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:

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

Where it is not safe, make changes.

Regular physical activity in children and adolescents promotes health and fitness. Compared to those who are inactive, physically active youth have higher levels of cardio-respiratory fitness and stronger muscles. They also typically have lower body fatness. Their bones are stronger, and they may have reduced symptoms of anxiety and depression. Youth who are regularly active also have a better chance of a healthy adulthood (Get Fit and Be Active!, 2008).
I-WALK Program Elements

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 student’s 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.

Community Data & Involvement

Complete and comprehensive data reports and recommendations for each of the I-WALK communities can be found at www.I-WALK.org.

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

Examples of I-WALK Coalition Representatives:

- Local government
- Traffic safety
- Community planning
- School administration
- Parent/teacher/students
- Local business
- Parks & recreation
- Local Public Health
- ISU Extension & Outreach

Over a 10-year time span, 50% of the pedestrian/motor vehicle crashes (fatalities, injuries) involved pedestrians under the age of 21 (IA DOT, 2000).
I-WALK Key Findings

- I-WALK has been successful in promoting walking and biking to school.

- Much of the program’s success can be attributed to the contributions made by parents, teachers, and community volunteers.

  In the 2010-11 communities, the I-WALK program helped to increase the rate of walking/biking to school along with a decrease in the use of private vehicles for transporting students to school.

- 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 to school.

- I-WALK addressed unique and insurmountable challenges faced by rural SRTS partnerships in dealing with physical and social barriers posed by school consolidations, budgetary constraints and unique needs of communities.

  Each I-WALK community received a comprehensive report identifying barriers and recommendations which can be used to apply for SRTS infrastructure or address no-cost or low-cost solutions.

Data Sources
- Iowa Department of Transportation Collision & traffic data
- Parent & Child Surveys
- Teacher Tally
- GIS Mapping Data

Conclusion

The IDPH I-WALK program provides a successful model for promoting safe walking and biking to school. Decreased rates of walking and biking and increased rates of driving to school may be leading to increased rates of overweight and obesity among Iowa youth. I-WALK is making an important difference to participating communities by enhancing health, increasing traffic safety, and helping other interested communities. I-WALK is committed to creating safe environments for walking and biking for Iowans.

Why should schools promote Safe Routes to School?

There are many reasons that schools promote active commuting to and from school:

- An increase in sedentary leisure-time activities, such as TV watching, plus cuts in recess and physical education programs can result in lack of physical activity in today’s youth.
- Walking or cycling to school is an opportunity for children to get exercise.
- Environmental benefits such as less traffic and air pollution surrounding the school. A large proportion of morning traffic is due to parents taking their children to school.
- Both children and adults can enjoy a social benefit of an active commute to school. Walking together can provide quality time between parents and children. Children who walk with friends can socialize and catch up on the day’s events.

Lessons Learned

1. Establishing policies is a collaborative effort. School personnel need to have effective relationships with public safety officials, city officials, parents, and school district representatives in order for policies to be enacted and enforced.

2. Policies that address personal safety and traffic safety (e.g., speed zones, drop off policies, and safe routes promotion) are paramount.

3. Active transport to school initiatives must take into account relevant state and local policies (e.g., bus policies, school start times, school choice) that might affect success.

4. Factors such as infrastructure, crossing guard/cross walk status, geography of the surrounding area or weather can be important catalysts or inhibitors for policy development. Addressing these proactively can benefit the initiative.
References


*I-WALK was conducted in partnership with Iowa State University Extension and Outreach and funded by Iowa Department of Transportation through a non-infrastructure Safe Routes to School grant.*
Walkability Assessment and Final Report Photos

Figure 1: Ida Grove, IA. I-WALK volunteers happy to participate in GPS mapping. April 2013

Figure 2: Ida Grove, IA. Chris Seeger from ISU Extension & Outreach trains the local I-WALK coalition on GPS Mapping. April 2013

Figure 3: La Porte City, IA. I-WALK photo taken during walkability assessment of major crack in sidewalk. October 2012

Figure 4: Sibley, IA. Community members being trained in I-WALK GPS mapping by Alan Jensen, ISU Extension & Outreach. Power Point presentations, handouts, and practice with the iPhones prepared volunteers for conducting the GPS assessment. May 2013

Figure 5: Sibley, IA. Community member evaluating the mid-block from her bike during I-WALK GPS mapping. May 2013

Figure 6: Storm Lake, IA. A 5-street intersection assessed during the GPS mapping. Difficult intersections can impede walking. May 2013

Figure 7: Mt. Ayr, IA. Suzy Wilson and Chris Seeger presented the I-WALK Final Report to the community. The elementary school principal was one of many attendees. Maps of GPS data were projected on a screen in high school auditorium. May 2013
Figure 8: Ida Grove, IA. Community volunteers map neighborhood intersection during GPS assessment. April, 2013

Figure 9: Guthrie Center, IA. Photo taken during GPS mapping depicting incomplete sidewalk with vegetation barrier located near elementary school. October 2012

Figure 10: Storm Lake, IA. Evaluation of a city intersection by a trained volunteer. May 2013

Figure 11: Ida Grove, IA. Volunteers worked in pairs with an iPhone equipped with the mapping application to complete walking assessment around elementary school. April 2013

Figure 12: Oelwein, IA. Sidewalk ends midblock. Incomplete sidewalks often force walkers to move to the street creating a potentially unsafe situation. November 2012

Figure 13: Sibley, IA. Volunteers on route during I-WALK walkability assessment. May 2013