Nationally, the number of students who walk or bike to school declined 35% in the last 40 years, from 48% in 1969 to 13% in 2009 (U.S. DOT, 2009).

37% of Iowa 3rd graders are considered overweight or obese (Spring 2010).

Parents and children most commonly cite long distances, traffic danger, adverse weather and fear of crime danger as barriers to walking and biking to school (CDC, 2008).

**I-WALK Final Report**

An Iowa Safe Routes to School Program

The number of students who walk to and from school has drastically declined in the last 40 years, which has led to health, transportation and social concerns in Iowa communities and nationally. Such concerns have led to the need for Iowa communities to examine their current local walkability and infrastructure.

While children continue to decrease the amount of walking and biking they engage in, childhood overweight and obesity is on the rise.

Overweight and obesity is the number one preventable health challenge facing Iowa’s children. One of the primary causes of the epidemic is a lack of physical activity. I-WALK helps foster and create environments which are conducive to physical activity through strong community coalitions, Geographic Information System/Global Position System (GIS/GPS) mapping of communities, thorough evaluation, and technical assistance to communities. This final report provides I-WALK program details and results of its implementation in 12 Iowa communities.

**I-WALK Vision**

The goal of I-WALK is to help communities continually update, implement and evaluate their Safe Routes to School (SRTS) plans.

Ultimately, I-WALK helps community stakeholders identify and address two fundamental points:

1. Where it’s safe, get kids walking and biking.

2. Where it’s not safe, make changes.

Atlantic, IA- I-WALK utilizes GIS/GPS technology to conduct walkability assessments in Iowa communities. March 2011
In the 12 I-WALK schools, 73% of parents indicated their child has asked for permission to walk or bike to/from school in the last year.

According to the 2010-2011 I-WALK Parent/Child survey, parent-reported level of concern for their child walking/biking to or from school on the following issues:

- **Distance-school is too far away**
  - 56% stated it was not a concern

- **Time-not enough time for child to get to school**
  - 68% stated it was not a concern

- **Amount of traffic near school**
  - 48% stated great concern

- **Amount of traffic on route**
  - 47% stated great concern

- **Speed of traffic along route**
  - 48% stated great concern

- **Intersection safety**
  - 46% stated great concern

I-WALK provides a comprehensive process to assist Iowa communities in the development of local SRTS plans. Without I-WALK, it is difficult for many schools to initiate and finance a project with usable results that identifies barriers and solutions for safe routes. Schools alone often lack the expertise and personnel needed to annually conduct and integrate safe routes. I-WALK provides the framework for sustainable annual assessments across the entire state. As projects are implemented and sustained, safety and health benefits accrue to all participating school districts, students, and citizens.

I-WALK’s key to success is working through Local Public Health (LPH) agencies to coordinate and lead SRTS community coalitions and discussions. LPH has an array of expertise and experience in understanding the health needs of local citizens, forming and facilitating strong representative coalitions, and managing multi-faceted projects to address health disparities in their counties. Iowa Department of Public Health staff provided technical assistance and resources to LPH.

Data collection, through volunteer community input, is conducted throughout the program including:

1) Teacher Tallies performed in 3rd-5th grade classrooms. Students are asked how they got to and from school for 3 consecutive days;

2) Parent/Child online surveys providing parent and student input regarding barriers for students transport to/from school as well as mapping the direct route taken to school; and

3) GIS/GPS mapping technology to allow community members to pinpoint barriers and identify opportunities for safe routes.

Data analysis is done at the state level. State staff report findings, correlations, and recommendations for safe routes in a community forum.

Complete and comprehensive data reports and recommendations for each of the 12 I-WALK communities can be found at [www.I-WALK.org](http://www.I-WALK.org).

Additional resources are available to all communities to implement components of the I-WALK program.*
I-WALK Results

In the 12 Iowa I-WALK communities:

- I-WALK successfully recruited and mobilized community partners across Iowa for SRTS planning, including the successful recruitment and integration of 12 community partnerships in both rural and urban communities.

- With the challenging task of engaging community members, over 150 partners were recruited for I-WALK.

- Community partnerships received training to conduct a GIS Walkability Assessment mobilizing partners and volunteers to identify and record safe routes barriers.

- Teacher tallies identified that in general, more students walk/bike from school than to school, thereby identifying opportunities for education and encouragement for active transport 1 to school.

1 Active transport is defined as walking or biking to/from school.

Safe Routes to School is a part of the solution!
- Increase physical activity
- Improve unsafe walking conditions
- Improve poor air quality by reducing vehicle emissions

Additional benefits of Safe Routes to School...
- Reduce traffic congestion around schools
- Provide cost savings for schools by reducing need for “hazard” busing
- Teach fundamental safety skills
- Strengthen family bonds
- Increase child’s sense of freedom and responsibility
- Provide more transportation options for everyone
- Benefit local economy

Conclusion

The Iowa SRTS program has a need to help communities demonstrate statewide success through evaluation, specifically through sharing among schools, as well as other groups, and providing assistance in making local data meaningful and useful by implementing changes necessary to increase active transport to/from school. Further, technical assistance and capacity-building related to these activities are needed. Often, school districts turn to external or regional groups for this support, but information obtained may be inadequate to make local decisions and statewide sharing of evaluation findings is lacking. Few communities have the staff or technology to conduct an appropriate evaluation and rely on assistance from outside sources; as a result, many communities struggle with the effective use of SRTS evaluation data and education about recommended activities provided by external sources. Among the 360 local Iowa school districts, a comprehensive repository for SRTS plans or evaluations conducted by the end of the 2010-2011 school year could not be identified. Through the I-WALK project (2010-2011), 12 Iowa communities now have a comprehensive and focused action plan to address local barriers to SRTS. I-WALK provides a comprehensive resource for collecting usable and accessible local SRTS action plans for communities statewide.
References


*I-WALK was conducted in partnership with Iowa State University Extension and funded by Iowa Department of Transportation through a 2010-2011 non-infrastructure Safe Routes to School grant. Additional funding for printed resources was provided by the Governor’s Traffic Safety Bureau.
Figure 1: West Union, IA- I-WALK student volunteers for GIS mapping. April 2011

Figure 2: West Union, IA- I-WALK volunteers being trained by Chris Seeger, ISU Extension, on GIS capabilities on iPhones. April 2011

Figure 3: West Union, IA- I-WALK photo taken during walkability assessment. April 2011

Figure 4: Adel, IA- Community members being trained in I-WALK GIS/GPS mapping for walkability assessment. Maps of the community used during the training in background. April 2011

Figure 5: Adel, IA-Community member conducting intersection assessment during I-WALK GIS/GPS mapping. April 2011

Figure 6: Atlantic, IA- Steps leading from sidewalks to intersections were a site during the I-WALK walkability assessment. March 2011

Figure 7: Atlantic, IA- I-WALK volunteer completing an intersection assessment during the walkability assessment. March 2011
Figure 8: Atlantic, IA- I-WALK GIS/GPS training in preparation for walkability assessment. March 2011

Figure 9: Atlantic, IA- Young student provides insight to walking conditions during the I-WALK walkability assessment. March 2011

Figure 10: Hull, IA- Students assisting adults with I-WALK walkability assessment. April 2011

Figure 11: Hull, IA- Elementary students receive a quick GIS/GPS lesson, while adult volunteers break for lunch during the I-WALK walkability assessment. April 2011

Figure 12: Hull, IA- Students assisting adults with I-WALK walkability assessment. April 2011

Figure 13: Hull, IA- Students assisting adults with I-WALK walkability assessment. April 2011
Figure 20: Kalona, IA—I-WALK volunteers use GPS technology during the walkability assessment. Horses and buggies offer unique opportunities for communities to consider. April 2011

Figure 14: Riceville, IA—I-WALK assessment documents sidewalks deteriorated near connection to street. April 2011

Figure 15: Riceville, IA—I-WALK volunteers assess an intersection. April 2011

Figure 16: Riceville, IA—Adult and student volunteers pose for a picture after the I-WALK walkability assessment. April 2011

Figure 17: Riceville, IA—A mother pushes her child in a stroller on the street due to absence of completed sidewalks. April 2011

Figure 18: Riceville, IA—I-WALK volunteers find shrubs block the sidewalk during the walkability assessment. April 2011

Figure 19: Independence, IA—I-WALK volunteers reporting unique findings of their defined part of town during walkability assessment to volunteer group. April 2011

Figure 21: Kalona, IA—I-WALK assessment shows sidewalks absent in most directions to/from school. April 2011

Figure 22: Kalona, IA—Horse and buggy share the road with automobiles, creating additional opportunities for I-WALK communities. May 2011
Figure 23: Kalona, IA--Make-shift sidewalk mowed out of grass photographed during I-WALK walkability assessment. May 2011

Figure 24: Kalona, IA--The elementary school principal was among the volunteers conducting the walkability assessment along with numerous additional community members. May 2011

Figure 25: Kalona, IA--New residential developments often create discontinuance of sidewalks, creating barriers for children walking to school in those areas. May 2011

Figure 26: Tabor, IA--I-WALK adult and student volunteers gearing up to complete the GPS walkability assessment. April 2011

Figure 27: Tabor, IA--Dogs, both big and small, can be a barrier for students and adults of any age walking a specified route. April 2011

Figure 28: Tabor, IA--Aesthetics often affects the likelihood of kids and adults walking a certain path. That, along with the broken sidewalk, are barriers to walking. April 2011

Figure 29: Tabor, IA--I-WALK volunteers identified numerous damaged sidewalks preventing walkable routes. April 2011

Figure 30: Tabor, IA--I-WALK volunteers identified numerous locations of standing water and damage due to standing water. Here, deep water is measured at an intersection where a curbcut used to be. April 2011

Figure 31: Vinton, IA--A variety of volunteers participate in the I-WALK walkability assessment, including city employees and retirees. April 2011

Figure 32: Vinton, IA--I-WALK community volunteers, including ISU Extension, conduct the walkability assessment with i-Phones equip with GPS. April 2011