



Alabama SRTS e-Newsletter

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Fall 2011

Welcome to the first issue of the Safe Routes to School (SRTS) Newsletter. We plan to issue the e-Newsletter once every quarter to inform you about Safe Routes to School activities and events in Alabama's schools and communities; and provide tips on ways to encourage and promote childhood wellness and safety.

In this issue, we are "spotlighting" two schools, but in future newsletters, we want to spotlight more schools; therefore, we will always be looking for material for inclusion and any contributions will be welcome. These can include news of what SRTS activities are taking place in a school, neighborhood, or community; photographs of relevant events and activities; and additional tips.

Any material would be most welcome. If you have a contribution to make, please contact Adrinda Carter at 334-206-5137 or adrinda.carter@adph.state.al.us.

Call for Applications

Through the Alabama SRTS Program and the National Center for Safe Routes to School, the following grants are available to support the goal of the SRTS Program, which is to enable and encourage children to safely walk and bicycle to school:

- All 2012 Alabama SRTS applications are due on March 31, 2012. To access the application and for more information, please go to www.aldot.org/srts
- The National Center for Safe Routes to School is now accepting applications for 25 mini-grants of \$1,000 each. Funds from this grant can be used to purchase bicycle racks, bicycle helmets, reflective vests, and promotional and educational materials to name. The application deadline is Wednesday, October 19, 2011. For more information on these applications, please go to <http://www.saferoutesinfo.org/>
- The **2011 James L. Oberstar Safe Routes to School Award** will recognize outstanding achievement by a local Safe Routes to School (SRTS) program that has greatly improved the safety or increased the number of elementary and/or middle school students who walk and bicycle to school. The application deadline is Wednesday, October 26, 2011. For more information on these applications, please go to <http://www.saferoutesinfo.org/>

Green Transportation

What is the most green, least expensive, and arguable the healthiest way to get from one place to another? Walking of course! It has been said that if each American walked for a half hour each day instead of driving, we would save the planet 64 million tons of carbon dioxide, 6.5 million gallons of gas, and we would shed around 3 million pounds! Not only that, but exercise has been shown to decrease behavioral problems in children and decrease depression. A study in North Carolina involved Energizers (short activities done in the classroom), recess, P.E. and sports which engaged children in at least 30 minutes of moderate to vigorous activity. The results showed positive increases in child participation, enjoyment, alertness, and focused more on studies.

Interested in getting your child or children feeling better? Walk them to school! Try getting your neighbors, friends, or family involved too. It is a great way to lose a little weight for the New Year, and teach children the importance of healthy living. Even if you live too far away to walk, you can still participate by both parking about a few blocks or a mile away, and walking with them the rest of the way. Some schools even allow parents to utilize the track!



Alabama SRTS has three community initiatives that encourage parents to let their children walk to school which are:

- Park and Walk
- Alternate Drop Off Site
- Walking School Bus

For more information, please go to www.adph.org/srts

Dodge Elementary School's Eagles Get Fit

By: Dr. Suzanne Crist, Principal

Olive J. Dodge Elementary School works hard to encourage students, parents, faculty, and staff to stay fit and healthy. The students at Dodge are provided with fresh fruits and vegetables several times per week through a USDA Fresh Fruit and Vegetable grant. This year students will "travel" through the five regions of the United States. They will learn about the regions and about the fruits and vegetables grown in those regions. Students will try new fruits and vegetables throughout the year. The Corn Man will be here in November and everyone will be able to taste roasted corn on the cob. We will try pluots, asparagus, celery, and many different varieties of apples among a plethora of other fruits and vegetables. At the end of each unit of study, parents and students will be encouraged to participate in a Park and Walk to School Day. If they come early there will be a special exercise class in the gym.

Three days a week everyone in the school gets up and moving by participating in a short exercise routine during morning announcements. On Tuesday afternoons, almost 100 students, parents, and teachers stay after school for Running Club. Running Club students agree to run at least 26 miles during the school year, meet their Accelerated Reading goals each quarter, complete 26 hours of community service, and participate in at least three local fun runs or 5Ks.

Other activities include participation in the National Walk at Work Day with teachers in September. There is an annual P.T.A. Fitness Night, and of course the International Park and Walk to School Day coming up in October.

Childhood Obesity, Breaking the Cycle

By: Sheryl Mims, Alabama Department of Public Health, Nutrition and Physical Activity Division

The expanding waistlines of Americans have been a hot topic for the past ten years. Lack of physical activity and unhealthy eating patterns are thought to be the main causes of this epidemic. Unfortunately, our children are learning these same poor lifestyle habits and following in our footsteps and becoming overweight and obese.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), there has been a 30% increase in obesity rates among children since 1980. Approximately 23 million children and teens are now considered overweight or obese. These extra pounds carry serious health risks. Overweight children and teens have an increased risk for developing high cholesterol, high blood pressure, asthma, joint problems, depression and Type 2 Diabetes. In fact, teens that are overweight have a 70% chance of becoming overweight or obese adults. This number increases to 80% if they have just one overweight or obese parent.

Don't be discouraged. There is good news. We can do something to reverse this trend. Here are 5 simple tips:

1. Serve more fruit and vegetables. Include fruits and vegetables in each meal and serve them as snacks. They are packed with the fiber, vitamins and minerals that young bodies need. They are also lower in calories and sodium than the usual snack foods.
2. Limit the intake of sweet beverages. Fruit drinks and sodas tend to be high in calories and low in nutrients. Substituting water or diet drinks for these beverages will cut unnecessary calories. 100% fruit juice, in limited amounts, is also a good choice.
3. Eat meals as a family. Families who eat meals together tend to eat slower. This allows for awareness of how much is eaten and how full you feel. It also gives families a chance to catch up on the family news of the day.
4. Encourage more activity. Participating in activities that get them moving is a great way for children to burn calories. This doesn't need to be an organized exercise program. Free play, skipping rope, dancing, and hop-scotch are all great ways to get moving.
5. Set a good example. Let your children see you adopting healthier lifestyle habits and they will follow in your footsteps into a happier healthier life.

Since September is National Childhood Obesity Awareness Month, it's a good time to begin implementing these tips into your daily life. For more information please visit <http://childhoodobesitynews.com/>.

Put on a Helmet and Get on Your Bicycle

A Bike Rodeo is an opportunity to educate parents and children about the safety aspects of riding a bicycle from their backyard to on the streets. Activities included in the rodeo are a helmet fitting, bicycle obstacle course, safety lecture on the rules of the road, and a bike tune up

It is a great way to teach children and their parents about the importance of being safe while riding a bike and having fun. If you are interested in having a bike rodeo, please contact Adrinda Carter at adrinda.carter@adph.state.al.us or 334-206-5137 or Bill Luckerson at luckersonb@dot.state.al.us or 334-242-6000.



Spotlighted School

Homewood Middle School, slightly south of Birmingham, Alabama, is making serious strides to become a green school. The building itself was the first LEED certified building in Alabama incorporating sustainable design features such as using recycled materials and needing less energy to maintain. And the changes don't stop there. The school is using an unused area of land to create a community garden. The produce from the garden is planned to aide children in maintaining a healthy and nutritious diet. And, in early December, the school, along with United Way and Safe Routes to School (SRTS), hosted the SRTS National Course, to develop ideas in getting children to walk or bicycle to and from school, and to make it safer for them to do so.

The three day course was a huge success, involving campus walks to identify high risk areas or behaviors, as well as activities and programs for the school to implement. Homewood Middle has a large population of children that walk through the neighborhood, many of whom are picked up at an alternative pick up spot. The use of this as a mechanism to reduce congestion at the school has helped to limit the traffic dangers as well as given children a bit of exercise.



Congratulations to Homewood Middle's principal, Martin A. Nalls, and the students for their tremendous work, and effort! Keep it up!



Upcoming Events

International Walk to School Day is an opportunity for students to join millions of children, parents, and community leaders from 42 countries around the world together in celebration of International Walk to School Day. This event will take place on Wednesday, Oct. 5th. Teachers, register your events at www.walktoschool.org.

Worldwide Day of Play

The 2011 Worldwide Day of Play takes place on Saturday, September 24th. For three hours, Nickelodeon will halt all programming and encourage kids and their families to turn off their TVs and go play. Visit www.nick.com/play for more information.

Obesity Task Force is a group that consists of individuals from across the state who are working on obesity issues in adults and youth. Hear about programs and strategies that create healthier lifestyles and environments. The next meeting will take place on Nov. 16th from 9a.m.-12p.m. at the Alabama Power Company in Clanton.