



Summer 2021



Coordinator's Corner

It feels like summer comes sooner every year! As Virginia reopens, it's a great time to get outside, enjoy some of our favorite activities, and try some new ones. No matter where you are, there are great opportunities to enjoy safe walking, bicycling, and physical activity.



In this newsletter, we'll share some fun things you and your family can do to get the most out of this summer. Next, we'll visit a school in Hanover County that found an innovative way to help students cross the street, and recap this year's Bike to School Day. Finally, we'll discuss the Safe Routes to School Building Blocks, which are the foundation of our program, and look at the findings of a survey about the future of Virginia Safe Routes to School.

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

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Virginia SRTS Coordinator

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CALENDAR

JULY

Park and Recreation Month

AUGUST

10: Walkabout Mini-grant due

Friends and Faces: Amy Williams

Amy Williams is the principal at Cool Spring Elementary School in Hanover County, where there was a big shift in how students traveled to and from school once schools reopened in September. Bus ridership was down, while more people were walking and bicycling. This created a new challenge at a school that previously did not have any walkers or bikers: making sure students could do it safely.

That's when community members found an innovative solution to help students across the street. We talked to Principal Williams about how it happened.

How have travel habits changed at Cool Spring since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic?

Due to reduced bus capacity with COVID-19, we began encouraging biking and walking to school at the start of the 20-21 school year. We have over 400 students who reside within two miles of our school and over 150 who reside within one mile of our school, so there is great potential and feasibility for students to bike and walk.



At the start of the school year, we did a social media campaign to encourage biking and walking and to share safety tips and procedures. We also held Walk to School Day and Bike to School Day events, which were successful in educating our students and community and encouraging more students and families to bike and walk to school. We currently have about 60 students using these active modes to travel to school.

What are the challenges for students and families who want to walk or bike to school here?

We do not currently have sidewalks at key entry points for our bikers and walkers, and we also do not have crosswalks near the school. The sidewalks in the newer developments near the school are often not connected to one another, so a challenge has been helping our students to know the safest route to bike or walk as they navigate roads, intersections, and sidewalks. We want to work to establish better connectivity with our sidewalks and paths to improve safety and accessibility for all of our students and families.

Cool Spring found a creative solution to the missing crosswalk outside the school. Could you talk about how that came about?

We felt that it was important to keep our biker and walker "traffic" separate from our car traffic and turning lanes exiting the parking lot. We also knew that many of our students would be using the sidewalk on the opposite side of the street and then cross over the road to our school grounds.

It was evident that we needed something to clearly mark a safe place for students to access

school grounds. We also worked with our county's transportation department to secure a crossing guard to assist our bikers and walkers with safely crossing Honey Meadows Road in front of the school. With this being the first year we have had bikers and walkers, the visual of safety fencing and the crossing guard also helped students and parents understand our new procedures for arrival and dismissal.

Cool Spring Elementary School applied for a QuickStart mini-grant to pay for the materials for walking and bicycling improvements. What was that like?

We partnered with parents and members of Bike Walk Hanover to identify immediate needs that would enhance safety for our students who choose to bike and walk to school, and to submit the grant. We were able to purchase safety fencing, crossing signs, crossing flags, and signage to alert drivers to our bikers and walkers. We also used the funding to purchase an additional bike rack to increase our capacity for bike parking.



This fencing directs students to a place where they can safely cross the street.



Students walking and bicycling during dismissal at Cool Spring Elementary School.

Do you think students will continue to walk and bike to school once social distancing restrictions are lifted? What's the school doing to encourage walking and bicycling in the future?

Biking and walking have gained a lot of momentum with our students and families this year. We know that students will continue to use these alternative methods of transportation to and from school, as many have shared how much they enjoy the time with their family and friends and how they feel biking and walking benefit them. Parents love not waiting in our car line!

We plan to hold annual Bike to School and Walk to School days to encourage more families to participate. Additionally, we are pursuing grants for infrastructure improvements that will improve safety and accessibility, which will also encourage more families to bike and walk. Finally, once COVID restrictions are lifted, we will explore ways to unite communities such as walking school buses.

A New Framework for SRTS

Virginia SRTS has created a new framework to help you build your local program! Like you, it's goal-oriented, with the ultimate goal of helping more students to safely walk and bicycle to school. It has five building blocks:

1. Equitable and Sustainable Program
2. Safe Streets
3. Welcoming Campuses
4. Safe Behaviors
5. Supportive Culture

Equitable and Sustainable Program is the most important of these building blocks, and the foundation for your program. It helps you evaluate and build support for your program so it can continue from year to year.

It also ensures that the program is equitable and takes proactive steps to reach out to and benefit students who are Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC), students with disabilities, students from low-income households, and other disadvantaged groups.

[Click here](#) to learn about the other building blocks and how they can help you think about program priorities and activities.



Fun Summer Activities

Summer vacation isn't just the end of the school year - it's the start of a time of great possibilities for enjoying the outdoors and getting some physical activity. Here are a few suggestions for fun things you can do this summer in Virginia:

Go for a walk! It might sound simple enough, but you can see a lot while walking or rolling. You can [take a nature walk](#) and learn about plants, insects, and the world around you. Or you can [practice mindful walking](#), a great way to de-stress after a long school year. Before heading out, check out WalkArlington's [advice on how to stay cool](#) and safe while walking this summer.

Visit a new trail. Virginia has lots of great places to hike or bike this summer. [Our coordinators' favorites](#) include the Belle Isle Pump Track in Richmond, the New River Trail in Galax, Hampton's Buckroe Beach, and the Key-Chain Bridge Loop in Arlington.

Practice safe bicycling. Whether you're exploring a new place or staying close to home, it's always a great time to practice safe bicycling habits. iCan Bike has [helpful tips for selecting the right bike and making sure that your helmet fits properly](#).



Bike to School Day Recap

After celebrating Walk to School Day Any Way You Can last fall, students and families across Virginia took our 2021 Bike to School Day (BTSD) slogan, "Let's Roll With It" to heart! Statewide, there were 173 registered BTSD events, which represents 14% of all BTSD events in the United States. From Northern Virginia to Hampton Roads and the Southside, students and families found opportunities to bike wherever they could, whether to school or within their communities.

Each participating school will get a Bike to School Day decal, and to help us remember these strange and challenging times, we've created a special edition 2021 decal with a mask.

We hope you enjoy these photos from BTSD events around Virginia. While Bike to School Day has passed, remember that every day is a chance to enjoy biking and to promote safe walking and bicycling in your community!



Cora Kelly School, Alexandria



Keister Elementary School, Harrisonburg



McNair Upper Elementary School, Herndon

Strategic Plan Survey Results

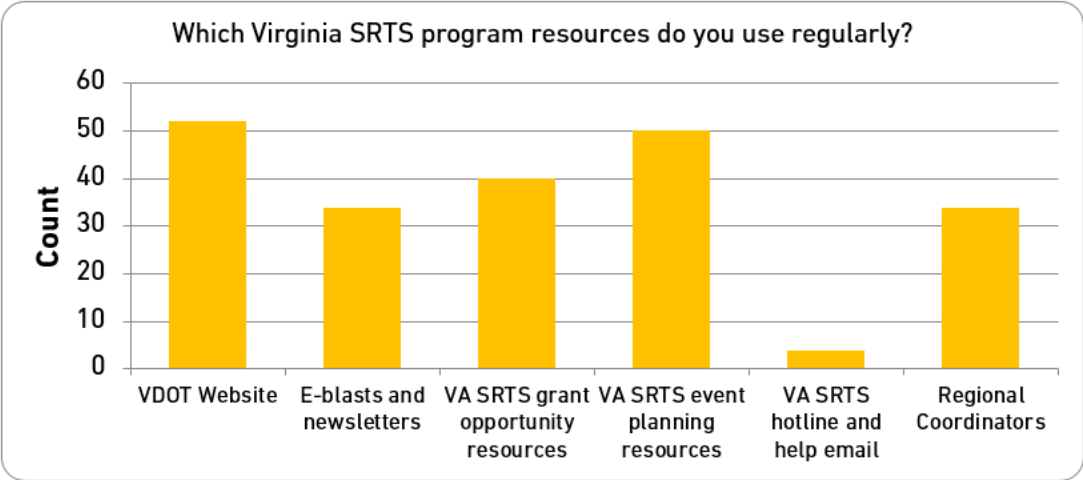
Virginia SRTS is planning for the next five years in our Strategic Plan. As we look to the future, we want to ensure that the program reflects the strengths and needs of local implementers. To better understand the value of existing resources and the level of support for local SRTS programs, we distributed an online survey in February and March of 2021. Here's what we heard from the 138 respondents.

Survey respondents came from a variety of backgrounds. The majority were local or state government employees, school employees, or private citizens/advocates. Nearly 28% have been involved with SRTS for 0-3 years, and 35% have been involved for 3-7 years. Most respondents (62%) characterized their communities as suburban.

Virginians involved in SRTS make use of the statewide resources. When asked to select program resources that they use regularly, survey respondents selected the program website, event planning resources, and grant opportunity resources most often.

Level of support out of 5 stars	
Local government	3.7
Parents	3.5
School administrators	3.8
School board	3.5
Teachers	3.7

Local SRTS programs have significant support from the broader community. Survey respondents were asked to rate support from various groups from 1 to 5 stars, 5 being the most support. Support for SRTS from local government, parents and caregivers, school administration, school board, and teachers was rated an average of 3.6 stars. School administrators were rated the most supportive, at 3.8 stars.

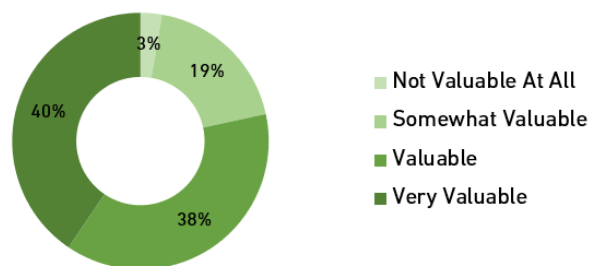


Have you ever thought about applying for one of the Virginia SRTS Mini-grants? Take it from past grant awardees that both opportunities are worthwhile.

About 40% of respondents that received Walkabout Mini-grant rated the grant as "very valuable," and 38% rated them as "valuable." For QuickStart Mini-grant awardees, 63% indicated that the grant was "very valuable."

Overall, we heard that Virginia SRTS is a valuable program, and the recommendations in the draft Strategic Plan continue to provide support for local SRTS programs. The plan will be presented to the Commonwealth Transportation Board in an effort to secure additional funding for the program. Many thanks to those of you who took the Strategic Plan survey and encouraged others to take it, too!

Walkabout Mini-Grant Awardees: How valuable was the grant?



QuickStart Mini-Grant Awardees: How valuable was the grant?

