

MENLO PARK SAFE ROUTES TO SCHOOL

Annual Report

School Year 2019-2020



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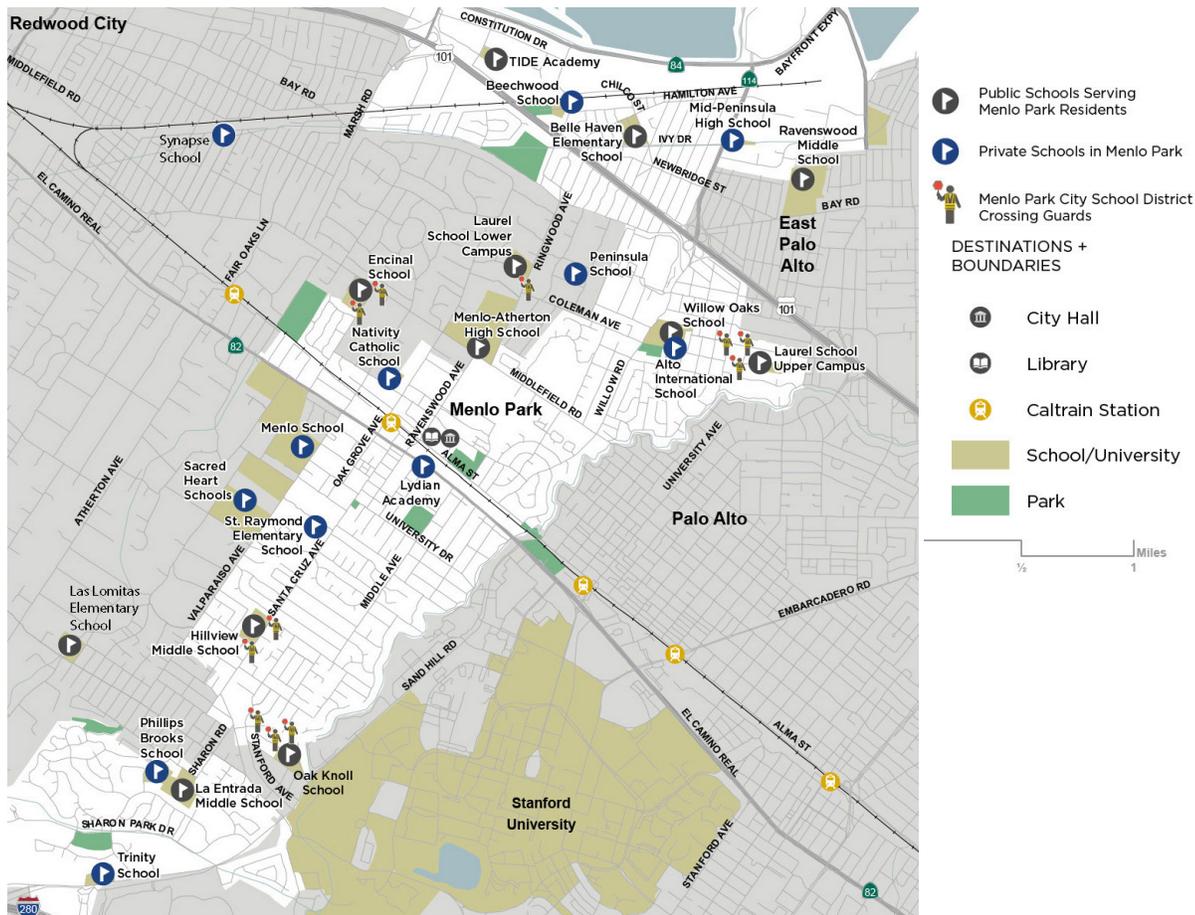
PROGRAM BACKGROUND

The Menlo Park Safe Routes to School (SRTS) Program is a citywide program that encourages and enables children to walk, bike, or bus to school by making school travel safer, easier, and more fun. The goal of Menlo Park SRTS is to support 23 public and private schools in both private and four public school districts across Menlo Park, unincorporated Menlo Park (San Mateo County), Atherton, East Palo Alto, and Redwood City to help youth get to school safely.

In March 2019, the City of Menlo Park hired a SRTS Coordinator through Alta Planning + Design, the City of Menlo Park SRTS consultant. The SRTS Coordinator serves as a liaison between the City and

school communities with focused an effort on SRTS initiatives and community-led activities and events.

In the summer of 2019, Alta Planning + Design finalized the SRTS Strategy that outlines recommendations based on feedback from stakeholder and community meetings held during the fall of 2018. School districts, schools, parents, local organizations, and students were invited to give their feedback on the SRTS Strategy before the plan was finalized. The SRTS Strategy provides a framework to help implement the program in Menlo Park schools and details a number of recommendations and goals for the City of Menlo Park and SRTS partners.



SRTS TASK FORCE

The SRTS Task Force was established in fall of 2019 to help guide and implement the SRTS program, discuss issues and concerns, and craft recommendations to improve the program. In addition to sharing information and ideas on SRTS, the SRTS Task Force engages the community around SRTS, partners on events, and supports schools and school districts with strategy implementation. The SRTS Task Force includes approximately 15 members representing a variety of organizations. Meetings are open to the public. The mission, roles, and goals of the SRTS Task Force were discussed and approved during the first meeting on September 18.

Mission, Roles and Goals

- Define and collaborate on objectives, goals, and milestones for the Menlo Park SRTS program
- Help organize and support different tasks and activities
- Be a liaison to share information and market the program to the school community

Members and Organizations Represented

- Four School District representatives (Las Lomas Elementary School District, Menlo Park City School District, Ravenswood City School District and Sequoia Union High School District)
- City of Menlo Park, San Mateo County and Town of Atherton Public Works representatives
- Police Department representatives: Menlo Park, Atherton, San Mateo County
- Complete Street Commission (SRTS subcommittee representative)
- Community organization / Parents for Safe Routes representative
- Menlo Park Fire District
- High School Student representatives

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Meetings in September, December and June (March 2020 meeting was cancelled due to COVID-19)

14

Average of attendees per meeting

TOPICS

- Stakeholder communication
- Walk and Roll Maps
- Demonstration projects
- Student travel hand tallies
- Open data collision map and traffic safety
- SRTS programming and milestones
- Crossing guards

COVID-19 SHELTER-IN-PLACE ORDER

On March 17, San Mateo County, along with five other counties in the Bay Area, enacted a shelter-in-place order to address the COVID-19 pandemic. The stay at home order prohibited group gathering, recommend social distancing measures, and allow only essential trips (to obtain necessary services or supplies or engage in outdoor recreation activity alone or with members of the same household only).

The following planned activities for Spring 2020 were cancelled: Motherload movie screening, 2nd Annual Spring Party/Middle Ave demonstration project, Bike to School Day.

All public schools in Menlo Park were closed to in person learning until the 2020-21 school year.

WALKING SAFETY



Stop
at the curb's edge



Look
left, right, and
behind you



Make
Eye Contact
with drivers



Cross
with heads up and
looking around

Communication and Encouragement

SRTS Newsletter

The SRTS Program publishes a monthly newsletter which currently has 82 subscribers. The SRTS Program worked in collaboration with City of Menlo Park staff to find the best format for the newsletter and find an efficient way to share and post individual articles. Four monthly newsletters were produced. The March 2020 newsletter was postponed due to COVID-19.

School Technical Support

In response to the variety of school needs, safety tips posters were developed to put in classrooms and at school entrances. The SRTS Coordinator also assisted with student hand tally data collection at Belle Haven School, La Entrada Middle School, Las Lomas Elementary School, Oak Knoll Elementary School and TIDE Academy during the 2019-2020 school year.

Crossing Guard Program

The citywide Crossing Guard Program was created in summer 2019 in partnership with Facebook and three school districts. Facebook funded 16 crossing guards, totaling approximately \$200,000 annually for an initial 5-year term with a 5-year extension possibility. The City of Menlo Park and Facebook sent each school district a survey to help identify new priority locations for crossing guards. The additional locations will create a network of safe corridors for students and their families, and help facilitate walking and bicycling from one neighborhood to another.

Pedestrian and Bicycle Safety Curriculum

The Menlo Park SRTS Program created a Pedestrian Safety Curriculum to promote and facilitate the implementation of a standardized citywide in-classroom curriculum to be taught in Physical Education classes. The curriculum is divided into six lessons that educate elementary students on pedestrian safety knowledge and skills such as crossing safety steps, transportation-related terminology, road rules and predictability, and traffic signal definitions.

An Activity Book that includes pedestrian and bicycle safety tips, quizzes and games was also developed for students and their families. The activities can also be used by teachers who'd like to add pedestrian and bicycle safety components to their curriculum. The Pedestrian Curriculum and Activity Book are available on the Menlo Park SRTS webpage.

EXISTING SRTS EFFORTS, CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Existing SRTS Efforts in Menlo Park Schools

According to the school administration survey (sent to all private and public schools in March 2020), almost all of the ten public schools who responded to the survey participated in at least one of the following activities during the 2019-2020 school year: Walk and Roll Day, promoting the Walk and Roll Maps, or organizing a safety assembly.

Schools showed interest in completing their SRTS program with safety education activities, hands-on trainings such as bicycle or pedestrian rodeos and safety courses, crossing guard programs, and training and walk safety assessments. Moreover, most of the schools already have SRTS policies in place (seven of the ten respondents) that encourage walking and biking, and promote traffic safety for parents and students.

Staff Capacity for SRTS Implementation

Six of the ten schools that completed the school administration survey identified time, limited capacity, and lack of dedicated staff as the major challenges when implementing SRTS activities at their school. Four schools have a staff person dedicated to SRTS efforts.

Some of the district and school staff that were involved in the earlier stages of the Menlo Park SRTS Program left their position during the 2019-2020 school year. Therefore, staffing transitions could have slowed down the SRTS implementation as working relationships had to be built again. For example, a joint resolution between the City of Menlo Park and the school districts to officially support the program and their roles was signed by only one of the four school districts. The three districts that did not sign were amid staff transitions.

12

Participating school in SRTS activities*

- 7 elementary schools
- 2 middle schools
- 2 high schools
- 1 private school

6

Schools celebrated Bike to School Day

12

Parent or staff champions at seven schools

8

Schools celebrated International Walk and Roll to School Day

10

Public schools have completed a school administration survey (March 2020)

**Note: A focus for the first year of the SRTS program was put on public schools.*

Parent and Community Engagement

While some schools identified “parent engagement and support” as a barrier to implementing SRTS activities, the majority of the public schools have a PTO/PTA that showed interest in the SRTS Program. Additionally, seven public schools indicated that they have a parent champion (a parent volunteer dedicated to the school’s SRTS program).

During the 2019-2020 school year, the parent champions led or were involved in encouragement and educational activities such as Walk to School Day, Cocoa for Carpools, Bike Rodeo, Safety Assembly, and Pedestrian Flags.

In addition to organizing activities, many of the PTOs and parent champions are strong advocates for pedestrian and bicycle facility improvements near their school.

Communication

In their first meeting, the SRTS Task Force identified the need for a tool to communicate and share information among SRTS stakeholders. Many options were considered such as sending group emails, creating a list of SRTS contacts, or collaborating on Google Drive. SRTS updates are now shared through the newsletter and communication from the SRTS Coordinator.

Initially, it took some time to identify a good point of contact at each school to share new information. In addition, some schools indicated in the school administration survey that the lack of support from City staff has been a challenge for implementing SRTS programs at their school.

Some areas for continued improvement include increasing the reach of SRTS communications and ensuring that there is effective coordination between the various organizations and groups involved in SRTS initiatives.

PRIORITIES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The priorities and recommendations are based on stakeholder meetings, outreach activities, SRTS Task Force meeting discussions, and feedback from the school administration survey. The recommendations complement and prioritize the recommendations included in the October 2019 SRTS Strategy.

Focus Areas and Next Steps

- Improve communication and continue to build relationships with stakeholders
- Work on the identified needs and interests at each school and continue to discuss school challenges and concerns
- Work with school districts to support a “post shelter-in-place” transition
- Build awareness of an inclusive citywide SRTS Program in Menlo Park:
 - Creating a culture of SRTS and active transportation
 - Standardizing SRTS messaging in Menlo Park
 - Implementing the Pedestrian Safety Curriculum

BUILD AWARENESS

Many ideas were shared in the SRTS Task Force meetings on how to generate enthusiasm for a citywide SRTS movement through social media outlets, such as:

- Bike/Walk to School Day – get City Council members to “adopt” a school
- Catchy selfies of bicycling
- Principals/VIPs bicycling
- Engagement with Police Departments

SRTS COORDINATOR ROLES

The school administration survey results indicated that schools could use SRTS Coordinator support to:

- Facilitate contact with SRTS vendors (e.g. to organize bike rodeos, walk audits, etc.)
- Help with hand tallies and data collection
- Build volunteer capacity (e.g. with the help of the school and PTO/PTA, identify a SRTS champion at schools)
- Provide technical support (e.g. creating poster/flyer templates, updating walk and roll map, etc.)
- Coordinate incentives/giveaways for school events and activities
- Help with student-produced safety programming

Recommendations

SRTS Partnership in Menlo Park

Work with the three school districts that haven't signed the joint resolution to formalize responsibilities between the City and the school districts and show support to the program.

SRTS Coordinator

Consider expanding the SRTS Coordinator position to a full-time role to provide more support to schools without a SRTS champion or who have not received the San Mateo Office of Education SRTS Grant. With the support of the SRTS Task Force, define the roles and priorities of the SRTS Coordinator.

Make Connections Across Programs

Build on programs and activities happening in schools and communities to share information and partner on activities. Coordinating with existing school programs and initiatives could alleviate school staff workload.

Crossing Guard Program

Work with Facebook and school districts to find solutions to crossing guard recruitment and program sustainability.

Transition "post shelter-in-place"

Given the unprecedented situation of COVID-19, the SRTS Program should work with schools and school districts to understand how the SRTS Program can support the transition to a "new normal" post shelter-in-place. Some examples include planning SRTS activities for distance learning, drafting messages on walking and biking or planning a "walking school bus" while physical distancing, or how to travel safely by school bus.

City and SRTS partners should work together to respond to COVID-19 in a way that supports and encourages the SRTS Program and supports physical activity among Menlo Park youth.

The Menlo Park Safe Routes to School Program is a partnership between the City of Menlo Park, Las Lomas Elementary School District, Menlo Park City School District, Ravenswood City School District, Sequoia Union High School District, private schools, and local community stakeholders.