

Sidewalks for Promoting Active School Travel

Active & Safe Routes to School (ASRTS) is a community partnership working together to promote and sustain programs that encourage children and families to choose active school travel (AST). ASRTS's primary program, School Travel Planning (STP), encourages AST by developing action plans that build upon strengths and work to remove concerns around schools. Since 2013, the STP process in our region has gained valuable insight into the concerns surrounding AST through parent and youth surveys. Sidewalks are a feature often identified indirectly through safety concerns and more directly through discussions. Parents identify "it feels unsafe due to traffic on the route" as a leading barrier to encouraging AST (n=2363); and this concern is echoed by youth (n=1057). "There are not enough sidewalks" is among the top 5 barriers to walking identified by students who live within walking distance (1.6km) of their school. Similarly, 31% of parents identified a lack of sidewalks on streets as a concern for encouraging AST.

An analysis of motor vehicle collisions involving pedestrians less than 18 years of age in Toronto, Ontario found the greatest density of collisions was highest in school zones, with more than 1/3 taking place within 300m of a school.¹ Sidewalks offer refuge for pedestrians by separating them from motorized vehicles and decreasing the risk of vehicle-pedestrian collisions. The U.S. Department of Transportation's *Toolbox of Countermeasures and Their Potential Effectiveness for Pedestrian Crashes* identified a potential 88% crash reduction through the installation of sidewalks.² Increasing the coverage and connectivity of sidewalks not only improves safety for those already using AST, but also increases the likelihood of more children using AST as it makes it easier for children to get between destinations.^{3,4,5}

The benefits of children using AST include improved physical and mental health, improved traffic and safety around schools, improved air quality and environment, students arrive at school alert and ready to learn, and students feel more connected to their community. Removing barriers that prevent students from using AST will allow them to experience these benefits more fully and allow parents to feel more comfortable letting their children walk or cycle within their neighbourhoods.

Sidewalks are a critical component for use of AST and municipalities can increase safety and its use through the provision of sidewalks in and around school communities. It is for the aforementioned reasons that ASRTS supports all schools being well-connected to their surrounding neighbourhoods by sidewalks, and, and for the health and safety of our children, no roads directly adjacent to elementary school should be without sidewalks. ASRTS strongly supports the development of sidewalks within school communities to address both perceived and objective barriers to AST associated with the interaction of pedestrians and motor vehicles. This is one element of the comprehensive approach undertaken by ASRTS and the STP program: the 6 E's: Engineering, Education, Encouragement, Enforcement, Evaluation, and Equity. By working together to achieve our goals, ASRTS believes that they can be achieved more efficiently and have a greater impact on the health and wellbeing of our children and society.

For additional information on ASRTS and STP visit <http://activesaferoutes.ca/>.



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References:

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