

COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL HEALTH ACTION GUIDE:

Active School Travel Using the JCSH Comprehensive School Health Framework

Introduction

Active School Travel (AST) promotes sustainable and healthy modes of travel within the school community. There are many benefits to AST, both environmental and personal¹:

Environmental

- Reduces air pollutants
- Reduces noise pollutants
- Reduces congestion
- Etc.

Personal

- Increases energy
- Improves fitness levels
- Improves sleep and productivity
- Reduces stress
- Improves concentration and focus
- Etc.

The pan-Canadian Joint Consortium for School Health's (JCSH) *Comprehensive School Health Framework* can be used to address a number of school health topics, including AST. An integrated, holistic approach to promoting health in the school setting, Comprehensive School Health (CSH) can assist and be applied by schools to take a more holistic approach to supporting school communities in AST. The CSH approach is based on evidence which shows that the greatest impact on student health and learning is achieved when action is taken across the entire school, addressing four distinct but inter-related pillars: 1) teaching and learning; 2) social and physical environment; 3) healthy school policy; and 4) partnerships and services. When actions in all four pillars are harmonized, students are supported to realize their full potential as learners, and as healthy, productive members of society. For more information on CSH and the Joint Consortium for School Health, see the following link: www.jcsh-cces.ca .



This document can assist school communities in promoting AST using the four pillars of the Joint Consortium's CSH Framework. Some of the suggested activities take a little effort, and some of them take a bit more. Remember to start small and be patient – change is often a long-term endeavour. Consider initiating activities that meet the needs of your students and the capacity of your school or district.

¹ Garrard J. Active Travel to School: Literature Review. Canberra, Australia: ACT Government Health; 2011. Available at: <http://www.timetotalk.act.gov.au/storage/Active%20travel%20to%20school%20Literature%20Review.pdf> Last accessed August 27 2014.

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Teaching and Learning

- Identify opportunities to promote active transportation benefits through cross-curricular links. For example:
 - [List of links between suggested AST activities and Ontario curriculum \(Grades 1-8\)](#)
 - [List of links between suggested AST activities and Ontario curriculum \(Grades 9 - 12\)](#)
- Provide tips and training on safety for pedestrians/cyclists/skateboarders/in-line skaters/etc.
- Host a bike mechanics workshop at school: many students ride their bikes on a regular basis, but could benefit from some instruction on safety and maintenance.



Social and Physical Environment

- Support and commitment are critical: dedicated parents, support of administration and the school district, local councilor support, etc.
- Be conscious of unique challenges for rural communities, and consider ways to adapt initiatives. For example, consider variations on walking to school:
 - Drop students off at a central location and walk/bike to school from there.
 - Organize a walking school bus on the way to a bus stop.
- Make physical activity a priority and a part of your school's culture. For example, upon arrival to school, have all kids run or walk two laps around the school's track, or start the morning with a classroom physical activity session after morning announcements. This might prove particularly useful in a rural context, where emphasis must sometimes shift from "Active TO School" to "Active AT School".
- Encourage and promote AST through:
 - Racks/shelters for bicycles, skateboards and scooters – allowing for secure lock-up
 - Storage bins/areas for helmets and in-line skates
 - Provision of crossing guards
 - Registration system for bicycles, etc.
- Role modeling is key. School staff and school community members should be committed to and involved in physical activity and AST initiatives.
- Use numerous communication formats – newsletters, newspapers, fact sheets, websites, radio, social media, posters in the school and school community – to promote the many benefits of active

AST: increased physical activity, reduced traffic congestion, improved air quality, enhanced neighbourhood safety, a greater sense of community, students' sense of autonomy, etc.

- Consider incentives for AST:
 - Enter the names of those who engage in AST in draws for prizes (depending on frequency of draws, prizes can be big or small). “Big” prizes might include an annual draw for a bike/scooter/skateboard/in-line skates; “medium” prizes might include bike helmets, hats, t-shirts, and pedometers; “small” prizes such stickers, temporary tattoos, blinking lights, slap bracelets, armbands, funky pencils, pens, markers, etc.
 - Provide designated buttons/stickers to celebrate students partaking in AST.
- Coordinate an anti-idling campaign in support of AST efforts. Idling is a huge contributor to greenhouse gas emissions, but most people don't realize how bad it is. Combined with misinformation over whether idling is good for your engine (it's not!), a targeted anti-idling campaign is a great way to raise awareness about this issue. Some proven strategies that schools have implemented include handing out “I Don't Idle” buttons, “Turn Off The Engine” stickers for cars, informational pamphlets on the effects of idling, or fake traffic tickets to remind drivers of the damage they are doing.
- Promote safety initiatives: display transit, local cycling and walking route maps in the cafeteria, so students can see what their options are and pick a safe route to school. Many city councils produce cycling maps showing where safer routes exist for cyclists. Some city groups also produce walking maps, detailing pleasant walks in different neighbourhoods. Work with homeowners to promote Neighborhood Watch programs in areas where students are walking to school.
- Incorporate **fun** into AST promotion (*See Appendix for specific activities*).
- Improve safety in the built environment through:
 - Crosswalks
 - Curb extensions
 - Sidewalks
 - Improved signage
 - Traffic calming measures
 - Vegetation clearance
 - Widening of road shoulders
 - Widening of pick-up/drop off zones
 - Enhanced lighting
 - New footpaths and cycle routes
 - Changes to road layouts
 - New one-way systems
 - New road crossings
 - Considering opportunities within nature trails and possible connectivity to schools
- Tips for winter walking:
 - Keep hands and head covered to prevent heat loss.
 - On really cold days wear a scarf over your face and mouth.
 - Wear warm, waterproof boots.

- Wear a warm coat that deflects the wind.
- Woolen clothing helps to retain the heat.
- Wear clothing or carry knapsacks with reflective material – it's important to be seen.
- If possible, change wet clothes at school – tuck an extra pair of socks and mitts into knapsacks.
- Below -25°C is considered too cold for walking, so move your walk indoors, or select another day for outdoor activities or walking to school/



Partnerships and Services

- Consider rural and urban assets and needs when planning for AST.
- Engage a number of different stakeholders – school boards, municipal transportation planners, engineers, public health, police, parents, students and school staff – in working to promote, develop, plan, implement and evaluate AST initiatives.
- Approach stakeholders and businesses in the school community regarding opportunities for grants, sponsorship or fundraising to be put toward infrastructure changes such as new footpaths and cycle routes, changes to road layouts, traffic calming, new one-way systems, and new road crossings.
- Work with local media to spread the work around AST. This will serve to promote physical activity and environmental efforts, as well as to enhance safety communication by drawing community members' attention the need to be extra-vigilant in designated areas.
- Contact your local police division or public health department for information on setting up a bike rodeo.
- Parents often cite safety issues as one of the primary reasons they are reluctant to allow their children to walk, bike, etc. to school. Whole school community approaches to supervision may help alleviate those worries. Consider the following options:
 - Walking school bus: a group of children walking to school with one or more adults. A walking school bus can be:
 - Informal (e.g. two families take turns walking their children to school); or
 - Structured (e.g. designing a route with meeting points, and a timetable with a regularly-rotated schedule of trained volunteers).
 - Bicycle train (a variation on the walking school bus): adults supervise children riding their bikes to school.
 - Walking with seniors: pair-up senior citizens in the community with students and have them walk to school together.

- Tap into plans/strategies already underway in the school community that make the case for AST. Perhaps the school's surrounding community has made commitments to sustainability/being "green", or becoming more active. Highlight your school as a setting and vehicle through which plans can be mobilized into action.
- Involve parents and students in decision-making. Parents have a tremendous influence on whether or not their children walk, bike, etc. to school. It is of particular importance to focus on encouraging parents to allow/make time for their children to engage in AST, and to take steps to address parents' concerns about safety. Even more important is the involvement of parents in the program. The most successful programs have strong parent volunteers.
- Consider the synergy that might be achieved by working as a cluster of schools. If two schools are in close proximity to one another, then it is best to work together. Otherwise, solving the problems of one school may only create issues for the other. The same is true if primary, intermediate and/or secondary schools share a main street, thoroughfare or parking area. In some cases, working simultaneously on AST plans may make it easier to plan networks of safe AST (rather than single site-based initiatives).
- Work with your local police force to introduce more education and enforcement measures around getting to school safely.



Healthy School Policy

- Make linkages between your proposed AST policy and existing policy. For example, policies around physical education and/or activity requirements should outline how AST could assist in meeting these requirements.
- Identify and engage an AST champion. If the champion within the school is a teacher, more will be achieved if the individual is provided dedicated out-of-classroom time for AST initiatives.
- Conduct research / collect data to assess the barriers to AST in the school community, and use this knowledge to develop and implement the AST action plan. Don't forget about existing data sources that may already contain the information you're looking for.
- Continue collecting data after having put your AST plan into place, which will allow for ongoing monitoring and evaluation.
- Keep the process as simple as possible. Surveys to assess your school's readiness for AST should be kept short, including only those questions you know you will use. Mark where each child lives on a map or aerial photo using colour-coded dots to show their current mode of transportation, and then use this visual aid to encourage discussion about issues and opportunities.
- To avoid creating unrealistic expectations, be realistic about the distances people will walk and cycle on a daily basis.

- Celebrate your progress and achievements, big and small, with the entire school community. Don't forget that change takes time. A school year is very structured, and it is unlikely that a school will be in a position to develop and adopt an AST plan in less than a full academic year. One study has revealed that the most successful AST plans have benefited from sustained work over two years or more.²

² Newson, C., Cairns, S. & Davis, A. (2010). Making school travel plans work: experience from English case studies. Transport for Quality of Life. Accessed July 22, 2014:
http://www.transportforqualityoflife.com/u/files/Making_School_Travel_Plans_Work_Nov_2010.pdf

Appendix – Ways to Incorporate Fun into Active School Travel Promotion³

- *Walk to School Fashion Show* – Students organize a 'walk to school' fashion show to a medley of 'walking tunes'. Download the activity package.
- *Write a skit or play on walking to school* – Spread the word about the benefits of choosing active, sustainable transportation to get to school! Write a skit or play on walking to school to perform at a local elementary school. A school drama club is a great place to develop some creative games and plays to perform for peers or a younger age group.
- *Sidewalk chalk the school yard* – Use sidewalk chalk to trace your footsteps on the sidewalk around the school. Create a 'walk of fame' and have walking students sign their names in the shoes around the school.
- *Organize an AST challenge* – Organize an AST challenge between schools or grades for a week at school; finish it off with a celebration breakfast for everyone who participates. International Walk to School Week/Month is a great time for a bit of friendly competition: challenge your rival high school to get the greatest percentage of walkers throughout the week, or design an in-school competition between grades. Contact local businesses to get their support and some prizes for the winning groups. Plan a party or celebration breakfast for the last day, when you have a chance to recognize the winning group, and congratulate everyone on their participation.
- *Terry Fox Run* – If your school usually participates in this annual event, why not team up the run with AST? Your school can incorporate the Terry Fox theme into physical activity, geography, biology, history and more. Challenge the students to walk to school by 'walking' the same route that Terry Fox took across Canada. For a cross-Canada walking map, contact Green Communities | Active & Safe Routes to School: telephone (416) 488-7263 or email info@saferoutestoschool.ca.
- *Passports* – Use passports that can be stamped with every walking trip a student makes. This method helps to keep track of which students walk to school, and how often. Also, create and have students join an AST Club where students receive their own member card to keep track of their trips to school.
- *Steps Across Canada* – Contact local sports equipment stores and ask if they will donate pedometers for students to keep track of their daily steps. Some schools have incorporated a theme of "Steps Across Canada" and, using Green Communities' "*Cross Canada Walking Poster Map*", are stepping out across the country. [Contact Green Communities Canada for a Cross Canada walking poster.](#)
- *Community Mascots Walk to School* – Many communities and schools have mascots that can 'walk to school' with the students. If your community doesn't have a mascot, create your own!
- *Family First* – Ask the families that live furthest from the school to start a Walking School Bus and have them walk with a banner collecting other families along the way.

³ All drawn from Green Communities | Active & Safe Routes to School. Available at: http://www.saferoutestoschool.ca/oldsite/iwalk_activities.html Last accessed August 27 2014.

- *Funky Dress* – Encourage students to have fun with their clothing. Some ideas include:
 - Dress in one primary colour
 - Wear clothes backwards
 - Decorate sneakers
 - Make and wear fun hats
 - Wear bright and reflective clothing

- *Combine AST with local fundraising initiatives* – On a particular day, schools can encourage students who walk to school to bring a non-perishable food item for their local food bank. Invite the local media to promote this.

- *Hold AST theme days* – Turkey Trot, Winter Walkin' Day, Halloween Monster March. For example, hold a Turkey Trot by making a featherless turkey and every time a student walks, add a feather.

- *Globe Trotting* – Calculate the cumulative distance that one class or school walks and compare it to distances between major cities all around the world.

- *Choose Five Continents* – Choose five continents (one for each day of IWALK Week) and learn about their cultures, dress, wildlife, food, etc. This idea can be incorporated with themed ideas for each day. For example, students create artwork from each continent to carry with them on their walks (i.e. flags).

- *Eye Spy* – Ask students to pick an "eye spy" theme for each day of IWALK Week, for example, eye spy safe things, unsafe things, things that pollute, etc.

- *Calculate Your Walking Pace* – Using string and sticks, this activity helps students calculate their walking pace in KM/H to determine what kind of walker (i.e. stroller or brisk walker) they are. [Download a walking pace activity sheet.](#)

- *Wild Walking* – Use wild animals to represent the Four Fitness S's: a) strength – elephant; b) speed – tiger; c) stamina – giraffe; and d) suppleness - chimpanzee. Younger children are given masks in the form of these animals to wear while walking to school.

- *Greening the Trees* – Each student draws a tree without branches. They also draw and cut out leaves. Every time the student walks to or from school, they add a leaf to their tree. This shows that walking to school can contribute to a greener world.

- *Take the Nature Challenge* – Visit the David Suzuki Foundation web site and have your class or school take the Nature Challenge.

- *Traffic Pollution Survey* – This is an interesting experiment to test local air pollution. Two locations are chosen: one by a busy street and the other far from a busy street. Students find a tree or a leafy bush (same species throughout the experiment) and lightly apply a piece of tape to each leaf, one from the busy street and the other from the non-busy street. These pieces of tape are placed in a notebook and labeled. The piece of tape from the busier street will be darker than the one from the non-busy street.

- *Decorate the School Fence with IWALK Posters* – Have classes of students create colourful banners and posters with IWALK-related themes for the school fence. This promotes the event to the entire community.
- *Puppet Show* – Students can make puppets from various materials and then write a puppet skit about walking to school that can be presented to the school.

References

Active and Safe Routes to School

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