

CDC'S DIVISION OF COMMUNITY HEALTH SUCCESS STORIES

by: Christine Glaszcz

Safe Routes to School in Place at Decorah Elementary

SUMMARY

The Safe Routes to School successes at Decorah Elementary were the result of a number of comprehensive programs and policy changes brought about by community collaborations. Increasing the number of safety features at the school has greatly encouraged more students to walk and bike to school, giving them the added benefit of more physical activity in their day. Traffic congestion around the school has decreased and near-miss accident locations.



CHALLENGE

When the bells ring at the end of the day at Decorah Elementary school, students exit the school grounds using many modes of transportation - bus, car, bike, scooter, or simply by walking. Vehicular congestion around the school area along with 500 students all going in different directions caused many safety issues and areas where near-miss accidents were more likely to happen. This is a neighborhood school but many parents still bring their child to and from

school in their personal vehicle. The sidewalk in front of the school that followed the two lane circular driveway was cracked and crumbling and was flush with the driveway so there was no barrier between pedestrians and drivers. Resistance from drivers around the school to follow safety measures also presented a challenge at dismissal time.

YOUR INVOLVEMENT IS KEY

We have found that increasing safety around the school zone and encouraging active modes of transportation has been a community-wide effort. Many passionate volunteers have worked together to ensure this success. We are always looking for more people to get involved. If you would like to see Safe Routes to School programs at your school please contact the Healthy People Project.

"As a parent, community and staff member, I appreciate the efforts of HPP and IPC for providing a safer way for children to enter and exit school. The improvements have been positively recognized by staff, families, and the community."

- Megan Formolo

SOLUTION

The key to solving this hazardous situation was community collaboration. The school teamed up with HPP, Injury Prevention Coalition (IPC), the city, and law enforcement. The first thing that was changed was the dismissal procedure. Next, students attended a Bike Safety Jamboree and were encouraged to walk or bike with a Get Fit Pledge Event and Walk To School Day. As the Safe Routes to School culture began to emerge at the school a \$45,000 grant was awarded to reconstruct the circular drive to one lane, widen the adjoining sidewalk, and install a curb between the driveway and sidewalk.

RESULTS

The entrance to Decorah Elementary is now a safe place for students, staff and parents to walk, bike, and drive during dismissal time. The new sidewalk and curb has given students more room to walk whether it is to the bike rack or to their car. Vehicular congestion has decreased with just one lane available for driving through. Because the Eisenbahn Trail is so close to the school many students utilize the trail for walking and bike to and from school. Once they reach the school grounds they are able to navigate much more safely to the bikes racks and school doors.

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FUTURE DIRECTIONS

It is important to continue the Get Fit Pledge Event in the fall and spring at Decorah as well as continuing to educate students about importance of safety and physical activity. Each school in the West Bend School District has its own set of challenges with dismissal and safety issues. As a community coalition, our goal is to bring Safe Routes to School programs to all of the elementary schools in the district. The Get Fit Pledge Event is already being introduced at another elementary school. The Bike Safety Jamboree will also be held at this school later in the year. Through parent, student and school staff involvement, we hope to spread the culture of Safe Routes to School to all districts in Washington County. Project work will be completed at other schools as funds become available through community donations and grants.