



Winter 2022



Coordinator's Corner

This year went by fast! We're already in the middle of the holiday season, which is always a busy time - but it's also a good reminder to bundle up, get out there, and enjoy some physical activity. As always, Virginia's Safe Routes to School programs are here to help students across the state walk and bike safely.



In this newsletter, we'll hear from a crossing guard who's part of an innovative new program in Richmond. We'll recap our fall events, get ready for Crossing Guard Appreciation Day, and learn about how to celebrate the special people in your community who make Safe Routes to School possible. Next, we'll talk about incentives to encourage students to walk and bike to school, and discuss a strategic plan for the future of Virginia Safe Routes to School. Finally, our regular Focus on Funding column will look at grant opportunities in the new year.

If you have any questions or would like to learn more about the topics included here, please don't hesitate to reach out! You can call the Virginia SRTS Hotline at 1-855-601-7787 or send us an email at info@virginiasrts.org.

Regards,

Katherine Graham

Katherine Graham
Virginia SRTS Coordinator

IN THIS ISSUE

Coordinator's Corner	1
Friends and Faces: Leslie Lopez	2
Looking Back at Fall Events	4
Mark Your Calendars for Crossing Guard Appreciation Day!	5
Who's Your SRTS Super Star?	5
Focus on Funding	6
Walking and Biking Incentive Programs	7

CALENDAR

DECEMBER

1: Most Outstanding Crossing Guard applications open

JANUARY

21: Most Outstanding Crossing Guard applications due

FEBRUARY

3: QuickStart mini-grant applications due

3: Walkabout mini-grant applications due

9: Crossing Guard Appreciation Day

Friends and Faces: Leslie Lopez

Two years ago, Richmond Public Schools started a pilot program where staff and faculty members could become crossing guards. We talked to one crossing guard, Leslie Lopez, about how she's doing and why she loves the job.

Can you tell us a little about yourself?

I am originally from the Northern Virginia area, but I've been living in Richmond for the last 12 years. I've been working at Ginter Park Elementary School for five years, with the last three years as a Second Grade Instructional Assistant.

Prior to that, I was in an AmeriCorps program called The Literacy Lab that helps bridge the K-3 literacy gap in underserved schools. I attended VCU and even worked for VCU Athletics for a few years, so I am a huge VCU basketball fan as well!

How'd you first hear about SRTS and get involved?

I had heard of SRTS prior to becoming a crossing guard because our whole staff would participate in the National Walk to School Days: walking into our local neighborhoods and creating walking school buses with our students. I'm also friends with someone who works for Greater Richmond Fit4Kids! When our principal asked our staff if anyone was interested in being a part of the crossing guard pilot program, I immediately signed up!

When I was in elementary school, there was a crossing guard named Gail, and the children coming through her intersection just LOVED her. She loved



Leslie Lopez (center) became a crossing guard in 2019.

Richmond recently shifted its crossing guard program from the police department to the school system. Why do you think that matters?

I think it matters so much. I think having the same crossing guards who already work in the building and are familiar to the students, and familiar to each other is important for communication in a busy, hectic intersection. I also think it builds a strong community, seeing the same kids and grown-ups (and even some neighbors!) out walking and biking every morning and afternoon.

You were part of a pilot program where teachers or other staff could become crossing guards. Could you tell us what that was like?

I just think it has been such a fun challenge to work through with my other crossing guards! We were together in the first year (that got cut short) and

we're back together this school year.

We have a very tricky intersection so the first year, we had to work on what was the most effective way to communicate to each other and anyone coming through the intersection and talk through the routine of traffic flow. Luckily, we were all new, so we would make our mistakes, talk about them once we were back on the sidewalk, and try again when we would go back out into the intersection. We have a well-oiled machine now though!



What are some challenges you've faced as a crossing guard?

As I mentioned, we have a tricky and sometimes dangerous intersection. The main road that comes northbound past our school has a curve, and people

Tips on How to Cross the Street

Crossing Guard Appreciation Day is an excellent time to remind students how to cross streets safely. Here are 5 steps to teach students, taken from [Safe Routes Philly pedestrian safety lessons](#):

1. Find a safe place to cross.
2. Stop at the curb.
3. Look left-right-left.
4. Listen for traffic.
5. When it's safe, cross quickly in a straight line. Keep looking left-right-left and listening for traffic!

driving cars tend to go too fast down it. It's also not a straight four-way intersection, more of a three-way stop, with the exit of our parking lot as the "fourth" stop. We've had to work on communicating with our pedestrians to make sure they wait for our go-ahead and make sure that all traffic has fully stopped.

Virginia currently has a shortage of crossing guards. Do you have any advice for anyone who's interested in becoming one?

It's more fun than you think it is! You are provided everything, and the team with Fit4Kids and SRTS are very active in communicating and will always make sure you have everything you need to be successful.

We often have to remind ourselves that our main and only goal is to make sure kids get across the street to school safely, so if you don't feel comfortable directing traffic, don't do it, and don't feel bad for not doing it. Talk with your team often, it's so important!

Finally, what are your favorite places to walk and bike in Virginia?

I used to live in the Museum District in Richmond, so I would run and bike all through there because it was easy, and everything is very accessible. Now I live in Northside and there's a great walking path right next to Shalom Farms that is great to walk on in the spring and summer when all the vegetation is coming in!

Looking Back at Fall Events

Though Thanksgiving has come and gone, it's never too late to practice gratitude and take a moment to be thankful. We're thankful for the return of in-person learning and the renewed commitment to walking to school, from a successful Walk to School Day to the number of schools evaluating how students get to and from school by taking Student Travel Tallies.

Walk to School Day

This year, schools across Virginia registered almost 300 Walk to School Day events at 243 schools, more than 10% of the national total! This level of participation has us excited for Bike to School Day coming up on May 4, 2022.

Student Travel Tallies

This fall, 100 schools took Student Travel Tallies to better understand how students are traveling to school. This number includes 31 schools that participated for the first time!

These schools will receive a SRTS banner in recognition for their efforts, and all schools that participated in Walk to School Day and took Student Travel Tallies will get decals to display on their banners. Missed the fall window for Student Travel Tallies? No worries! We will be taking tallies again in March and April 2022. Stay tuned for more details!



Students at Creighton's Corner Elementary School in Loudoun County celebrate Walk to School Day.



Mark Your Calendars for Crossing Guard Appreciation Day!

Not all heroes wear capes - some hold a stop sign paddle and greet kids on their way to and from school!

If you know a crossing guard who goes the extra mile to make walking and biking fun, easy, and safe, make sure they are celebrated on Crossing Guard Appreciation Day. While the official date is **February 9, 2022**, find a day in February that best works for your school. Celebrate crossing guards with a letter of appreciation, a meet and greet with warm drinks, a poem or cheer, or other ideas found [on the Virginia Safe Routes to School website](#). The website has other resources such as thank you cards, social media graphics, and press release templates.

We've heard that communities all over Virginia are looking for more crossing guards. This fall, 25% of Norfolk's crossing guard positions were vacant, and [62% of positions were vacant in Portsmouth](#). Crossing Guard Appreciation Day is a great time to recruit new guards by showing your community

values the brave people that help students get to school every day.

We want to hear how crossing guards go above and beyond to make the journey to school efficient and enjoyable. Schools are encouraged to nominate their crossing guard for Virginia's Most Outstanding Crossing



Guard Award starting **December 1, 2021 through January 21, 2022**. Nominating your crossing guard is easy: just fill out [the online nomination form](#) and be sure to include a photo and a story that shows how special your crossing guard is. We'll announce award winners on our website and in an eblast at the beginning of February.

All schools that nominate their crossing guard will receive a decal to add to their banner.

Who's Your SRTS Super Star?

Virginia SRTS is built upon a network of people across the Commonwealth who support walking and biking. From advocating for policy changes or neighborhood improvements, to leading walking school buses, to helping students to learn how to ride a bike, it takes a village to run a successful Safe Routes to School program.

Who's been championing walking and biking in your community? Is it a teacher, neighbor, or student leader? Virginia SRTS recognizes these committed individuals as SRTS Super Stars. [This webpage](#) has thank you cards, a coloring page, and other resources to celebrate SRTS Super Stars for going above and beyond.



Focus on Funding



Here's a list of upcoming grant opportunities at the state and national levels:

Outride Fund—Grants

- \$15,000 based on previous grant awards
- Applications due January 7, 2022
- Funds for bike rooms and to support bike STEM programs, bike tech programs, bike clubs, and other bike-related activities
- Dollar-for-dollar match requirement

QuickStart Mini-grants

- \$1,000
- Applications due February 3, March 3, and April 7.
- Small-scale SRTS activities

Walkabout Mini-grants

- \$3,000-\$5,000
- Applications due February 3
- To assess walking and bicycling conditions around schools and provide a report

Healthy Community Action Team Grants

- \$30,000 based on previous grant awards
- Next application round expected in fall 2022
- Action Teams build community and find opportunities to prevent obesity through policy and environmental changes.

See our Learn It. Do it. Live it! on [Funding SRTS Projects](#) for time-tested tips for funding SRTS projects, a menu of common funding sources, and links to other valuable funding resources.



Students at Kate Collins Middle School in Waynesboro used a QuickStart Mini-grant for a crosswalk art project.





In Alameda County, CA, the SRTS program implemented Bike to the Moon Week, a great example of a walking/biking challenge.



A Golden Sneaker award.

Walking and Biking Incentive Programs

Have you seen more parents driving their kids to school this fall, in some cases causing significant traffic and safety concerns? Have you had bus driver shortages that result in students arriving to school late? If so, you're not alone. Many Virginia schools are experiencing negative impacts on school travel related to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

Walking and bicycling incentive programs - like Bike to the Moon Week, a program from Alameda County, California's SRTS program, can help alleviate these negative impacts by motivating more kids to walk and bicycle to school. They're also an excellent opportunity for children to practice pedestrian and bicycle safety skills and get the regular physical activity they need to stay healthy. These programs can be structured in different ways and go by many names, but generally fall into the three broad types:

Frequent walker/biker programs

- May span several months or entire school year

- May include regular walking/biking events (e.g., Walking Wednesdays)
- Incentives based on trips to/from school, requiring a method for tracking trips

Mileage clubs

- May span several months or entire school year
- Incentives based on miles walked/biked, requiring a method for tracking mile

Walking/biking challenges

- Concentrated effort over a relatively short period (1-4 weeks)
- Usually oriented around an ambitious collective goal (e.g., walking across the state, biking to the moon)
- Incentives for participation, mileage

Regardless of type, walking and bicycling incentive programs have two essential ingredients: 1) an incentive to motivate kids to walk or bicycle to school and 2) a method for tracking walking and bicycling miles or trips.

Incentives

The incentive can be a small gift given to students for achieving a milestone, an award given to classes or schools for winning a competition, or the collective satisfaction of reaching an ambitious goal together.

If small individual gifts are given, it is best if they are somehow related to walking or bicycling. Examples include stickers, shoelaces, reflective tags and straps, bike lights, ponchos, umbrellas, and t-shirts.

The Virginia Safe Routes to School program provides a cool "I WALKED TO SCHOOL TODAY" sticker template that [you can download here](#).

Group awards can include special privileges or fun, homemade trophies, such as the golden sneaker award.

Tracking Methods

The tracking method depends on the type of program. Examples include:

- The Virginia Safe Routes to School Program's [frequent walker-bicyclist punch card](#) (top right), which can be used for tracking how many times student walk and bicycle to school.
- An online or paper form students can use to self-report miles or minutes walked and bicycled.
- An Excel table that scales up self-reported miles and minutes with mathematical formulas to help students reach lofty collective goals, such as going to the moon and back.



Other Tips

- It's important to provide pedestrian or bicycle safety education before launching a walking or biking incentive program.
- If students live too far to walk or bicycle to school, or if their route is unsafe, provide an option to record distance walked and bicycled at home, to and from a bus stop, or on campus during the school day.



Introducing the Virginia SRTS Strategic Plan

One notable accomplishment for the Virginia SRTS Program this year was the development of the 2021-2026 Strategic Plan. In the spring, we administered a survey and held a 2-day workshop with stakeholders and potential partners to better understand the reach and value of different program elements. We shared the results of the survey in our Summer newsletter, and used what we heard from the survey and workshop participants to draft 18 recommendations for the program for the next 5 years.

The recommendations are organized into three categories that build upon one another:

Year 1: Actions to Sustain the Program - The recommendations for Year 1 help establish shared ownership of the Virginia SRTS Program and support efforts to find dedicated funding sources to allow the program to continue and expand in the future.

Years 2-5: Actions to Maintain and Improve the Program - The recommendations in this category are aimed at maintaining the Virginia SRTS Program at the current level of statewide support. They include continuing outreach and communication activities, supporting statewide events, regularly evaluating the program, and providing QuickStart and Walkabout Mini-grants.

Years 2-5: Actions to Grow the Program - The recommendations in this category would expand the current program offerings to reach a broader audience, create new content, and strengthen partnerships at the state level.

With the plan being finalized in early fall, work began immediately to secure dedicated funding for the program. This work continues as we learn more and explore opportunities created by the recently passed Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act.

You can read the [full plan on our website](#), and we look forward to partnering with you to implement the recommendations and strengthen Virginia's SRTS Program in the years to come. We're always seeking partners and welcome new ideas – send us an email at info@virginiasrts.org!

