.

### 1. Define Problems/Goals

- Consult with community, including parents, students, school board and city council members, and active transportation advocates, among others, to define problems and goals, and to ensure a shared vision and commitment to safety.
- Consider connecting with the local health department or school district to gain insights on community context, to gather relevant data on community health outcomes, and to be connected to some of the stakeholders listed above. Relevant data include obesity rates, physical activity rates, injury rates and rates of feeling a sense of school-based cohesion among children and youth.

### 2. Understand the Current PSE Landscape

- Review your school district's LSWP (typically available on the school district's website) and relevant local laws, policies, plans, and/or programs that relate to SRTS.
- Identify relevant stakeholders (don't forget those who could be involved in programmatic elements of SRTS interventions that can lead to PSE change). Stakeholders may include students, parents, teachers, school administrators, community advocates, local residents, community groups and nonprofits, local health department, elected officials, local government staff such as planners and transportation planners, public safety, and local businesses.
- Identify and review relevant planning documents – such as general plans, master plans, or active transportation plans – that may be relevant for SRTS efforts surrounding schools and in the community.
  - Review these to understand what planning goals, policies, and actions are being taken by the community to improve walking and bicycling infrastructure and safety, particularly around schools. These documents should be available on your local government's website. The general and master plans can typically be found within the community development or planning department/division sections of the website. The active transportation plans are typically found within the department of public works or transportation sections of the local government's website.
    - *General Plan*: sets forth long-term policies for future growth and land use development patterns for a community.

- *Master Plan*: establishes a road map for a community's future that is in conformance with the General Plan.
- *Active transportation plans*: a comprehensive set of strategies to ensure improved options for walking, bicycling, and public transit in a community.

### 3. Outline a Clear Strategy for Engagement

- Develop a clear strategy for implementing the PSE change related to SRTS, whether that is incorporating SRTS into an existing LSWP, adopting a LGR that expressly supports SRTS program implementation, or integrating SRTS efforts into local planning documents.
- The strategy should be tailored to the community's goals, and interventions should be appropriately matched to address the problem(s) you have identified.
- Action planning can also help by laying out the steps needed to achieve your goals and can clarify the roles that Fellows and others play in supporting the strategy, establish a timeline, and determine what resources are needed to implement the PSE intervention.

### 4. Mobilize Partners

- What constellation of individuals, groups, agencies, etc. will be able to collaborate to achieve shared goals around SRTS? (e.g., city council members, school board members, parents/caregivers, students, SRTS working groups, local health departments, local law enforcement, bicycle or pedestrian advocates, planning department, transportation planners, nonprofits, etc.)
- Partners are key to gaining traction and momentum towards goals. They can provide resources and other supports in terms of shared knowledge and insights into SRTS interventions. Refer to page 13 of the PSE Playbook for more details on what makes up a successful partnership.

### 5. Educate the Public and Key Decision-Makers

- Use the SRTS Implementation Toolkit *Fact Sheet* and *Slide Deck* to educate the public and key decision makers about SRTS and the need for intervention to address concerns
- Educating the general public and decision makers about the need for PSE change to achieve SRTS helps to build support for your initiative. It's important to remember that as healthcare providers, you are trusted members of the community, and you can play a vital role in bringing attention to critical health issues, such as obesity, and advocating for needed change.
- You can educate audiences in multiple ways, including through the use of media to raise awareness of strategies, by presenting at public meetings and providing formal comments or testifying at public hearings, and reviewing and providing comments on public documents, such as an active transportation plan under development/review.

### 6. Monitor and Determine Whether Success Has Been Achieved

- It is critical to establish measures of success—both for process outcomes and health outcomes associated with implementation of your SRTS initiative. This will require establishing standards for measurement and review, and incorporation of community input at every possible stage of the process.

- Provide support to partners, including local health departments, school leaders, and community members, all of whom can offer support in the identification of measures of success, with ongoing tracking of progress and setbacks, and the dissemination of information to the general public.
- Measures of success can vary depending on the priorities of a community. Specific metrics a community may choose to focus on in their evaluation may include: a prioritization of SRTS investments in high need areas to promote equity, changes in the rates of walking and bicycling to school, changes in parents' perceptions around child safety and SRTS, and changes in the number of traffic crashes involving children walking or bicycling to and from school. It is important to collect data before and after the activity (e.g., adoption of a SRTS policy/program) in order to identify any changes that have occurred.

## 7. Take Stock and Level Up

- As you progress through your action plan and achieve various milestones, consider how you can build on those successes, where you can fill in the gaps, and how you can adapt when specific efforts are not working.
- This also represents a great opportunity to share success stories with others, including partners and key decision makers in order to garner support for other efforts.

### KEY AUDIENCES

This section provides an introduction on how to engage key audiences – namely school board members and city council members - regarding SRTS programs and policies. Before exploring specific considerations for each audience, the section outlines a set of guiding principles that apply broadly to all key stakeholders.

### Guiding Principles for Interacting with Key Stakeholders

Whether you are speaking with members of your local school board, city council, or other critical audiences, the following guiding principles will help you maximize the limited time you have to present your issue to key decision-makers.

#### Educate Your Audience about SRTS Initiatives

- Understand the evidence base for adopting/strengthening SRTS initiatives to support child safety and health. For example, be prepared to speak to the meaningful increases in the proportion of students who regularly walk to or from school as a result of SRTS interventions. Rely on the SRTS Implementation Toolkit *Fact Sheet* and *Slide Deck* for relevant data and talking points to highlight in your conversation.
- Highlight existing inequities in your community. Are segments of the local population disproportionately impacted by living and going to school in areas that are unsafe for walking (most often youth with low-income, rural youth, and youth of color)?
- Connect these existing inequities in the lived environment to local health inequities and poor health outcomes associated with diet and physical activity, including obesity, diabetes, heart disease, and dental decay infection. This is an opportunity to integrate your patient stories about how this issue impacts the patient population that you serve.

#### Craft Your Message in Partnership with Others

- Work with your partners to fine tune your messaging and provide relevant context to the issue.
- Lift up the lived experiences of community members.
- Refer back to the Champion Provider Fellowship [media training \(bit.ly/2PB8Rc9\)](https://bit.ly/2PB8Rc9) and [messaging workshop \(bit.ly/2S7D2d2\)](https://bit.ly/2S7D2d2) for more tips on crafting your message.

- Consider having your partners also present with you.

### **Anticipate Questions, Reservations, and Requests for More Information**

- Put yourself in the shoes of your audience to anticipate the types of questions and reservations they may have (e.g., concerning limited funding, liability, child safety, limitations with enforcement, etc.).
- It's important to be honest and direct about the resource constraints that many schools and school districts face and to be sensitive to these realities.
- Strategies to address parental concerns about child safety, as well as concerns around liability and risk management connected to SRTS, are highlighted in the SRTS Implementation Toolkit *Slide Deck*. Advise schools and board members to consult with an attorney if they have specific questions regarding liability concerns.
- Review the SRTS resources you have gathered to comb through FAQs that may be relevant to your audience. Highlight, for example, challenges other districts and communities have faced, as well as how they overcame them.
- Share case studies from other schools and communities that have successfully incorporated SRTS into their LSWPS or adopted LGRs to support SRTS. Look to the PSE Playbook and the SRTS Implementation Toolkit *Slide Deck* for some initial examples.
- Be prepared to leave behind a resource for the interested stakeholder to learn more (e.g., the SRTS Implementation Toolkit *Fact Sheet*).

### **Own Your Role as a Trusted Community Leader**

- Do not be afraid to leverage your trusted position as a physician in the community to educate your audience on the advantages of adopting stronger measures that support health, especially the health of children.

### **Engaging Your Audience: School Board Members**

#### **Do your homework:**

- Review the existing LSWP. LSWPs are required for all school districts receiving federal funding for national school lunch and breakfast programs. You should review the LSWP to understand potential gaps and opportunities where language can be made stronger to explicitly support SRTS.
- Seek to understand school board members' perspectives and opinions on SRTS.
  - Consider scheduling in-person meetings or phone calls with school board members to have a better understanding of their perspectives, including areas of concern and excitement, in order to begin to identify potential allies and roadblocks.
  - You can usually find publicly available contact information for school board members on the school district's website.
  - If you are struggling to find time with a school board member, consider reaching out to the school superintendent. They work closely with the board on policy issues and sometimes are specifically tasked with suggesting new policies and revisions to existing policies that address issues affecting the community. They can be a key ally to get your issue on the radar of the school board.
- Understand the baseline environmental and health conditions.
  - Do your homework to understand and assess the existing conditions of the physical environment around schools, safety concerns, and health outcomes of students.
- Consider presenting your issue at a school board meeting.

- Because the process for placing an item on a school board meeting agenda varies among districts, you should consult your local school district website to understand the procedures in your district. The frequency of school board meetings also vary by district, but many hold at least two meetings a month. There may also be opportunities to comment on items outside of the meeting agenda – again here, it’s helpful to consult your local district website to understand how to sign up for these open public comment opportunities. Expect your time to speak to be limited to 2-3 minutes. Finally, you should consider attending a school board meeting in advance to get a sense of the meeting’s flow and the dynamics of the room to feel more comfortable presenting in the future.

### **Be clear about your specific request**

- Be straightforward in communicating the purpose of your interaction with school board members:
  - If it involves SRTS-related policy change in the LSWP, how is what you are requesting different from what is in the existing LSWP? Be prepared to present data and describe the consequences of non-action.
  - If it involves SRTS programmatic work, what role are you asking the school district to take on?

## **Engaging Your Audience: City Council Members**

### **Do your homework:**

- Review existing city ordinances related to SRTS – what are the gaps and what provisions can be strengthened to explicitly support SRTS?
- Similarly, review the community environment as it relates to SRTS – for example, what is the existing pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure in neighborhoods near schools? Are there any particular safety concerns? Consider conducting a walking and bicycling audit with community partners.
- Review policies and plans relevant for SRTS in your community, like the general plan, active transportation plan, bike or pedestrian master plans, Complete Street plans, or Vision Zero policies. Again here, seek to identify the gaps and opportunities to strengthen language to explicitly support SRTS.
- Meet with city council members to learn about their specific thoughts or orientation to SRTS. You can typically find contact information of city council members and the mayor on the city’s website. It’s helpful to include in your request to meet how much time you’re asking of the city council member (e.g., 10-20 minutes). If they cannot give you the full amount of time requested, be sure to confirm how much time you will have so that you can tailor your talking points.

### **Be clear about your specific request:**

- Be straightforward in communicating the purpose of your interaction with the city council members:
  - If you want them to help pass a SRTS LGR, be prepared to answer their questions and justify your request.
  - If the city already has a policy or other planning document that touches on SRTS, be prepared to answer how what you are requesting is different from what is in the existing plan or policy. Be prepared to present data and describe the consequences of non-action.

## **PREPARATION FOR COMMON BARRIERS AND HOW TO OVERCOME THEM**

The PSE process requires an investment of time and resources from all stakeholders involved. Although there is not a clear timeframe for successfully adopting SRTS PSE change due to a variety of contextual factors (e.g., community and decisionmaker readiness), the process of change can be slowed—or brought to a complete halt—by obstacles such as capacity and funding

shortfalls, lack of parental/caregiver support due to concerns about child safety, and concerns about liability and risk management. This section highlights common barriers to SRTS implementation as well as how to prepare to overcome them.

## Funding and Resources

Many local municipalities and school districts schools are already strapped for resources, and asking them to expand offerings related to SRTS may seem unrealistic to them. Effective changemakers will come prepared to address these issues. This aligns with the *Mobilizing Partners* step of PSE strategy. Use community engagement activities as opportunities to make connections that leverage resources, relative advantages, matching strengths and opportunities.

Resources for capacity support for expanded SRTS activities are included in the SRTS Implementation Toolkit *Fact Sheet* and *Slide Deck*. Additionally, SRTS champions may consider pursuing the following federal, state, regional, and local funding opportunities:

- [Fixing America's Surface Transportation \(FAST Act\)](https://www.transportation.gov/FAST) ([bit.ly/2Z3aNOA](https://bit.ly/2Z3aNOA)) a federal source of funding for walking, bicycling, and SRTS.
- State and local health departments or health foundations.
- [Highway Safety Improvement Program](https://www.transportation.gov/highway-safety-improvement-program) ([bit.ly/2ZaiZvV](https://bit.ly/2ZaiZvV)) provides funding for bicycle and pedestrian safety improvements, as well as education and encourage programs.
- [California's Active Transportation Program \(ATP\)](https://www.transportation.gov/california-active-transportation-program) ([bit.ly/3aP4By5](https://bit.ly/3aP4By5)): consolidates existing federal and state transportation programs, including state SRTS, into a single program.
- Physical education grants such as:
  - [Active Schools grants](https://bit.ly/2PCgklc) ([bit.ly/2PCgklc](https://bit.ly/2PCgklc))
  - [Shape America grants](https://bit.ly/34FTDHk) ([bit.ly/34FTDHk](https://bit.ly/34FTDHk))
- Other organizations that have resources on potential funding opportunities include:
  - [Local Government Commission](https://bit.ly/3c0yThQ) ([bit.ly/3c0yThQ](https://bit.ly/3c0yThQ))
  - [Institute for Local Government](https://bit.ly/2ReEQ2H) ([bit.ly/2ReEQ2H](https://bit.ly/2ReEQ2H))

## Parental/Caregiver Concerns About Child Safety

Parental/caregiver perceptions and concerns about child safety may limit their willingness to allow their children to actively commute to school. Frequent SRTS-related safety concerns voiced by parents and caregivers include apprehension over unsafe intersections and crossings, fear of crime and violence along the school route, concerns about large amounts of traffic and high traffic speed, and awareness of a lack of sidewalks, pathways, crossing guards, and adult volunteers available to help children walk and bike to school. Fortunately, SRTS programs are designed to alleviate these exact concerns by proactively addressing things such as the built environment to promote child safety (e.g., by enhancing sidewalks and crosswalks, improving lighting, creating designated bikeways, and involving more adults to serve as crossing guards and stewards). Another critical element of SRTS programming is teaching and encouraging safe practices among drivers, cyclists, and pedestrians. Together, the Six Es of SRTS are designed to promote safer physical environments and practices, as well as to provide ongoing monitoring and the provision of safety-promoting resources for SRTS programming. It should come as no surprise, then, that multiple studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of SRTS programs in addressing these safety concerns. Data and talking points from these studies are included in the SRTS Implementation Toolkit *Fact Sheet* and *Slide Deck*.

An additional useful strategy to alleviate parental/guardian concerns around SRTS programs and child safety is to conduct a walking and bicycling audit. SRTS champions will find additional guidance on the utility of a walking and bicycling audit in the SRTS Implementation Toolkit *Slide Deck* as well as in this resource from the Spare the Air Youth Program: [Evaluating School Commute Programs](https://bit.ly/2Z7FqCc) ([bit.ly/2Z7FqCc](https://bit.ly/2Z7FqCc)).



## Liability and Risk Management

Concerns around liability can sometimes serve as an impediment to SRTS policy adoption and program implementation. However, common sense precautions go a long way toward avoiding liability risk. In fact, SRTS programs can help decrease liability exposure by proactively and systematically addressing hazards and safety concerns. Communication around and documentation of risk management practices are key to promoting child safety and mitigating liability concerns. Still, communities may have questions such as: *Does a school district that supports SRTS via its LSWP become liable for the related programmatic activities?* SRTS champions may find guidance on these questions and more in existing ChangeLab Solutions resources such as:

- [Safe Routes to School: Minimizing Your Liability Risk \(bit.ly/38VoMdn\)](https://bit.ly/38VoMdn)
- [Crossing with Confidence: Managing Risk When Creating Crossing Guard Programs in CA \(bit.ly/2rTV3Ry\)](https://bit.ly/2rTV3Ry)

They may also seek out additional technical assistance from organizations like ChangeLab Solutions to address context-specific questions around SRTS and liability. In addition, when concerns around liability arise, SRTS proponents should consult a local school district attorney, who can make sure that the laws and protections discussed in the resources above apply.

*The Champion Provider Fellowship empowers, trains and supports doctors and dentists to use their expertise and respected voices to improve the health of communities through local policy, systems and environmental changes.*

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