

Putney Central School Establishes Safe Routes to School Program

Five years ago Putney Central School in Vermont organized a school health action committee. In the beginning, this committee implemented a variety of wellness related programs, a couple of which incorporated walking and biking to school.

For five years they had invited a trained educator to teach students about bike safety and the school organized regular Walk to School Days. In 2005, Putney Central received a grant for \$1,500 a year for two school years from the Vermont Transportation Agency. These funds were used for community meetings, surveys, and safety devices for kids such as reflectors for backpacks.

The community held meetings to gather input about Safe Routes to School. They identified that many parents enjoyed driving their children to school as it allowed them to walk with their children into school and provided them an opportunity to meet and talk with other parents and teachers. In order to accommodate the needs of parents while still encouraging children to walk and bike to school, Family Walk to School Days will be introduced during the 2007/2008 school year for six weeks at both the beginning and end of the year, with one walk each week. Since many of the students live far away, the school arranged for the parents to park in the center of town one mile south of the school, where the walk will begin. The community meetings also revealed that parents were concerned with the safety of the bus and car pick up/drop off area. Many parents felt cars that were moving in several different directions within the drop off area presented a danger for children to get to school.

Results

Walk to School Days have been so successful, that in addition to expanding the program to include families in the fall, they will expand to include a coffee hour for participating parents that follows the walk. To address the concerns of pedestrian safety in the pick-up/drop off area, the school temporarily rearranged the car and bus drop off points, to decrease the amount of traffic children had to cross to get to school. This rearrangement produced favorable results and will become a permanent change at the start of the 2007 school year.

Putney Central is also in the process of applying for federal Safe Routes To School grant money for infrastructure improvements. If received, the funds will be used for crosswalk enhancement, better signage including a beacon sign announcing a crosswalk, and the creation of sidewalks from the center of the town south of the school to the school.

For more information about how Putney's program, or how to incorporate Safe Routes to School programs in your school Contact: Pamela Corbett, Health Coordinator Phone: (802) 251-2127
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