

MENLO PARK SAFE ROUTES TO SCHOOL

Annual Report

School Year 2023-2024



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

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 and offers an annual grant to support local SRTS efforts. For many years, the school districts and other schools in Menlo Park used the grant to organize encouragement and education events like safety assemblies, bike rodeos, and Walk to School days.

2023–2024 Year Overview

In 2023–2024, the SRTS team focused on supporting school-led activities such as Walk and Roll to School days, walking school buses, bike buses, and bike rodeos by providing technical assistance, materials, and resources.

The SRTS program also organized citywide encouragement events including Ruby Bridges Walk to School Day, a poster and video contest, and a bike-themed spring event.

During this school year, the SRTS program completed the Pedestrian and Bicyclist Safety Handbook that offers safety tips for pedestrians, bicyclists, and drivers and techniques to stay safe in Menlo Park streets and shows the different infrastructure types road users may encounter in Menlo Park.

In winter 2024, the City of Menlo Park was selected with the San Mateo County Public Works, Las Lomitas Elementary School District, and Oak Knoll Elementary School to participate in the 2024 SMCOE School Travel Fellowship to explore ways to improve safe crossings along school routes to Las Lomitas, La Entrada, and Oak Knoll schools.

Previous Years Highlights

2018–2019

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

2019–2022

- SRTS Task Force
- Pedestrian Safety Curriculum for Elementary schools and training for PE teachers
- Shift to online SRTS activities during the COVID-19 pandemic
- Walk audits

2022–2023

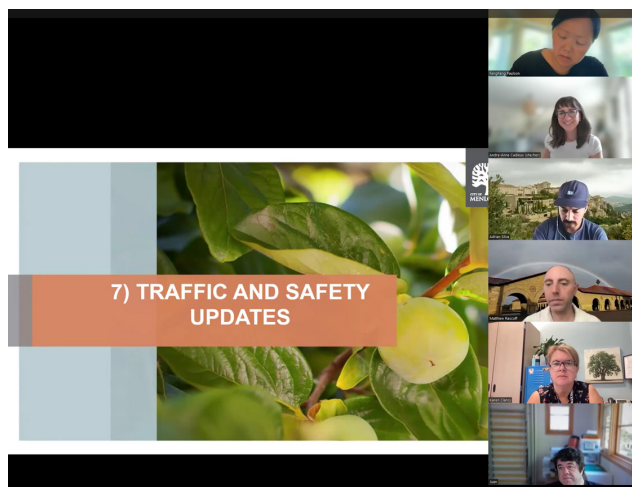
- Support the implementation SRTS education in the classroom
- 2023 SMCOE School Travel Fellowship (with Laurel School)
- Pedestrian and Bicyclist Safety Handbook
- Come back of the Spring Party in 2023

SRTS TASK FORCE

The SRTS Task Force was established in fall 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 and meets quarterly. The meetings have been virtual since spring 2020 and are open to the public. In fall 2023, the SRTS program hosted a hybrid meeting.

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

One hybrid meeting and three virtual meetings in September, December, March, and June

TOPICS

- E-Bike Safety
- Menlo Park Local Road Safety Plan and Vision Zero Plan
- Ruby Bridges Walk to School Day
- Bike Month
- Program Evaluation

19

Average number of attendees per meeting

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
- Menlo Park Fire District
- High school student representatives
- Library and Community Services

ACTIVITIES AND RESOURCES 2023-2024

Fifth Year Celebrating Ruby Bridges in Menlo Park

Ruby Bridges Walk to School Day was celebrated on Tuesday, November 14, 2023. The Menlo Park SRTS program supported the organization of school-led walk and roll day. The SRTS program helped with volunteer training and provided promotional materials, incentives, and snacks for the day of the event and created Walking School Bus or Bike Bus maps upon request. Six schools participated in Ruby Bridges Walk to School Day in 2023. A few examples of activities planned by the schools include read-along sessions about Ruby Bridges; a symbolic walk with City Council members and district staff; engagement of middle school student clubs such as the Black Student Union, Latin X, and Polynesian Clubs; and discussions on Ruby Bridges' experience and legacy.

Ruby Bridges Walk to School Day Walking School Bus Map



Bike Safety Discussion

In fall 2023, after hearing many concerns from the school community regarding students riding too fast on e-bikes and not following the rules of the road, the SRTS Task Force held a discussion on e-bikes to understand the situation in Menlo Park, hear the concerns, and share ideas and opportunities. The Taks Force agreed that e-bikes are an opportunity to address biking safety in Menlo Park. The group also agreed to focus on the biking behaviors rather than on the technology to develop positive safety messages and education.

RUBY BRIDGES DAY AT ENCINAL ELEMENTARY

“It was very rewarding to see how touched some parents and staff were by the event. Some parents who didn’t grow up in the area asked who Ruby Bridges is, and we were happy to be able to share Ruby’s story.”

“It was very emotional, and we are grateful for the school’s help in getting things set up, communicating, and coordinating with the teachers, and staff. I hope we can do this next year! Thanks to the Menlo Park SRTS program for facilitating and providing the resources and giveaways.”

– Encinal SRTS Parent Champions



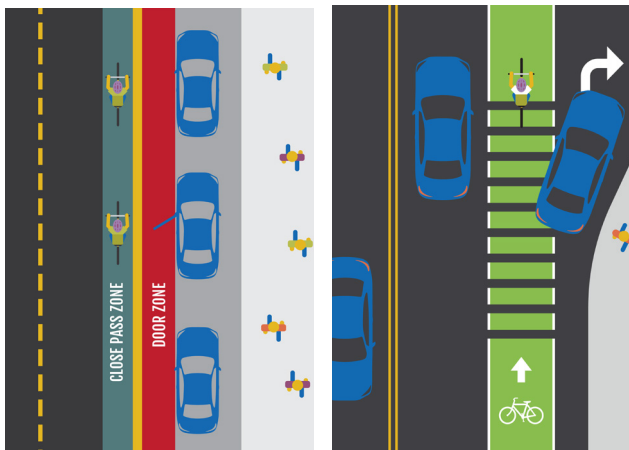
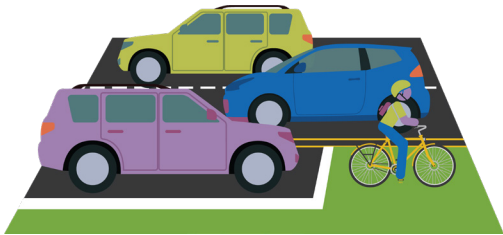
Pedestrian and Bicyclist Safety Handbook

The last section of the Pedestrian and Bicyclist Safety Handbook was developed during the 2023–2024 school year and is dedicated to driving tips focused on pedestrian and bicyclist safety. This includes information such as how to open the door of a vehicle to avoid hitting a bicyclist, how to turn right when there is a bike lane, and the relationship between speed and the severity of crashes.

The Pedestrian and Bicycle Safety Handbook complements 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.



All the images and graphics included in the handbook are available to download for schools' use from the SRTS website: menlopark.gov/saferoutes.



School Travel Fellowship: A Second Collaboration

The City of Menlo Park was selected with Las Lomas Elementary School District, San Mateo County Public Works, and Oak Knoll Elementary School to participate for a second year in a School Travel Fellowship, a project of the SMCOE and San Mateo County Health Policy and Planning. The fellowship is an opportunity for local jurisdictions to partner with local schools to support safe and active student travel. The current project aims to explore improvements to safe road crossings near Las Lomas, La Entrada, and Oak Knoll schools and implement a short-term demonstration project that will increase connectivity between houses and the schools. For the first time, city, county, and school leaders were brought together to identify and respond to shared priorities.

35

Children who attended the bike rodeo at the Bike to the Library event.

53

Percentage of students citywide who use active transportation to travel to school.

82

Students who participated in Ruby Bridge Walk to School Day at Encinal Elementary.

75

Helmets donated during the Bike to the Library event and provided by Safe Kids Santa Clara San Mateo Coalition.

Spring Party: Bike to the Library

In spring 2024, over 100 people joined the fun at the SRTS Spring Party themed as a “Bike to the Library.” The event took place at the Menlo Park Main Library. Students and their families were invited to bike from their school to the library for an afternoon of activities including a bike-themed story time, bike skills courses (bike rodeos), pedal-powered spin art, a bike repair station hosted by Live in Peace, a churro food truck, and a bike helmet giveaway. Local organizations tabled at the event, in particular, SamTrans, Caltrain, SMCOE SRTS, San Mateo County Office of Sustainability, Wheel Kids, and Menlo Park Fire, Police, and Transportation departments. A few students from Hillview Middle also came to help with the event.



Poster and Video Contests

A poster contest for elementary school students and a video contest for middle and high school students was organized by the SRTS program. Winners won gift certificates to Sports Basement, Kepler’s Books, and Cold Stone Creamery.

The poster contest theme was the importance of wearing a helmet when biking or rolling. The winners were from Oak Knoll and Encinal elementary schools. The video contest was on biking safety and good biking etiquette, and the winner was a student from Hillview Middle School.



Local Schools SRTS Efforts

Over the years, the schools in Menlo Park have developed their own culture of safe routes to school and have organized activities and events tailored to their community priorities and interests each year. Here is an overview of some of the SRTS efforts conducted by the local schools throughout the year.

- Laurel School teamed up with Oak Knoll and Encinal schools to plan their annual “Graduation Bike Ride” where raising sixth graders practiced riding together to their new campus at Hillview Middle.
- Each year Encinal Elementary engages parents to help with their bike rodeo for fifth graders. After the bike rodeo, students do a short bike ride to navigate the neighboring streets and practice their skills in real-life situations. Encinal Elementary is also working on a carpool campaign to encourage families who can’t walk or roll to drive together to school.
- Oak Knoll Elementary has a successful Bike Bus program, and the parents regularly organized group rides on weekends. The school also did helmet checks and fittings in the morning during a week in the spring.
- Belle Haven Elementary encourages all their students to celebrate Ruby Bridges Walk to School Day. Students who can’t walk or roll to school can also participate by doing laps around the school field.
- Menlo-Atherton High School bike advocacy club, M-A on the Move, encourages people to use alternative transportation modes and runs weekly bike maintenance workshops on campus. M-A on the Move donates refurbished bikes to the community.
- Las Lomas Elementary started the program All Kids Bike, which will be part of the PE class curriculum. The school received a fleet of bikes to run the bike education program.
- TIDE Academy touches on bicycling safety and rules of the road during PE classes and hosts quarterly pop-up bike repair clinics.
- Parent champions at Hillview Middle School developed a bike safety presentation with examples from Menlo Park streets and coordinated with the school administration to provide bike safety education to all grades.



TRAVEL MODE SHARE

Travel Tally Data

Each year since 2019, the Menlo Park SRTS program has collected data on how students travel to and from school. Schools have been collecting data for longer than that as part of the SMCOE SRTS program. Travel tally data are usually collected in the classroom by the teachers. Here are the fall 2023 key observations:

- More than half of the Menlo Park students commute to school using a mode other than the family car.
- Biking and taking the school bus are the most popular alternative transportation modes with elementary school students.
- Walking and biking are the most popular alternative transportation modes with middle school students.
- Public transit is a considerable transportation option for middle school students, with almost 10% using this mode.
- More than half of elementary school students drive to school, whereas only about one-third of middle school students drive to school.

68

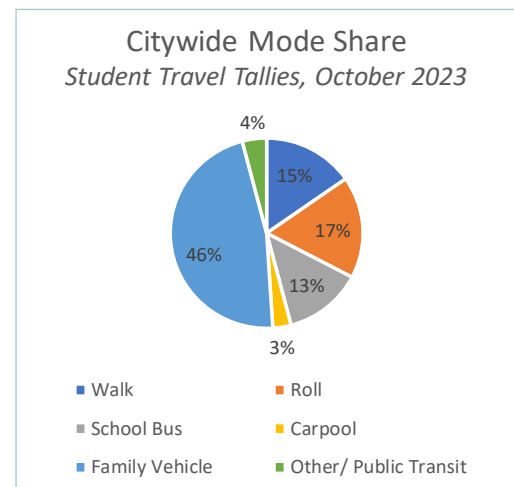
Percentage of the average participation rate per school to the travel tally.

53

Percentage of students citywide who use active transportation to travel to school.

9,939

Trips tallied in October 2023.



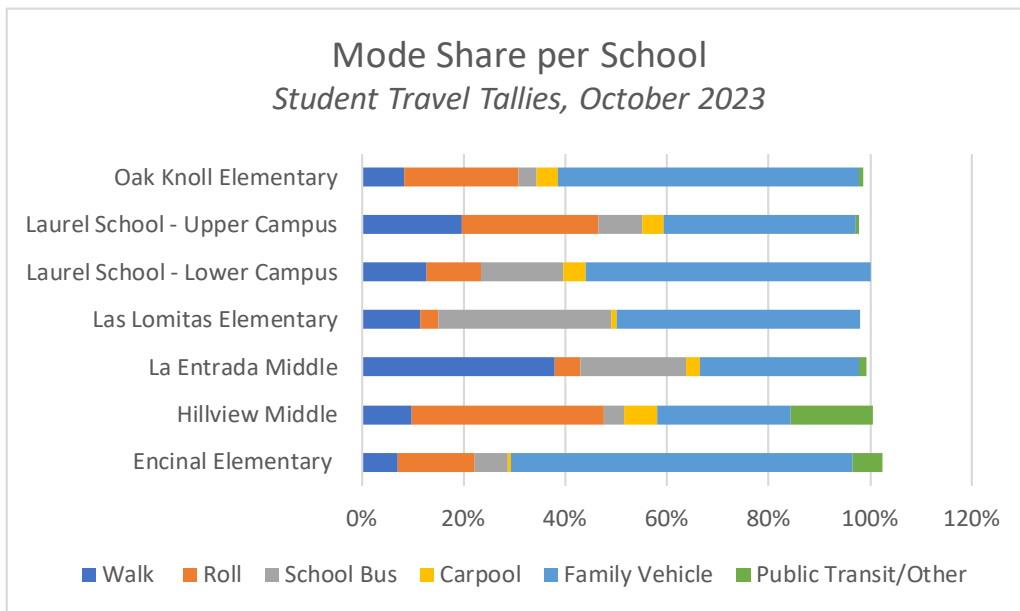
	Walk	Roll	School Bus	Carpool	Family Vehicle	Other/ Public Transit	Alternative travel	Average Response Rate
Elementary Schools	12%	16%	14%	3%	54%	2%	46%	62%
Middle Schools	24%	21%	12%	5%	29%	9%	71%	75%
Citywide	15%	17%	13%	3%	46%	4%	53%	68%

School Participation in the Data Collection

In October 2023, seven public schools participated in the student travel tally collection. The results are shown in the chart below. The following schools did not collect student tallies in 2023:

- Belle Haven Elementary
- Cesar Chavez Ravenswood Middle
- KIPP Valiant Community Prep School

Also, note that the Menlo Park Safe Routes to School program did not ask the high schools (Menlo-Atherton High School and TIDE Academy) nor the twelve private schools to collect travel tallies.



Schools that have participated in the Menlo Park SRTS program over the last five years* have:

↑4 %

Increased active modes

↓4 %

Decreased drive in family vehicle

↓4 %

Decreased school bus and carpool modes

↑2 %

Increased Public Transit

Source: Tally Data collected in 2019 or before, and in October 2023 for Schools with Data in Both Periods.

*This includes six schools with data available in both time periods in Menlo Park City School District and Las Lomas Elementary School District.

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Volunteer Recruitment

The SRTS team continued to work closely with the schools' SRTS champions and volunteers. The SRTS team heard from the champions that recruiting other parents to help with school-led events is a challenge. Finding new SRTS champions to take over "graduating parents" is also essential to keep the program going and preserve the progress made at each school.

In 2023-2024, the SRTS team hosted volunteer meetings before citywide events to provide a space where SRTS champions could share ideas and lessons learnt, ask for support, and receive resources.

Safe Biking Behaviors

Safe biking behaviors among students, especially middle and high school students, is a concern regularly discussed at the SRTS Task Force meetings. With the rise in popularity of e-bikes, the need for a robust bike education and for promoting safe biking in Menlo Park is necessary. The school administrations and parents showed their support and interest in exploring solutions.

Outreach and Communication on SRTS

Getting the word out on the SRTS program and raising awareness around the ongoing efforts has been a challenge. The STRS team publishes a monthly newsletter that does not have a big reach (a little over 100 subscriptions) and the team relies on the PTAs and school staff to share information and communication to Menlo Park families. The information can get buried with other school communications. This year, the SRTS program partnered with the Menlo Park Library to reach the broader community for the spring event. The SRTS program will continue to explore potential communication channels and partnership to increase the visibility of the program. The new Public Engagement Manager at the city is also a great resource to help with promotion and communication.

E-BIKE SAFETY DISCUSSION

"Let's talk about the e-bike **opportunity**, rather than the e-bike problem."

-Task Force member

Gaps in the pedestrian and bicycle infrastructures

The Task Force members regularly discuss the importance of safe pedestrian and bicycle infrastructures and there is a desire in the school community to advocate further for safer streets and provide feedback to city staff on street improvements and city plans.

Some schools that serve Menlo Park families are located in other jurisdictions (Atherton, San Mateo County) which makes it complex to create a continuous pedestrian and bicycle network. Projects like the San Mateo County Office of Education SRTS School Travel Fellowship are great opportunities to bring the different partners and organizations together to work on safe school travels for all.



PRIORITIES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In October 2023, the SRTS team presented the program’s progress to the City of Menlo Park Complete Streets Commission. The Commission provided feedback and suggestions to improve the SRTS program. The following priorities and recommendations are based on the Complete Streets Commission’s feedback, outreach activities, SRTS Task Force meeting discussions, and feedback from the schools and caregivers.

Focus Areas and Next Steps

Evaluation: Identify Milestones and Metrics

With the SRTS Task Force, identify goals, milestones, and metrics to keep track of the program progress.

Task Force Subcommittees

With the Task Force members, create Task Force Subcommittees focused on a specific area (e.g., a neighborhood or school) to develop tailored SRTS programs for the local schools that meet the specific needs and priorities of the community.

Bike Safety Campaign

Continue the discussion started this school year and work with the Task Force members, schools, neighbors, parents, and other community members to develop positive messages around safe biking in Menlo Park.

Coordinate with the City’s Vision Zero efforts

The SRTS program and the City’s Vision Zero Action Plan implementation should be coordinated to holistically improve traffic safety for school children. The SRTS Task Force will continue to support outreach and provide feedback on the City’s Vision Zero infrastructure projects.

Volunteer Capacity

Continue to support school-led events and projects by helping with identifying SRTS champions at each school and providing training and resources to assist them. Collaborate with SRTS champions on encouragement events (e.g., Walk and Roll to School days), data collection and education activities (e.g. safety assemblies, bike rodeos, group bike rides).

Technical Assistance to Schools

Continue to support the schools with their education and encouragement activities by providing resources such as maps, templates, and language for fliers or posters, educational materials, newsletter, and so on.

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

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 arrival or dismissal 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. Collaborate with neighboring jurisdictions (Atherton, County of San Mateo).



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.