

2025 COLORADO SAFE ROUTES TO SCHOOL CENSUS

CONNECTING
PEOPLE AND
COMMUNITIES



PREPARED BY



COLORADO
Department of Transportation

Table of Contents

Introduction	2
Why does Safe Routes to School Matter for Colorado?	3
History and Structure of Safe Routes to School in Colorado	5
Colorado Safe Routes to School Program Landscape	7
Success Stories	16
Lessons Learned	21
Colorado’s Policy Environment for Safe Routes to School and Active Transportation	22
Conclusion	25
Appendix	26



1. Introduction

Safe Routes to School is a movement that aims to make it safer and easier for students to walk and bike to school. It is also an effective tool to help children achieve the recommended amount of daily physical activity, build social connections with their peers and neighbors, and develop habits that will last throughout their lives. In Colorado, Safe Routes to School programs can vary significantly depending on the location. Programs may be volunteer-run or staff-supported at the local or regional level. Some may run robust daily programming, while others may focus on an annual walk and bike to school day. Due to this variety, it is challenging to determine the exact number of Safe Routes to School programs in Colorado, their locations, or the number of children and communities they serve.

To capture a snapshot of Safe Routes to School programming in Colorado, the Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT) contracted with the Safe Routes Partnership in 2020 to conduct the first statewide census survey of Safe Routes to School programs. The 2020 census survey established a baseline for existing Safe Routes programs around the state, showing that there were more programs located in urban and suburban areas, with a focus primarily on one-off events, such as Walk and Roll to School Days. Now, in 2025, this update aims to assess the current state of Safe Routes to School programs in Colorado. The 2025 survey was updated based on feedback from previous participants as well as from the survey administrators from the 2020 survey. The changes were made to gather more detailed information about Safe Routes to School programs in Colorado, including their longevity, types of programming offered, funding sources, and any challenges they face. The resulting report provides an opportunity for program tracking over time.

2. Why Does Safe Routes to School Matter for Colorado?

Safe Routes to School is a movement that aims to enable and encourage safe, active transportation for children while they walk or ride their bikes to school. Colorado has always been a leader in the Safe Routes to School movement and developed a strategic plan in 2024 to guide work across the state. In the 2024 Strategic Plan, the goals of Safe Routes to School in Colorado are:

- To continue to grow the capacity of all Colorado communities related to Safe Routes to School
- Advance the Safe Routes Program to meet the diverse needs and varying capacities of Colorado communities
- Expand collaborative partnerships to advance the SRTS program

Safe Routes to School programs encourage more students to walk and roll by providing skills and safety education, creating engaging activities that get children moving together, and establishing a safer street network to support walking and rolling for the 1.5 million school-age children in Colorado, along with their families and other neighborhood residents. In addition, Safe Routes to School programs are effective in both urban and rural areas, a fact that is particularly important for the 14.5 percent of Coloradans who reside in rural areas.

Colorado does not have a statewide policy on bus service in relation to school distance. Bus service is determined by individual school districts based on factors like walking distance, student age, and specific "no transport/walk zones". For instance, Denver Public Schools (DPS) requires kindergarten through fifth-grade students to live more than one mile from their home school to be eligible for bus service, while Mesa County Valley School District 51 has a two-mile distance requirement for elementary students and three-mile distance for middle and high school students.

A. Health

While Colorado is often seen as one of the healthiest states in the nation, with comparatively low obesity rates and higher levels of physical activity among adults, there is room for improvement. Only 28.4 percent of Colorado children aged 6-13 years old meet the physical activity guidelines set by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, while the obesity rate among Colorado youth ages 10-17 is 10.6 percent. Colorado requires a minimum of 15 minutes of physical education for elementary students each day, it does not have specific time requirements for middle or high school students. In the absence of physical activity during the school day, walking and rolling to and from school can provide opportunities to incorporate physical activity into students' daily routines.

B. Safety

For many students and their families, walking or bicycling to school is not a choice but a necessity, either because they do not own a car or must share a single vehicle. In the US, households in the lowest fifth of incomes owned the fewest number of vehicles on average: one vehicle per household, compared to two or more in higher income households. Yet in many communities, active transportation is dangerous. In Colorado, between 2020 and 2025, drivers struck and killed 712 people who were walking or biking in Colorado. Of those fatalities, 36 of the people killed were 18 years of age or younger. Between 2021 and

2024, three fatalities were reported within a school zone. Nationally, since 2010, there has been a 75 percent increase nationally in the number of people killed by drivers while walking. In that same period, pedestrian deaths have more than doubled in Colorado. In 2023, 20 people were killed while bicycling, making up 2.8 percent of total traffic fatalities. In the context of Colorado's high car use, this is a significant safety issue.

Safe Routes to School projects and programs are a powerful and cost-effective way to address safety challenges. Framing active transportation work around children's safety is often compelling, and while the focus may be on the trip to school, these initiatives also improve surrounding neighborhoods and benefit people of all ages through safer street design combined with education and encouragement.

C. Academic Success

Walking and biking to school can help youth get more physical activity, which can help them perform better in school. One study found that after walking for 20 minutes, children responded to test questions with greater accuracy and had more brain activity than children who had been sitting. Children also completed learning tasks faster and more accurately following physical activity.¹ Student health has been linked to academic performance. Physically fit children have larger hippocampal volume and basal ganglia, brain components both connected with learning.

D. Lower Transportation Costs

Safe Routes to School provides low-cost options for students to get to and from school, reducing the amount of money needed for personal vehicle use and busing. Transportation is the second highest household expense in the United States after housing. Approximately 51 percent of children in the US are bused to school, and in the 2018- 2019 school year \$27.9 billion was spent on school bus transportation, an average of \$1,152 per child transported per year.

3. History and Structure of Safe Routes to Schools in Colorado

The Safe Routes to School movement launched at the national level in the United States in 2005, spurred by rising childhood obesity levels and a precipitous drop in the rates of students walking and bicycling to school. These rates dropped from 48 percent to less than 15 percent over 30 years, while rates of obesity, diabetes, and other chronic diseases grew exponentially. Colorado was the first state in the country to implement Safe Routes to School with federal dollars. While federal legislation mandated states to establish Safe Routes to School programs in 2005, Colorado legislation codified Colorado Safe Routes to School in 2004. To learn more about the history of federal support for Safe Routes to School, check out [this infographic](#).

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The Colorado Department of Transportation and Metropolitan Planning Organizations across the state receive federal Transportation Alternatives Program funds and awards money by selecting active transportation projects, including Safe Routes to School, through a competitive process open to local governments and school systems. Colorado statute also requires one full-time employee or the equivalent to support Safe Routes to School programming across the state.

Colorado recognizes Safe Routes to School as an essential transportation program and has used various forms of funding, including a one-time use of state-appropriated funds in 2014. Since 2015, the Colorado Transportation Commission has allocated \$5 million in federal Transportation Alternatives and Surface Transportation Block Grant funds per funding cycle (\$2.5 million per year) specifically for Safe Routes to School infrastructure and educational projects. Beginning in 2018, the maximum Safe Routes to School infrastructure project award increased to \$100,000, and by 2024, it had risen to \$1 million per project. Additionally, program eligibility has been expanded from K to 8th grade, now including high schools.

Cities and counties often take the lead on making Safe Routes to School infrastructure improvements near schools. Safe Routes to School practitioners run education and encouragement programs with families and schools and push for strong municipal and district policies to support safe walking and bicycling. Schools across Colorado have been active in Walk and Bike to School days, and in 2024, there were 113 registered Bike and Roll to School Day events throughout the state.

The Colorado Department of Transportation's Colorado Safe Routes to School (SRTS) Program is a federally funded aid program established to enable and encourage safe active transportation for children while they walk or ride their bikes to school. The program is part of the Main Streets and Active Transportation Section and provides technical assistance to communities, training webinars, online resources and grant funds to support local Safe Routes to School programs.

The Colorado Department of Transportation’s Safe Routes to School Program and Safe Routes Advisory Committee has developed an updated five-year strategic plan that reflects on past achievements as well as goals for the next five years. The most recent update was completed in March of 2024 and laid out an ambitious plan to advance Safe Routes to School over the next five years. The three goals for the next five years are.

- Goal One: Continue to grow the capacity of all Colorado communities related to Safe Route to School
- Goal Two: Advance the Safe Routes Program to meet the diverse needs and varying capacities of Colorado communities
- Goal Three: Expand collaborative partnerships to advance the SRTS program

Throughout the next section, CO Census survey results will be tied back to the goals and objectives laid out in the Safe Routes to School Strategic Plan.



4. Colorado Safe Routes to School Program Landscape

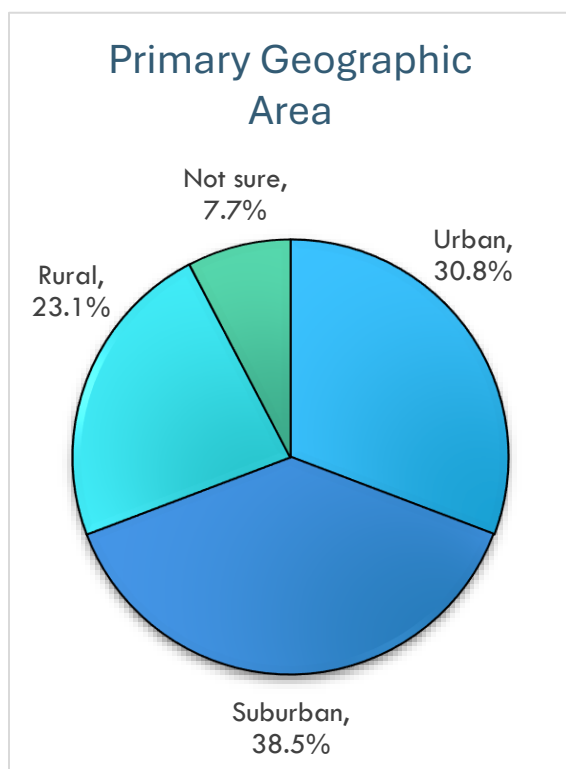
This section examines the landscape of Safe Routes to School programs in Colorado, based on responses to the 2025 Safe Routes to School Census survey and additional research on local programs.

A. Program Assessment Methodology

Information about Safe Routes to School programs in Colorado was primarily collected through an online survey hosted on Google Forms, conducted from March to May 2025. The survey instrument can be reviewed [here](#). Safe Routes Partnership shared the survey with existing Safe Routes to School contacts in Colorado and then asked survey participants to disseminate the survey link to other programs and partners. In 2025, the survey link was disseminated to people and organizations potentially affiliated with Safe Routes to School initiatives in Colorado through a wide range of direct and indirect outreach including emails from the Safe Routes Partnership listserv sent to all people who identified Colorado as their home state and emails from CDOT to their statewide listserv; inclusion in the Safe Routes Partnership, CDOT, and other partner organization's newsletters; messaging in the Safe Routes to School Google Group; direct contact by CDOT and the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE); webpage postings; and social media. Safe Routes Partnership encouraged respondents to forward the survey to peers or other interested parties.

The Safe Routes Partnership conducted more targeted outreach in early and mid-May 2025 to connect with contacts and gather any additional information about their programs. This included emails from the Safe Routes Partnership and CDOT, as well as social media. Further information about existing Safe Routes to School programs, as well as state practices and support, was gathered through conversations with CDOT staff and review of the CDOT Safe Routes to School Strategic Plan. Data from the survey were compiled and analyzed to identify the locations of programs, trends, similarities, differences, and other varying characteristics among programs. This report includes an analysis of the collected data to provide a broad overview of current trends in Safe Routes to School programs in Colorado.





B. Overview

The 2025 Colorado Safe Routes to School (SRTS) Census presents a snapshot of how communities across the state are enabling children to walk and bike safely to school. 26 programs responded to this version of the survey, up from the 16 program participants in the 2020 survey, and it was conducted with broad participation from rural, suburban, and urban programs.

The data from the 2025 CO SRTS Census reveal both encouraging momentum for programs around the state and common barriers that communities face. Many programs (particularly in suburban and urban areas) report high participation in Walk to School Day (69 percent) and Bike to School Days (77 percent), along with increasing engagement in student education (54 percent) and advocacy for infrastructure changes (62 percent). Yet challenges persist, written comments about program funding, staffing capacity, and school district engagement were particularly prevalent in the 2025 SRTS Census.

The 2025 CO SRTS Census responses underscore the importance of enhancing access through strategic planning and targeted programming. Programs serving Title I schools or culturally diverse populations reported that they need tailored outreach and culturally responsive engagement but often do so without additional funding or technical support.

The following sections provide insight into various aspects of Safe Routes to School programs throughout Colorado. Exciting work is happening, and building on existing community enthusiasm will ensure that every child in Colorado has the opportunity to walk and bike to school safely and confidently.

C. Urban, Suburban, Rural, and Frontier Context

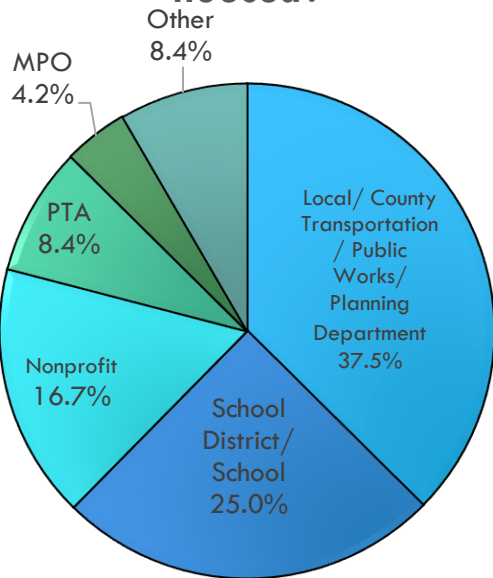
Colorado has a unique variety of geography and community types that necessitate flexible programming and funding options. Whether dense urban neighborhoods or rural mountain communities, kids deserve options for getting physically active on their way to and from school. Understanding where people are working on Safe Routes to School can help shed light on the unique needs of programs in each context and help the state program better respond to needs across the state. Colorado designates urban, suburban, rural, and frontier communities. For the purpose of this survey, respondents were provided with six options: urban, suburban, rural, frontier, tribal community, and unsure.

In the 2025 CO SRTS Census survey, 70 percent of respondents indicated that their programs serve suburban or urban areas, while 23 percent serve rural areas (6 percent said they were uncertain how their community was categorized). In 2020, just 13 percent of survey respondents came from rural

communities. This change could be attributed to higher participation in the 2025 survey or growing rural Safe Routes to School efforts (and people identifying their work with “Safe Routes to School”). The rural program representation in census responses underscores the importance of supporting strategies that address common needs in rural communities where long distances, low density, limited sidewalks, and seasonal weather can significantly impact student mobility. This can come in the form of winter walk and bike to school days or creating spaces like traffic gardens for children to practice their bike skills. Funding opportunities should be flexible enough to allow for investments that consider the rural context and the programming that can be helpful and successful. Several rural programs noted that schools were located on or near highways, creating barriers to walking and biking, even when student interest was high. One rural respondent noted, “The distance and speed limits around our schools are dangerous, but students still try to walk and bike. We need [infrastructure that helps with] visibility...and enforcement.” These differences affirm the need for geographically responsive program models and flexible funding approaches that account for the realities of rural communities.

In urban areas, respondents reported better access to infrastructure such as sidewalks, crosswalks, and transit, yet still highlighted major concerns about speeding traffic and inconsistent driver behavior near schools. They also report a lack of staff capacity at the municipal level, permit timing, and costs for infrastructure changes and programmatic improvements. In addition, respondents from urban and suburban communities report that winter maintenance and snow storage can create safety issues along sidewalks and roadways. In contrast, rural respondents noted a greater dependence on volunteerism due to a lack of staff capacity and funding for dedicated staff. In addition, due to their lower density, people in rural communities typically have limited public transportation options, as well as inadequate infrastructure to support active transportation options. Suburban programs also face the challenge of longer travel distances in neighborhoods that were not designed for walking and biking. This geographic diversity presents both unique challenges in program design, delivery, and sustainability, and there are opportunities to target specific assistance, resources, and state-wide learning to support communities.

Where is your program housed?



D. Program Structure and Staffing

Colorado's Safe Routes to School programs operate with various program and staffing structures, tailored to the unique resources, population, and partnerships in each community. This diversity also comes with challenges. Without a standardized system, many programs may operate in isolation from one another. Several respondents described a sense of "starting from scratch," even when nearby communities had already developed robust programs. This highlights a broader need for regional coordination and cross-community sharing, enabling Colorado communities to learn from one another and build on what works well-

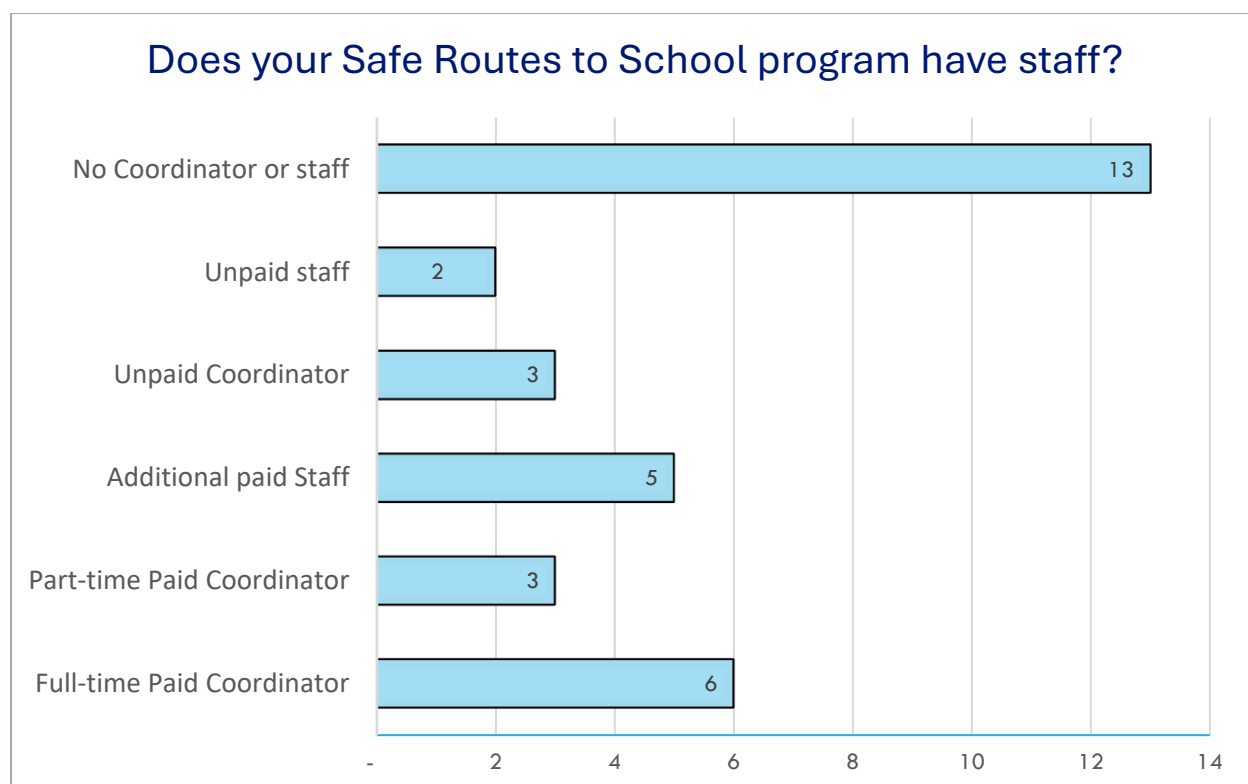
Sponsoring Agency

Safe Routes to School programs are typically nested within a larger organization like a city, school district, or nonprofit. Each of these sponsoring agencies has its own strengths and challenges, so it is helpful for the state program to understand the variety of sponsoring agencies and assess

where support would be most helpful. Based on the 2025 CO SRTS Census, 37.5 percent of respondent programs operate within municipal transportation or public works departments, 25 percent are housed in school districts, and the rest are led by regional planning agencies, nonprofits, or grassroots parent coalitions. This variety in sponsoring agencies reflects both the creativity and complexity of Colorado's Safe Routes landscape and is important to consider when planning future statewide supportive programming. The Safe Routes to School Strategic Plan's Goal Three states: *Expand on collaborative partnerships to advance programming*. By focusing on this at both the state and local level, programming can get the support necessary to grow, even without traditional support or funding.

Staffing

Staff and volunteers dedicated to Safe Routes to School efforts help programs thrive. This can be a paid staff position within the sponsoring agency or added to an existing staff person's responsibility. During the 2020 survey, more than half of respondents had full or part-time staff dedicated to Safe Routes to School programming. During the 2025 survey, the number of programs with paid staff has dropped with more than half of the survey respondents (52 percent) saying they operate without a formal Safe Routes to School coordinator. Just 8 percent of programs reported having full-time staff dedicated to the work, and another 8 percent had a full-time coordinator with supporting staff. Nearly one in four programs reported having no dedicated funding to support Safe Routes to School efforts and relied solely on volunteer support.



Working without dedicated, full-time staffing can be challenging. Programs run by part-time or volunteer leaders may struggle to maintain momentum, sustain programming, or expand to new schools. One rural respondent shared, “It’s just me. I run this program off the side of my desk.” Another added, “We are fully volunteer-run. It feels unsustainable.” These reflections reveal the personal dedication behind many programs, as well as the challenge of relying on unpaid or overstretched staff. This staffing disparity is especially acute in smaller and rural communities. Many reported that a single individual must coordinate across multiple schools, or even across county lines. This limits community engagement and their ability to respond to student needs or infrastructure gaps.

“We are fully volunteer-run. It feels unsustainable.”

Programs that have access to full-time coordinators or sustained funding tell a different story; they can engage in long-term visioning, deeper school partnerships, and make sustained and steady progress. In this way, staffing can significantly impact the success of local programs.

Task forces

One way to build structural support and sustainability for programs is to establish a task force, steering committee, or core working group. 28 percent of local program respondents indicated that their program has a task force of some kind. This is down from the 40 percent of respondents from the 2020 survey. This decrease shows that there is work to do to help the other 72 percent of programs develop a task force, advisory team, or other Safe Routes to School committee. This Colorado community

engagement toolkit, [Working Together to Make Meaningful Change](#) is a useful starting point for connecting with community champions and sustaining working relationships.

E. Funding

While much can be accomplished through volunteers, funding is an important part of successful Safe Routes programs. Data collected in the 2020 survey showed that 60 percent of responding programs received state or federal funding for Safe Routes to School programs. In the 2024-2025 school year, Safe Routes program budgets varied widely from no funding to \$2.7 million. 35 percent of programs shared that they received local funding, and 19 percent received state or federal grants. 31 percent of respondents shared they have no funding to support this work and depend on volunteer time. Colorado programs also depended on school funds, donations, and other grants. The funding pattern is similar to national results, where programs rely on state and federal transportation grants, followed by local funds, education funding, and donations. In the CO SRTS census survey, more than 60 percent of respondents indicated that increasing funding was a goal for the next two years of Safe Routes to School programming. These responses indicate that there is a need and desire in communities that do not have funding, and that programs could benefit from receiving funding.

The CDOT Safe Routes to School program currently provides grants for infrastructure (\$100,000 to \$1 Million per project) and non-infrastructure (\$5,000 to \$1 Million per project). Eighty-three percent of CO SRTS census respondents expressed interest in smaller grant opportunities. CDOT has successfully partnered with the CO Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE) to provide smaller grants to Safe Routes to School community of practice participants through CDPHE's quick win funding program. Communities could receive up to \$10,000 to implement a quick win project. Douglas County hosted a bike rodeo and had over 300 participants. Delta County is planning a demonstration project in Paonia to pilot safe walking and biking infrastructure. These partnerships are key to helping grow and sustain Safe Routes to School programming and align with both Goal One (*Continue to grow the capacity of all Colorado communities related to Safe Route to School*) and Goal Three (*Expand collaborative partnerships to advance the SRTS program*) that are laid out in [CDOT's Safe Routes to School Strategic Plan](#).

F. Program Activities and Community Engagement

Colorado's Safe Routes to School programs engage children, families, and communities through a wide range of creative, locally tailored activities. While Walk and Bike to School Days remain among the most popular events, many communities are expanding beyond these once-a-year celebrations to offer year-round opportunities like remote drop-off, weekly walk and roll to school days, and incentive programs for engagement, education, and encouragement.

40 percent of respondents saw an increase in students walking or biking as a result of their program. This number is up from 37 percent from the 2020 survey.

According to the 2025 CO SRTS Census, over 75 percent of respondents reported hosting community events such as walk-to-school days, safety assemblies, or bike rodeos. The most popular are Bike to School Day (77 percent) and Walk to School Day (69 percent), followed by student education in and/or outside of school (54 percent). According to data from the National Safe Routes to School Center, 157 schools participated in Walk and Roll to School Day events while 119 schools participated in Bike and Roll to School Day events in the 2024/25 school year. This is down from 2019 data. However, since 2020 (and COVID), there has been an increase in the number of events across the state. These programs serve as entry points for family engagement, particularly when they involve local partners such as school staff, police departments, and community organizations. According to survey responses, in rural areas law enforcement officers frequently play a role in delivering bike safety instruction. [The Safe Routes to School Strategic Plan](#) presents Walk and Bike to School Day as a low-barrier opportunity and is a way to continue to advance Goal One (*Continue to grow the capacity of all Colorado communities related to Safe Route to School*). Continuing to foster the growth of events like this can be the starting point for developing larger scale Safe Routes to School programs.

Which activities do Colorado Safe Routes to School programs implement or participate in?

Special Days

- 20 Bike to School Day
- 18 Walk to School Day
- 5 Earth Day Celebrations
- 2 Weekly Walk/Roll to School Day
- 3 Monthly Walk/Roll to School Day
- 1 Ruby Bridges Walk to School Day

Activities

- 15 Student Education (in or out of school)
- 13 Bike Skills Clinics/Bike Rodeos
- 8 Walk Audits
- 8 Contests and Incentives
- 7 Driver Awareness
- 4 Walking School Busses
- 4 Enforcement Activities
- 3 Remote Drop-off/Park and Walk
- 2 Bike Bus
- 1 School Streets, Bike Club, Parent and Student Advocacy



School Curricula and After-School Activities

Safe Routes to School programs are integrating walking and biking into school curricula or after-school activities. One rural high school now teaches pedestrian safety as part of its health curriculum, while several elementary schools have reported running weekly walking clubs or bike buses (group rides led by adults). These recurring activities build habits, normalize active travel, and offer joyful, safe experiences for students. Colorado has statewide Safe Routes to School curriculum developed in alignment with state standards that local programs can use. CDOT is currently updating that curriculum for 2026. This new curriculum will include core subject lessons, e-bike safety, and a bicycle and a pedestrian safety packet which can be used outside of school hours.

Out of School Activities

Some programs have started extending their reach to families outside of regular school hours. In Pueblo, a nonprofit organization collaborated with four schools to host multilingual Family Safety Nights, featuring Spanish-language presentations, helmet fittings, and law enforcement officers facilitating safety games for children. Community events not only provided critical information but also helped build trust and foster relationships in neighborhoods that are often underserved by traffic safety investments. Safe Routes to School events outside of school can foster culturally relevant engagement and empower caregivers to advocate for their children's safety.

Despite the range of activities, many programs noted that their reach is limited by staff capacity, time constraints, or turnover in school leadership. However, what these programs lack in resources, they often make up for in creativity. The diversity of programming across Colorado shows that there is no one-size-fits-all approach; some programs need to focus on remote drop-offs to include children who live too far to bike from home, while others are focused on building weekly bike trains through more urban neighborhoods.

F. Technology

Technology and data are also playing a larger role in Safe Routes programming. About 25 percent of respondents use mapping tools to identify walking routes, track travel behavior, or support outreach. A Denver-area school developed a GIS-based mobile app to help families plan routes that avoid unsafe intersections. The route planner now helps over 200 families find safer ways to get to school. The tool includes icons for crosswalks, crossing guards, and areas of concern that were identified by parents and students. All of this helps caregivers make informed choices and engage students in the process. In other communities, like the St. Vrain Valley and Boulder Valley School Districts, [Trip Tracker programs](#) reward students for walking, biking, or carpooling by issuing coupons redeemable at local businesses. They have students and staff fill out an online survey to report their monthly “Green Trips” via walking, biking, carpooling, and riding either the school bus or RTD. The Trip Tracker program in Boulder County has been operating for over 15 years and is an excellent example of how Safe Routes can support both health and economic development, engaging thousands of families and strengthening school-community relationships in the process.

G. Accessibility and Barriers

Ensuring all children can safely and comfortably walk, bike, or roll to school requires more than just sidewalks and crosswalks; it requires intentional strategies to reduce barriers that disproportionately impact families with limited financial resources, students with disabilities, English language learners, and those living in historically disinvested neighborhoods. In the 2025 Colorado SRTS Census, 40 percent of programs reported having specific outreach strategies for these populations. For comparison, in the 2019 Safe Routes to School National Census, fewer than one-third of local Safe Routes to School programs were engaging in any kind of targeted outreach or programming to encourage participation by specific groups. Eighteen percent of programs reported a focus on students with disabilities, followed by immigrants/non-English speakers (15 percent). While many programs intend to do accessible outreach and programming, they are often limited by time and staff capacity.

Barriers reported by participants are often systemic in nature. Over 70 percent of respondents identified major implementation challenges, including:

- Difficulty coordinating across school leadership changes
- Lack of administrative or custodial support during events
- Complex permitting processes for street closures or infrastructure changes
- Funding delays or rigid application timelines

One program shared that hosting a temporary School Street required 44 barricades and multiple layers of city approval. Another noted that their work paused for over a year due to a principal's retirement and the absence of an advocate within the school building. These accounts highlight the importance of institutionalizing Safe Routes programming so that it is not dependent on a single champion within the school or city.

Rural and frontier communities face unique barriers shaped by geography and limited public resources. Many lack sidewalks, marked crossings, or safe shoulders. Even basic infrastructure upgrades like signage or curb extensions can be delayed due to the required coordination with state highway departments or funding cycles that do not align with local school needs. The ongoing Colorado Safe Routes to School webinar series aims to address some of these gaps and will continue to be one important pathway to continue identifying and addressing communities' needs. Some programs have found creative ways to overcome these challenges. In one rural community, a local health department took on the role of coordinating Safe Routes to School efforts for three school districts. In another, volunteers trained in community-based planning worked with families to document "problem spots" using photo surveys. Still, these are exceptions, not the rule.

5. Success Stories

Across Colorado, inspiring examples of grassroots efforts, cross-sector collaboration, and persistent advocacy are advancing the Safe Routes to School movement despite resource constraints. These stories show the power of local leadership, community buy-in, and the ripple effects of small-scale investments.

One respondent described how a fall bike club in their rural district transformed student habits: “Thirteen students who had never biked to school before are now riding daily.” Another shared how a single walk-to-school event attracted 300 students and multiple generations of family members, turning into a community-wide celebration that spurred a broader conversation about street safety.

The following stories underscore a core lesson: when communities have the flexibility to adapt Safe Routes strategies to their local context, powerful results follow. Success grows where programs are led with empathy, tailored to local needs, and sustained by partnerships that extend beyond the school.

Stories from Colorado’s Community of Practice

Growing Safe Routes to School programming through collaboration, technical assistance, shared learning, and quick wins, the Colorado Community of Practice is a program designed as a partnership between the Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT) and communities around Colorado. CDOT contracts with Safe Routes Partnership to support this work. The goal of the program is to meet communities where they are, helping them begin or grow Safe Routes to School programming that meets the needs of their community. Working in a cohort of three communities, participants meet three times as a large group to hear about resources, tools, and funding opportunities while sharing their experiences and learning from and with the other communities. Each community involved in the 2024-2025 Community of Practice brought unique perspectives to the program.

Douglas County/Castle Rock School District



Douglas County, Colorado, with a population of 383,906, is situated between Denver and Colorado Springs along the Front Range. The county seat is located in Castle Rock. Douglas County School District is the third-largest district in the state of Colorado and continues to grow. The district participated in the Community of Practice project to learn more about building an effective safety program, including bike rodeos and in-school education for students who bike and walk to and from

school. Additionally, the growing popularity of e-bikes among students has created safety concerns that the school district aims to address.

Delta County



Delta County, Colorado, with a population of 31,746, is situated on the western slope of the Rocky Mountains. The county seat is Delta, and other rural communities include Paonia, Hotchkiss, and Cedaredge. For a rural area, there are many Safe Routes to School opportunities already happening, including a bike path and bridge infrastructure project, safety education programming, and a demonstration project. Through their Community of Practice, the Nature Connection (a nonprofit representing the Delta

County team) hopes to build out a bike fleet that can be used for county-wide safety education and bike rodeos, as well as work with the smaller communities in Delta County to identify areas of the community that could benefit from demonstration-style traffic calming projects.

Town of Rye



The Town of Rye, Colorado, with a population of 145, is located in the Greenhorn Valley of Colorado just 30 miles southwest of Pueblo. It is one of the smallest incorporated communities in the State of Colorado. As a very rural community, Rye often lacks the resources to staff full-time positions as well as update any active transportation infrastructure. Their goal in the Community of Practice project is to begin community engagement and data collection. By conducting a community survey and a community walk audit, Town leaders and staff hope to initiate conversations about what accessibility in the community entails, as well as what residents are willing to do to advance biking and walking in Rye.

Updates on 2020 Case Studies, Five Years Later

In the 2020 Colorado census and report, we highlighted three Safe Routes to School programs in Colorado with more detailed profiles. As a part of this report, we reached out to see how things are going five years later. Here are brief updates from two of the three case studies highlighted in the last report.

Boulder Valley Trip Tracker



The Boulder Valley School District Trip Tracker program is now entering its 15th year. The program works by incentivizing students and staff who choose to walk, bike, carpool, or take the bus to school. Each month, students and staff who participate in the program and report their trips receive Trip Tracker dollars that can be used like cash at dozens of local businesses, donated to their school, or donated to local non-profit

organizations. When the first CO Census was completed, the TripTracker program was present in 29 of the schools in the Boulder Valley School District. The program has experienced significant success and growth over the past five years, and is currently running at 44 of the 52 schools in the Boulder Valley School District. In the past year, there were 3,000 students participating in the program. In addition, the program is now being run in the Saint Vrain School District with seven of the 54 schools participating in the program.

Two of the program's biggest successes come from the people and partnerships that make it unique. First, there are currently 32 local businesses and organizations participating in the program as spots to redeem Trip Tracker dollars. This buy-in from the community helps Trip Tracker operate and broadcasts the community's support for biking and walking. The second major success has come from student advocacy. The high school became involved in the program after students who had previously participated in the program from elementary and middle school advocated for it to be introduced at the high school level. Safe Routes to School can build lifetime habits!

The Trip Tracker program also works as an engagement tool for the community. Each month, staff, parents, and students complete an online survey to report on their trips and receive Trip Tracker dollars. In addition to tracking trips, the survey includes a space where individuals can share the barriers they have experienced to biking, walking, or taking the bus. This opportunity has helped the Safe Routes to School program gain a deeper understanding of the community's needs, as well as the infrastructure and programs people use daily. This feedback has led to improvements at intersections and crossings as well as improvements in bus services and stops.

Denver Equity Matrix



At the time of writing the 2020 report, the City and County of Denver's (CCD) Department of Transportation and Infrastructure (DOTI) was developing a new way to prioritize transportation investments throughout the CCD to make sure investments were directed to historically marginalized communities. This prioritization effort produced Denver's first Equity Index, which was created in 2020 and is maintained by DOTI staff on an annual basis. The Equity Index uses American Community Survey Census data and traffic safety data to drive decisions for

transportation project investments.

The first Safe Routes to School project at DOTI that used the Denver Equity Matrix was the 2022 Safe Routes to School Action Plan. The Action Plan laid out two main goals for Safe Routes to School in Denver, including:

- To double the rate of students walking, biking, and rolling to school by 2026
- Zero traffic fatalities or injuries for youth, 18 or under, by 2026

The action plan identified 299 schools in the Denver Metro Area. Schools were scored based on equity, trip-distance, and safety to determine a tiered prioritization structure that would determine Safe Routes to School priority schools during the Action Plan's five-year period. Through this scoring, 108 of the 299 schools were categorized as prioritized schools for SRTS assistance. Since adopting the plan, work has progressed at approximately 32 of the 108 identified schools.

Work begins with small area "Travel Plan Studies" for individual schools prioritized in the Action Plan which identify barriers and challenges to using active transportation. The barriers and challenges are identified through a process of public outreach, existing conditions analysis, and field visits. To break down barriers for engagement, each Travel Plan Study considers language access needs and performs document translation or hires in-person interpretation to reduce barriers to participating in Safe Routes to School work. Within these travel plans, short, medium, and long-term project recommendations are developed to improve connectivity and safety around the school and local neighborhoods. These goals might include improvements like specific pedestrian crossings, new school zone speed limits, Safe Routes to School education and encouragement programs, or large-scale infrastructure projects. Once the recommendations are developed, projects are moved towards possible funding through the Capital Improvement Project process or through other programs such as the Pedestrian Crossing Program or Bicycle Programs at DOTI.

Another benefit of completing Travel Plan Studies for schools is the ability to take projects in those plans and apply for state funding. For example, Smith Elementary School received funding for intersection improvements through CDOT's Safe Routes to School program. ADA compliant curb ramps and intersection median islands were finished in spring of 2025. The Safe Routes to School program focused

on improving the pedestrian infrastructure and the other programs at DOTI worked on improving bike lanes around the school. This is a good example of how successful and well-thought-out planning can lead to infrastructure improvements that align with a Safe System Approach around schools in Denver. A Safe System approach means that Denver makes safety the highest priority for all investments. It recognizes that people make mistakes and anticipates them by designing and managing to decrease the likelihood of severe injuries or death.

To help track progress and show impact, DOTI is also in the process of developing an evaluation program for the Safe Routes to School program. As a part of all Travel Plan Studies, traffic data collection (turning movement counts, vehicle speeds and volumes, pedestrian counts) is included in the contract and required to better inform recommendations. The goal of creating an evaluation program is to justify the need for funding as well as tracking data to show both the short and long-term impact of these safety projects. At the end of the day, DOTI staff report that both the Equity Index and the Safe Routes to School Action Plan have significantly advanced efforts in schools with limited resources and infrastructure.

6. Lessons Learned

The 2025 Colorado Safe Routes to School Census revealed not only what programs are doing, but also what they have learned along the way. Across diverse geographies and program sizes, several themes emerged that can inform future planning and investment.

1. **Relationships are foundational.** Programs that thrive tend to have strong partnerships with school administrators, teachers, parents, and local agencies. They are also typically bolstered by a task force or core working group. Turnover in school leadership was cited as a major disruption; maintaining multiple champions across staff levels and in a working group is a strategy to build resilience and longevity.
2. **Small wins build momentum.** Events like Walk to School Day often serve as gateways to broader engagement. Even when budgets are tight, programs reported that consistent, joyful activities increased visibility and community support. They can also build momentum for more frequent, larger-scale programming.
3. **Intention and investment ensure broader reach.** Programs that prioritized outreach to historically underserved groups emphasized the need for translated materials, staff training, and partnerships with trusted community leaders. These efforts were often limited by time and funding.
4. **One size does not fit all.** The diversity of program structures and geographic contexts means flexibility is key. Rural programs and communities with historically underserved groups in particular need tailored support because what works in a metro area or for well-resourced communities may not translate elsewhere.
5. **Data drives advocacy.** Several programs used surveys, travel tallies, and mapping tools to build the case for crosswalks, signage, and street design changes. Data helped shift conversations from anecdote to action.

These lessons are not just reflections; they serve as guideposts for how Safe Routes to School can expand its reach, relevance, and resilience across Colorado.

7. Colorado's Policy Environment for Safe Routes to School and Active Transportation

A crucial part of Colorado's ability to create an environment that is safe and supportive for students walking and bicycling to school is the state policy environment. Safe Routes Partnership's [Making Strides: 2024 State Report Cards on Support for Walking, Biking, and Active Kids and Communities](#) provides an overview of Colorado's general policy landscape and commitment to Safe Routes to School and active transportation.



OVERALL SCORE
172 / 200

Colorado's overall card score was a whopping 172 out of 200 points, putting it in the "Building Speed" category, the highest possible scoring category.

This is an increase of 42 points from 2020. This score demonstrates that Colorado has taken meaningful steps to support walking, bicycling, Safe Routes to School, and active communities. Even with this high score, there are still areas where Colorado can improve. Below, we describe how Colorado performed on Safe Routes to School-related policy indicators reviewed in the State Report Cards and note other relevant Colorado policies.

A. Complete Streets and Active Transportation Policies, Planning, and Design

A Complete Streets policy sets out a state's commitment to routinely design, build, and operate all streets to enable safe use by everyone, regardless of age, ability, or mode of transportation. The Complete Streets indicator in the State Report Cards evaluates whether the state is taking effective action to support a safe and robust walking and biking network, with a particular emphasis on the quality of the state's Complete Streets policy. Colorado received almost all the available points for this section, benefiting from the fact that the state has adopted Complete Streets policies in both the state legislature and at the Department of Transportation.

The state adopted a statewide bicycle and pedestrian plan in 2012 which included goals to increase walking and bicycling mode share (but lacks a numerical goal). This creates a strong foundation for active transportation improvements. At the time of writing this report, the draft Active Transportation Plan (an update to the 2012 Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan) is currently underway and does include a goal that by 2037 20 percent of total trips in Colorado will be using an active mode such as walking or bicycling.

B. Federal and State Active Transportation Funding

The Federal and State Active Transportation Funding indicators examine the amount of money a state allocates to local jurisdictions for projects and programs that promote safe walking and bicycling, as well as the state's prioritization of high-need communities. This includes federal funds that the state is charged with administering, such as Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) funding, as well as additional state funding.

In the latest edition of the State Report Card, Colorado received 77 out of 80 possible points in this section (in 2022, Colorado earned 47 out of 75 possible points). Since 2022, the state has retained its TAP funding by not transferring it to other programs. The state has also held at least one TAP competition, awarded at least eight years' worth of funding, and obligated over 80 percent of state-controlled TAP funds. Colorado provides special considerations for high-need communities in TAP awards as well as support for communities during the application process. The TAP application considers whether projects enhance transportation equity (10 out of 100 points) and bases that on whether it is located in a [Disproportionately Impacted Community](#) using the [EnviroScreen mapping application](#). In addition, Colorado is now leveraging Highway Safety Improvement Program funds and their state Multimodal Transportation and Mitigations Options Fund (MMOF) to help offset the match for TAP projects focused on safety. This earned additional points in the 2024 report cards. Colorado is one of only five states taking advantage of the opportunity to use HSIP as match for TAP, a federal funding flexibility that supports both mobility and safety. For Safe Routes to School grants, communities can receive 100 percent funding for projects if they qualify using a modified version of the thoroughly researched the Multimodal Transportation and Mitigations Options Fund (MMOF) matrix. The additional match funding comes from toll credits. Colorado is setting an example for how states can help local jurisdictions access federal funds!

In addition to federal TAP funding, Colorado has dedicated state funding for active transportation. Colorado dedicates \$2.93 of state dollars per capita to active transportation.

While Safe Routes to School is primarily funded with federal dollars, when state funding is used, it comes from State Highway Funds. With State dollars, Colorado has also funded an e-bike rebate program, Revitalizing Main Street programs, and other walking and biking incentive-based programs. This funding surpasses what is typical in other states, giving Colorado real cause to celebrate its Safe Routes to School efforts.

C. Safe Routes to School Funding and Supportive Practices

Funding

These indicators look at whether the state prioritizes funding and support for Safe Routes to School infrastructure improvements and programs. The Colorado Transportation Commission dedicates \$5

million per two-year funding cycle (\$2.5 million per year) for both infrastructure projects as well as education and encouragement to support Colorado Safe Routes to School. In 2025, the program had \$7 million in federal funds to award to infrastructure and non-infrastructure projects (the additional funding came from leftover funds in previous years). Additionally, Safe Routes to School infrastructure projects are eligible for TAP competitions through Metropolitan Planning Organizations (regional coordinating entities in large metropolitan areas). The Colorado Safe Routes to School program does not fund planning grants, but they are available through other programs such as Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ) and Surface Transportation Program (STP).

Supportive Practices

The following Safe Routes to School Supportive Practices indicators look at what state DOTs are providing in terms of support and technical assistance to schools and local governments to further advance Safe Routes to School initiatives, beyond funding. Colorado currently has one full-time equivalent (FTE) consultant staffing the Safe Routes to School program. State Safe Routes to School coordinators and other staff play a crucial role in ensuring that Safe Routes to School funding is accessible, facilitating communication between school systems and transportation professionals, and providing technical assistance to schools and communities. Colorado also has a [state Safe Routes to School Strategic Plan](#) that outlines goals and directions for funding and programming within the state. This dedication to strategic planning for Safe Routes to School helps bring more projects to life while expanding the network across the state.

School Siting and Design

School Siting and Design includes state policies and guidance regarding the location of schools, as well as the design features that support students' safe walking and biking to school. Colorado does not have large school site minimum acreage guidelines or requirements that can be detrimental to creating opportunities for kids to walk and bike to school. Colorado's state school siting guidelines do contain criteria that encourage consideration of walking, biking, and Safe Routes to School in school siting and design. Specifically, the guidelines encourage school sites that safely separate pedestrian and vehicular traffic, coordinate with the municipality or county to provide for adequate signage, traffic lights, and crosswalk signals, provide well-maintained sidewalks and a designated safe path leading to the school entrance(s), and provide bike access and storage. There are currently no incentives for schools to be located near parks or other community facilities, and no guidelines for maximum school site acreage or minimum outdoor play or physical activity space.

8. Conclusion

The 2025 Colorado Safe Routes to School Census paints a compelling picture of a growing, evolving movement committed to making active travel safer, more inclusive, and more accessible for students across the state. Despite the challenges of limited staffing, geographic isolation, and systemic barriers, communities are responding with creativity, commitment, and a shared belief in the power of Safe Routes to School.

Programs are expanding not just in number but in depth. They are building stronger partnerships, incorporating culturally relevant engagement strategies, and demonstrating measurable increases in student participation. From volunteer-led bike trains in rural towns to school-based mapping apps in metro areas, this moment reflects the rich diversity of Colorado's Safe Routes to School community.

The insights shared through this Census offer a roadmap for sustaining and scaling these efforts. They highlight the need for stable and increased funding, regional coordination, inclusive resources, and policy reforms that match local passion with statewide support. In addition, the 2025 CO Census will help to move forward the current Safe Routes to School Strategic Plan while informing future updates.

As Colorado looks ahead, one truth stands out: when we invest in Safe Routes to School, we invest in the daily well-being, confidence, and opportunity of our youth. The movement is growing in Colorado; it simply needs the tools to thrive.

Appendix

Policy and Practice Recommendations

The 2025 Colorado Safe Routes to School Census shows strong interest in Safe Routes to School across the state. To grow and sustain this work, programs need guidance, funding, engagement, and clear policies. The following needs were identified by survey responses:

- Expand programming to reach more students and schools (40 percent)
- Strengthen outreach for historically underserved groups (31 percent)
- Increase funding opportunities (62 percent)
- Reach more students at each school (46 percent)

By working at the state, regional, and local levels, Safe Routes to School can continue to grow to become an important part of the day-to-day operations of school districts around the state. Based on these survey responses as well as the Safe Routes Partnership's experience working with programs nationwide, we recommend the following actions.

1. Expand state funding and support smaller-scale funding opportunities (mini-grants and quick-win funding).

Funding is essential for growing and sustaining Safe Routes work. One third of the 2025 CO SRTS Census respondents indicated that they receive no funding to run Safe Routes to School programming. Additionally, more than 60 percent of respondents indicated that increasing funding was a goal for the next two years of Safe Routes to School programming. These responses indicate that there is a need and desire in communities that do not have funding, and that programs could benefit from receiving funding. To expand on the work that has already been done in partnership with CDPHE's quick-win funding, consider the following opportunities:

- Create a low-barrier mini-grant or “quick-win” program (grants could be \$1,000–\$5,000) to seed walking school buses, student safety patrols, encouragement events, bike racks, and other quick wins. This can help new or under-resourced Safe Routes efforts expand their programming and build momentum for larger funding opportunities in the future. Eighty-three percent of respondents expressed interest in this strategy.
- Sustain and increase competitive grants for local programs, with awards scaled to the project type. Prioritize rural and under-resourced communities in accordance with current state guidance.
- Provide clear information about what activities or progress reporting is required of CDOT grant recipients so that applicants can assess their own capacity when deciding to apply. Help communities understand and manage the administrative burden of grant funds and compliance. Help them understand early on whether a grant will be manageable with their existing capacity to meet the grant award expectations if their project is awarded.
- Provide training and resources to help communities identify other opportunities for supporting Safe Routes to School work. Share funding opportunities scaled to project size and timeline.
 - Spotlight what other Colorado communities have already successfully done to help fund and sustain Safe Routes to School Programs.
 - Highlight successful partnerships and connections with public health, local foundations, health systems, and economic development.

2. Strengthen technical assistance and regional coordination

CDOT's Safe Routes to School Program is an established source for information and funding, so building on their technical assistance support is an opportunity to address the most common barriers faced by Safe Routes to School programs.

- Leverage the state technical assistance team (contracted or CDOT staff) to coach communities through permitting, traffic engineering reviews, and public works timelines. This will complement the existing application and program development assistance.
- Fund regional or shared coordinators (part-time or full-time), especially in rural areas. A shared staff model can reduce administrative burden and support multiple districts.
- Provide sample templates and access to consultants or CDOT advisors who are familiar with Safe Routes to School strategies. Coach programs on how to effectively recruit and leverage local task forces to build momentum and sustainability. Provide templates and office hours for plans, applications, MOUs, and school partnership agreements.

3. Build Colorado-focused training and resources.

There is an opportunity to strategically build on existing program offerings to meet specific needs across the state. 57 percent of program respondents indicated interest in training on particular topic areas and 52 percent are interested in a community of practice.

- Continue offering regular webinars, newsletters, program highlights, and add a periodic in-person learning event. Prioritize topics requested in the survey:
 - How to start a Safe Routes program
 - Building community partnerships to grow and sustain Safe Routes
 - Remote drop-off and safe routes to bus stops
 - Moving from one-day events like Walk or Bike to School Day to more regularly scheduled activities like walking school buses and bike trains
 - Rural strategies like pairing Safe Routes with busing, wildlife concerns, and ways to promote safe walking and bicycling when infrastructure is limited
 - Practical guidance on data collection, tracking, and evaluation
- Build a Safe Routes to School starter kit tailored to Colorado communities
- Nurture a state-wide learning community. Build out statewide support and collaborative sharing for Safe Routes to School practitioners. This could build on the first round of community of practice (CoP) and include not only CoP communities but also educational opportunities where CoP participants share successes, challenges, and next steps with districts and communities across the state.

4. Set statewide metrics and publish ongoing data.

Data is important not only to track the success and change in programs but is also an important piece of successfully advocating for funding, policy change, and community engagement. Questions on the SRTS Census about walking and biking counts highlight a gap in available data, when asked about the percentage of students currently walking or biking 35 percent of respondents answered "Don't know/Not sure." One comment mentioned that mode share is difficult to measure because of low survey participation.

- Collect and publish participation and safety data, including differences by geography and demographics. The strategic plan has good data but is only replicated every 5 or more years so having more up-to-date data can be beneficial

5. Institutionalize evaluation and storytelling support

Storytelling is a powerful tool, whether the goal is to get more funding, build local support, convince decisionmakers, or get more kids to join events. Collecting some data before and after a project can make stories even more tangible.

- Train communities on evaluation and storytelling. Provide simple evaluation tools and short trainings for small and rural programs, including before-and-after templates and quick surveys to help programs track their impact and tell their stories. This helps build visibility and sustain momentum.
- Create a storytelling toolkit and a rotating spotlight series to help local partners share outcomes and sustain momentum with local decision makers and funders.
- Expand communications strategy focused on encouragement that elevates Safe Routes to School around the state. Highlight successful projects and impactful programming; track investments around the state; and encourage local and state officials to celebrate Walk and Bike to School Days and other regular events.

6. Be a resource for Safe Routes in local policy and planning.

Plans and policies can help build, sustain, and provide long-term support for Safe Routes to School programs. Based on the 2025 survey results, 14 respondents said that they had plans in the next two years to establish local-level policies that support and promote Safe Routes to School programming. As a state agency, CDOT does not currently take an active role in policy changes, however CDOT could be a helpful resource for presenting what has been done across the state and how Safe Routes to School plans can integrate with state goals and requirements.

- Gather examples of how Safe Routes to School is integrated into local school, transportation, and health policies from a variety of community types across Colorado and share for public use.
- Provide guidance for how local Safe Routes to School policies can meet both local and state requirements.
- Encourage integration of Safe Routes into local and regional plans (transportation, Vision Zero, comprehensive plans), including project pipelines and maintenance practices.