

# MENLO PARK SAFE ROUTES TO SCHOOL

# Annual Report

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School Year 2022-2023





# MENLO PARK SAFE ROUTES TO SCHOOL

## 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 private and public schools in four 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.

The San Mateo County Office of Education (SMCOE) offers a countywide SRTS program that funds and provides technical assistance to local jurisdictions, school districts, and schools. The SMCOE SRTS program is funded by the City/County Association of Governments of San Mateo County (C/CAG) and offers an annual grant to support local SRTS efforts. For many years, the school districts and other schools (in particular, Menlo-Atherton High School) in Menlo Park used the grant to organize encouragement and education events (e.g., bike rodeos, parent focus groups, Walk to School days). SMCOE also has staff supporting the Ravenswood City School District and acting as their SRTS Coordinator.

The Menlo Park SRTS Coordinator leads focused efforts on SRTS initiatives and community-led activities and events, guided by the Menlo Park SRTS Strategy.

### 2022–2023 Year Overview

In 2022–2023, the SRTS team continued to support the implementation of pedestrian and bicycle safety education in the classroom.

One elementary school piloted the Pedestrian Safety Curriculum in the PE classes.

In winter 2023, the City of Menlo Park was selected with Laurel School Upper Campus to participate in the SMCOE School Travel Fellowship to pilot bike buses at the school along with other safe routes projects that can be replicated in other schools.

The SRTS team also created a Bicycle and Pedestrian Safety Handbook to complement existing educational resources.

### Previous Years Highlights

#### 2018–2019

- SRTS Strategy
- SRTS Coordinator
- Suggested routes to school maps for all public and private schools

#### 2019–2020

- SRTS Task Force
- Pedestrian Safety Curriculum for Elementary schools
- Shift to online SRTS activities due to the COVID-19 pandemic

#### 2020–2021

- All schools in Menlo Park reopened for in-person education
- Online Community Input map and community meetings on traffic safety near the schools

#### 2021–2022

- Pedestrian Safety Curriculum training for teachers
- New encouragement activities and events
- Walk audits

# SRTS TASK FORCE

The SRTS Task Force was established in fall of 2019 to 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. The SRTS Task Force meets quarterly. The meetings have been virtual since spring 2020 and are open to the public.

## 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

4

Virtual meetings in September, December, March, and June

16

Average number of attendees per meeting

TOPICS

Volunteer recruitment and SRTS Champion

Local road safety plan

Collaborative Data/ Contact Management

Bike Buses

How to report collisions and near misses

## UPDATES FROM THE POLICE DEPARTMENTS

“Traffic and Safety Updates” is a regular item on the Task Force agenda. The police departments of Menlo Park and Atherton provide updates on the projects they are working on. They also answer any questions and concerns caregivers, school administrators, or other community members might have.

For example, the officers shared information on how to report a collision or any incidents that may happen on the way to school.

## Members and Organizations Represented

- Las Lomas Elementary School District
- Menlo Park City School District
- Ravenswood City School District
- 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, and San Mateo County
- Complete Streets Commission (SRTS subcommittee representative)
- Parents for Safe Routes
- Menlo Park Fire District
- High school student representatives

# ACTIVITIES AND RESOURCES 2022–2023

## Ruby Bridges Walk to School Day

In 2022, as part of Ruby Bridges Day, Menlo Park students shared why they walked or rolled to school on Monday, November 14, and what they enjoy the most when they walk or roll to their favorite place. Many elementary students expressed that they walk or roll because it is a fun way to stay healthy, move their body, and protect the environment. They also mentioned that walking or rolling provides an opportunity to see and feel different things on their way to school. Students who participated won gift certificates to the local store Kepler's Books.

### STUDENTS' COMMENTS

"I will walk to school on Ruby Bridges' Day because it's good exercise, it's good for the environment, and it's nice to see things along the way. I get to see things along the way that I wouldn't otherwise notice when we drive there."

"I wanted to show my support for equity and wish for no more racism. I really enjoy feeling and seeing the difference of seasons, like temperature, the color of the leaves, and also the decorated houses."

## Parent Champion Workshop

On October 26, the Menlo Park SRTS program held a workshop for caregivers or other community members who would like to get involved in safe routes to school. Nine participants attended the meeting to share their goals, ideas, and concerns regarding children's safety. Parent and caregiver engagement is a key component to the success of SRTS initiatives. Walk and Roll to School days, bike rodeos, and other encouragement activities often rely on caregivers' availability. Many caregivers came with the desire to learn more about how to advocate for better pedestrian and bicyclist infrastructures in Menlo Park streets, but also in Atherton and unincorporated areas where children travel to and from school.

## Spring Party

The Spring Party was back for the first time in three years since the first edition in 2019. For the occasion, the Menlo Park SRTS program joined the Love Our Earth Festival, a partnership between peninsula communities to celebrate Earth Day. The festival took place at Menlo-Atherton High School on April 22. The SRTS team hosted a bike blender and smoothie station and a bike license plate crafting activity.



## Crossing Guard Appreciation Week

For a second year, in conjunction with the San Mateo County Crossing Guard Appreciation Week in March, caregivers, school staff, and students were invited to celebrate their school crossing guard. The SRTS team collected testimonies of how important these individuals are for families and shared them in the monthly newsletter. The SRTS team also awarded the crossing guards with gift certificates.

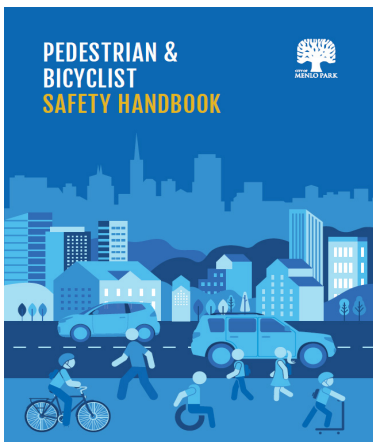
## Bike Buses

In May, the SRTS team joined two schools' bike buses to get a sense of how to implement bike buses in more schools next year and get input from parent bike enthusiasts. A bike bus is similar to a walking school bus, but on bikes. A bike bus is when students from many families ride together to school, under the supervision of adults, on a designated route and schedule. The SRTS team supported the Laurel School bike buses by creating route maps and advertising the events.



## Pedestrian and Bicycle Safety Handbook

The Pedestrian and Bicycle Safety Handbook was created in the spring to complement other existing educational materials, like the Pedestrian Safety Curriculum and the Walk and Roll Champion toolkit. The purpose of the handbook is to help parents, caregivers, students, and educators understand the California state laws that specify pedestrian and bicyclist rights and responsibilities. The handbook contains the rules of the road, safety tips, and examples from local streets in the Menlo Park area.



## School Travel Fellowship

The City of Menlo Park was selected with Laurel School Upper Campus to participate in a School Travel Fellowship, a project of the San Mateo County Office of Education and San Mateo County Health Policy and Planning. The fellowship is an opportunity for cities to partner with local schools to support safe and active student travel. The Menlo Park team's BHAG (Big Hairy Audacious Goal) is to increase the percentage of families living within one mile of school who walk or bike to school to 50% by fall 2024. The team worked on implementing bike buses at the school and recruiting local businesses to create a network of "Safe Routes to School Supporters" for children walking and rolling to and from school.

The efforts also included increasing the visibility of the SRTS program with targeted communications to families in the school newsletter and by asking students and their families to take a pledge to walk, roll, or bus to school more often. The school SRTS parent champions rewarded good biking behaviors such as wearing their helmet properly and stopping at stop signs, with gift certificates to a local store as part of "Operation Safety".



*"Operation Safety" near Laurel School Upper Campus. SRTS Champion rewarded students for their safe biking behaviors.*



# EXISTING SRTS EFFORTS, CHALLENGES, AND OPPORTUNITIES

## Five Years of SRTS in Menlo Park

For the fifth year of the SRTS program, the City of Menlo Park Complete Streets Commission SRTS sub-committee began a process to evaluate the progress of the SRTS program. The evaluation was articulated around the following topics: the roles of the SRTS coordinator, the encouragement activities and events (walk and roll to school days), the Task Force meetings, bicycle and pedestrian education, and communications from the SRTS team to the community. As part of the evaluation process, a School Administration and Stakeholder Survey was distributed to identify the strengths, challenges, and improvement opportunities of the SRTS program.

## It Takes a Village

The survey results showed that while the majority of the schools organize each year's encouragement activities such as walk and roll to school days, these events rely heavily on volunteer work and on the school administration time and availability. The survey respondents mentioned that the main challenges to implementing SRTS programs at their school are parent and caregiver support and engagement, staff bandwidth, and funding.

The school administrators and stakeholders indicated that they would benefit from additional support to build volunteer capacity and more information and resources about SRTS.

### SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS' COMMENTS

"We would like to further our partnership to educate students on bike and skateboard safety."

"I hope we can collaborate on advocacy for safer bike lanes."

8

Public schools (out of 10) that host bike to school days.

23

Percentage of students who use active transportation (walk, bike, or roll) to travel to school according to the spring 2023 student travel tallies. This proportion is higher in the afternoon, when 26% of the students use walk, bike, or roll.

104

People who receive each month the SRTS newsletter.

## Address Each School's Specific Needs

The survey results also highlighted the importance of working with each school to develop SRTS programs tailored to their needs and priorities. Respondents suggested many opportunities and ideas to explore, including supporting access to public transportation and city shuttles for high school students, providing carpool or bus-related incentives for students who do not have the option to walk or bike to school, promoting safe skateboarding, providing crossing guard training, and collaborating with senior centers on safe routes to school projects.

# PRIORITIES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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These priorities and recommendations are based on outreach activities, SRTS Task Force meeting discussions, and feedback from the schools and caregivers.

## Focus Areas and Next Steps

### Bicycle and Pedestrian Education

- Implement the Menlo Park Pedestrian Safety Curriculum and continue to provide training and support to schools and SRTS champions.
- In collaboration with schools and SRTS champions, implement a bike safety curriculum in the schools with a focus on grades 5 to 8.

### Volunteer Capacity

- Support school-led events and projects by building volunteer capacity and recruiting SRTS champions. Provide training and resources to assist the SRTS champions.

### Bike Bus and Walking School Bus

- Support the implementation of walking school buses or bike buses at interested schools by developing route maps, sign-in sheets, and other relevant templates.

### In-Person Encouragement Events

- After two years of virtual encouragement events, the community showed an interest in in-person events again. Promote and support the organization of in-person events at each school to build excitement around SRTS and encourage walking and rolling to school.
- Provide incentives for the school-based events.
- Think of new ways to create excitement around walking and rolling to school and build awareness of an inclusive citywide SRTS program in Menlo Park.

### Improved Outreach and Collaboration

- Improve outreach by attending school-based or community-based events such as Cafecitos with the Principal, farmers' market, food distribution giveaways, and meet and greet tables at the school entrance during drop-off or pick-up periods.
- Collaborate with different organizations like after-school programs, summer camp programs, and other local organizations like the Boys and Girls Club or libraries to increase the visibility of safe routes to school efforts.





**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, local community stakeholders, and Alta Planning + Design.**