



City Safe Routes to School Workshop Chicora Elementary School, North Charleston, SC

**January 15, 2009
9 am to 12:30 pm**

The following are recommendations for improving student safety at Chicora Elementary School. The primary beneficiaries of the suggested safety improvements are the walkers and bikers at Chicora; neighborhood residents will also experience improvements in measures of safety and livability.

The City Safe Routes to School workshop was open to the general public, and invitations were issued to specific individuals, as well as groups and organizations. South Carolina's Safe Routes to School Coordinator was in attendance. The workshop was arranged by the Berkeley-Charleston-Dorchester Council of Governments (BCDCOG), and facilitated by Mark Plotz and Gary MacFadden from the Active Living Resource Center (ALRC).



The workshop was divided into four parts:

1. Welcome and audience member introductions.
2. A PowerPoint presentation by Mark Plotz on Safe Routes to School best practices and common barriers.
3. A walking audit of the school zone and surrounding neighborhood led by Mark Plotz and Gary MacFadden.
4. Group reflections on the audit and discussion of next steps towards starting a Safe Routes to School program at Chicora ES.

The goal of the workshop was to identify steps that can be taken to improve safety for Chicora's walkers and bikers. The recommendations that follow are based on the observations and suggestions of the workshop participants.

Recommendations

1) Host a Walk to School Day. Chicora ES has a very high percentage of its students walking to school—a fact that should be celebrated. Walk to School Day will be celebrated on October 8, 2009.

A Walk to School event provides a good opportunity to reach students and parents on the subject safety. It is the ALRC's observation that the conversation about walking and biking safety needs to happen as soon as possible at Chicora; it is our recommendation that the school to hold a walking event in the spring. Earth Day is a popular choice for schools wanting to do a walking event in the spring.

Several schools in North Charleston participated in the 2008 Walk to School Day. They are:

- Dunston Elementary School
- A.C. Corcoran Elementary School
- Hunley Park Elementary School
- Eagle Nest Elementary School

Contacts for these schools can be found at this URL:

<http://www.walktoschool.org/who/seestate-lastyear.cfm?st=SC>

Information on planning a Walk to School Day can be found at this URL:

<http://www.walktoschool.org/index.cfm>

2) Initiate Neighborhood Service Projects

A) Neighborhood Cleanup. While on our walking audit we encountered streets with no sidewalks; sidewalks that were overgrown with vegetation; sidewalks that were broken or missing sections; and a noticeable amount of litter and broken glass. At Chicora, the students are responsible for keeping their schoolyard clean; this sense of ownership has proved powerful disincentive for littering in the school yard.

Answering the problem of neighborhood litter with a student-led neighborhood cleanup, may produce a similar positive peer pressure on residents. Remarkd one workshop participant:

“The school is a part of the neighborhood. There needs to be more integration between the city and school. There needs to be ongoing monitoring of the routes to the school. Kids can be a powerful reminder to adults of good behavior.”

In the event of a neighborhood cleanup, it was suggested that the weight of the trash collected be reported in the school's newsletter. Students and residents could use that number as a benchmark for monitoring future cleanups. The Crossing Guard Supervisor mentioned that she has orange safety vests available for use during a cleanup.

B) Neighborhood Walking Audit. The goal of the audit would be twofold:

- 1) identification of good walking routes for students, and
- 2) cataloging problems for the City of North Charleston to address. The Berkeley-Charleston-Dorchester Council of Governments has considerable expertise on conducting walking audits, and has assisted other schools in North Charleston with winning SRTS grants.

C) Get students involved. Metanoia's youth march for neighborhood traffic calming demonstrates how effective youth can be when they are engaged in an issue. Fifth graders are very capable of helping out with a walking audit. Students should be solicited for their ideas on other destinations where they would like to walk or bicycle. (Both fifth graders we interviewed mentioned a lack of places to play football and basketball.)

3) Outreach and Education. Chicora does not cover pedestrian safety or bicycle safety in its curriculum. Students (presumably) rely on their parents for this knowledge. Unfortunately, as was pointed out during our workshop, parents either do not understand walking/bicycling safety, or they model poor behavior for their children. An outreach strategy should target parents.



A) Hold a Bicycle Safety Event. Kohl's has an annual bicycle rodeo in its parking lot. The event should be noted on the school calendar.

i) Vonie has bicycle helmets to give away.
ii) The North Charleston Police Department has a bicycle team.

B) Discuss Pedestrian Safety during back to school night and during the first week of school. The National Center for Safe Routes to School is a good source for safety materials (<http://www.saferoutesinfo.org>).

C) Partner with local law enforcement to ensure a heightened law enforcement presence during the first week of school, on Walk to School Day, and when classes resume after Christmas vacation.

D) Insert bicycle and pedestrian safety tips into the school newsletter. The Active Living Resource Center has a brochure that targets parents (<http://www.activelivingresources.org/assets/bikesafety.pdf>).

4) Recognition of Crossing Guards. The Crossing Guard program run by the Charleston County Sheriff is exceptional and should be recognized. How about a Crossing Guard Recognition Day?

5) Additional ideas for consideration.

A) Bicycle Parking. Currently, Chicora has no bicyclists—a fact that can be directly traced to the school's lack of a bicycle rack. A second challenge is that most students (presumably) do not own locks to secure their bicycles. Vonie Gilreath (BCDCOG) has pledged to make an effort to get a bicycle rack for the school. Another option would be the creation of a fenced-in bicycle corral that would hold yet more bicycles.

B) Student Safety Patrol. Students are often used to help with arrival/dismissal. See the National Center for Safe Routes to School for case studies of how other schools are using Student Safety Patrols. (See <http://www.saferoutesinfo.org> and search for "student safety patrol".)

Participants' Reflections on the Workshop

- Lots of kids are already walking!
- How about a Community Day? We can get kids to take responsibility for their neighborhood. Getting kids to influence their parents' behavior. Using older kids to help out with a walking audit. We can put our Safe Routes efforts into a community context.
- [We should be] working more with the parents on safety issues. What about getting rain gear, and reflectors for kids? Get the PTA involved. Doing some parent training and conduct outreach through the school newsletter.
- We have a lot of unsafe areas for walking that are overgrown with trees and bushes. We should be talking to children about safety issues and bicycle safety. (School Counselor)
- Bringing back DARE? Getting North Charleston Police Department working as mentors (again).
- A stronger presence of law enforcement at arrival/dismissal.
- A special safety event at the school with outreach posters. We need a student run school safety patrol. Collect the neighborhood trash, weigh it, track the cleanups in the school newsletter.
- North Charleston may have a community day.
- The school is a part of the neighborhood. There needs to be more integration between the city and school. There needs to be ongoing monitoring of the routes to the school. Kids can be a powerful reminder to adults of good behavior.
- Next year the school will become a communications magnate school. This student-as-leaders message may fit nicely. The walking audit was eye-opening.
- Co-opting the Fifth Graders as school patrols. (They start some of the trouble.) Reinforce with the kids the job of the crossing guards. The clean-up thing works.
- Thinking about safety a few blocks beyond the campus. The walkers haven't had much attention. Adding the pedestrian/bicycling guidelines to the student handbook.
- WTSD is a great resource/opportunity. (We're going to win!) The bike safety event. Kohl's Safety Day. There is a big end-of-the-year celebration (a bike safety theme this year?).
- Lots of schools do a WTSD in conjunction with Earth Day. Saferoutesinfo.org is a great website.
- Need an official crossing guard recognition day.
- Midland Park and Hunley Park ES—both grants were written by the City of North Charleston. Stiles Point ES is having a planning workshop (President's Day)? Coming up with a plan for spending the SRTS grant (the day's goal).
- scdot.org (Community Service page) > SRTS.
- Regarding getting the kids involved in walking audits and cleanups and safety patrol... there are safety vests available. (Crossing guard supervisor)
- Vonie will try to get the school a bike rack.
- Kristin Wedding MUSC has Safe Routes to School expertise.
- Vonie has lots and lots of bike helmets at her house.
- Metanoia's student leadership program is a neighborhood resource.
- There is a School Improvement council to engage in Safe Routes to School.

Barriers and needs as noted on the walking audit

1. Sidewalks are overgrown.
2. Crosswalks are faded.
3. Trash in the neighborhood.
4. Availability of parks and athletic fields.
5. Railroad tracks.
6. Spruill Avenue is wide and fast.
7. Kids walking after dark.
8. Parents and adults are not modeling good behavior (walking and biking).

Community Resources

- Crossing guards (5 at the school).
- Neighborhood Nonprofit (organized Kids March for better traffic safety).
- AmeriCorps VISTA members.
- Great connections with... School Resource Officers, DARE, Neighborhood Resource Officers.
- North Charleston police have a bike team.
- Kohl's has a bike rodeo every year.
- There is a neighborhood association (not well attended).
- The after school program.
- Department of Health and Environmental Control. There is a B Square program. A school based program. Tree planting. No Idle Zones. Fountain Head ES was a project.
- ALRC's kids brochures: www.activelivingresources.org (library)