

6. *Evaluation*

Evaluation efforts are essential to developing and sustaining a Safe Routes to School program. By understanding and documenting the effects on travel behavior, parent and student attitudes, and/or the physical conditions around a school, programs can maximize their effectiveness and prioritize new investments. Evaluation efforts are often also required to be competitive or eligible for grant funding. This section discusses student hand tallies and parent surveys, which are the two primary evaluation methods used by most programs.

Other evaluation efforts/programs include:

Bicycle and Pedestrian Counts

Bicycle and pedestrian counts provide hard data on student travel volumes by mode and can be used to verify or supplement the student hand tally and/or parent survey results. Counts on particular days may also help identify potential program goals. For example, if a school promotes International Walk and Roll to School Day (usually the first Wednesday in October), counts may be conducted during that day to assess how well the event was promoted and how many families took part. Counts are most informative when conducted annually on or near the same day to minimize the influence of unintended factors, such as bad weather, daylight savings time influences or the school calendar.

Bike Parking Survey

Bike parking surveys are another way to assess travel behavior by counting the number of students parking their bicycles at school.

Overview

Student hand tallies are conducted to quickly determine the way students travel to and from school on a particular day. Teachers (or another adult) ask students to raise their hands in response to the mode of transportation that is read aloud from a list (carpool, bicycle, drive alone, etc.). In addition to recording the number of students that use each mode, the tally taker records the weather and any special events occurring that day.

Steps to Take

Ideally, student hand tallies should be conducted during the fall and spring on multiple mid-week days to gain the best understanding of mode choice during a typical school day. Two days is the minimum necessary to determine this 'average' percentage of modes, although programs are encouraged to conduct tallies for all three mid-week days - Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday. In order to produce comparable results, hand tallies should not be conducted during the week of International Walk and Roll to School Day (in October) or on the same day(s) as other large-scale events.

Particularly for schools new to the Safe Routes to School program, or for schools expanding their SR2S activities, hand tallies early in the school year are important to measure the "baseline" from which the success of new or additional programs can be measured. In the fall semester, preparation for tallies should begin as soon as the school year starts (if not before) if they are to be conducted before the weather turns and days get noticeably shorter. Preparation activities include printing and distributing the appropriate number of tally sheets (in multiple languages as needed), training teachers or providing written instructions, establishing incentives for teacher participation (e.g., a coffee shop gift card), and coordinating who will collect the completed tally sheets.

The National Center for Safe Routes to School provides a hand tally form for which they are willing to collect completed surveys and produce a basic summary analysis. The Center does not provide this service if a different form is used. Appendix A provides a copy of the Center's



Students raising their hands in response to the mode they used to get to school. It is important to conduct these surveys on at least two separate days within the same week to develop an accurate accounting for how children typically get to school.

hand tally form, and more information is provided in the "Resources" section below for sending and processing the completed tally sheets.

It should be noted that student hand tallies are required for eligibility under several grant programs, including the California Safe Routes to School funding cycles.

Benefits

- Provides a general sense of mode choice on a typical day
- Provides mode choice data to assess the effectiveness of education, encouragement, and other programs
- Supplies important information for grant applications and other Safe Routes to School Initiatives

Resources

National Center for Safe Routes to School:

- "Ways to Collect Information"
http://guide.saferoutesinfo.org/evaluation/ways_to_collect_information.cfm
- Student Arrival/Departure Hand Tally Form
http://www.saferoutesinfo.org/sites/default/files/SRTS_Two_Day_Tally_Scan2009.pdf
- Completed Hand Tally Data Entry Form
<http://www.saferoutesdata.org/>

Overview

In order to evaluate the impacts of the grant that is helping fund the San Mateo County SR2S program, the Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC) has developed a two-page parent/caregiver survey for use by participating schools. Included in Appendix A of this Program Guide and also available online, the survey asks a number of questions related to school travel behavior and attitudes toward existing travel conditions, real and potential impacts of SR2S programs, and opportunities for volunteering to establish walking school buses, bike trains, etc.

Parent surveys are a great way to find the reasons why families and/or students choose certain modes to get to/from school. Sometimes offered twice during the school year (similar to the student hand tally), parent surveys should be administered at least once per year in either the fall or spring semester as the primary method for assessing the overall impacts and success of a Safe Routes program.

Steps to Take

Both hard copy and online parent surveys will be made available by the SR2S program. A popular method to distribute parent surveys and/or online survey flyers is by sending them home as “backpack mail” with the student. To maximize response rates and turnaround time, parents should be encouraged to complete the form in 1-2 days. Completed hard copy surveys are then returned to the school, either via a dropbox or to an identified staff person (online surveys will be automatically collected). Depending on the level of parent engagement, student reminders and cross-promotions at school events may also be needed.

Some parents and/or staff may be familiar with the National Center for Safe Routes to School standard parent survey form, which is available online and can be processed for free once completed (making it a popular choice for schools with limited resources). Please note this form will not be accepted by the San Mateo County Safe Routes to School program in the 2011-2012 and 2012-2013 school years. To limit the burden on schools, however,



Parent surveys are great opportunities for families to discuss their travel behavior and provide feedback on what issues are most important and what programs are most effective.

the Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC) will process and summarize all online survey responses and a limited number of completed hard copy forms at no charge.

Benefits

- Provides a second travel mode data set for comparison with student hand tally results
- Supplies more detailed travel information to calculate environmental benefits, including reductions in greenhouse gases (GHGs) from SR2S activities
- Supplies information on parent attitudes and concerns related to school travel options
- Helps assess existing program impacts and prioritize future program activities/focus areas
- Engages families in a discussion of travel behavior
- Supports grant applications and other opportunities for funding
- Helps identify parent volunteers

Resources

- Appendix A contains the parent survey to be used in the 2011-2012 school year. An online version will also be provided through the SR2S program website, and surveys will be available in English, Spanish and Chinese
- Contact the San Mateo SR2S program for more information on how to distribute, collect and process hard copy parent surveys and/or identify the survey web address.