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FACULTY OF KINESIOLOGY & PHYSICAL EDUCATION

ACTIVE SCHOOL TRAVEL STAKEHOLDER SURVEY: REPORT

May 8, 2015 ♦ Alicia Luciani, M.Sc., & Guy Faulkner, Ph.D.



Walking School Bus, Viscount Alexander PS, Ottawa
Photo Credit: Bill Blackstone

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Executive Summary

The objective of this survey was to examine the reach of Active School Travel (AST) programming in Ontario. Forty-six respondents from 28 different school boards/regions across Ontario completed the survey. Respondents' roles varied greatly in terms of active involvement in AST. Some respondents had the role of facilitating the implementation of active transportation in multiple schools, while others just provided general support on a very part-time basis. Almost half (46.5%) of respondents have delivered/supported AST programming for 5+ years. There was variation in the participation of different school boards and regions in AST initiatives, and many were at different stages of developing programs. There is a need for a systematic method of tracking schools involved in AST initiatives. There is also a high degree of variation and fluctuation in terms of the amount of staff/volunteer support based on region and school. Many respondents do conduct research and evaluation by following the Green Communities Canada (GCC) process for data collection for schools participating in School Travel Planning (STP). However, there was a consistent request for funds to support STP implementation. Sustainability of AST programs and initiatives presents a key long-term challenge, particularly without dedicated staffing and funding. Overall, findings suggest variation across Ontario in terms of AST initiatives, and a more comprehensive funding model is likely required.

- 89% of organizations provide support to AST.
- 67.5% of organizations have a local AST steering committee.
- 72% of organizations collect data on school participation in AST activities.
- 89% of organizations use and/or reference the www.saferouteschool.ca web site.
- 59% of organizations create their own AST resources and programming.
- 43% of respondents indicated that AST policies have been created in their community.
- 46% of organizations report that AST policies have created stronger stakeholder commitment to the program.

46
respondents,
representing a
wide range of
organizations,
completed
all the survey
questions

Introduction

Green Communities Canada, on behalf of the Heart and Stroke Foundation, distributed a survey in February 2015 to Ontario stakeholders. The survey included questions regarding the reach of active school travel programming in Ontario. The survey is part of a larger project that aims to encourage the creation of active school travel policies within key stakeholder groups. This larger project has funding support from the Ontario Trillium Foundation.

Methods

This survey was distributed via email to School Travel Planning (STP) steering committees including representatives from municipalities, public health units, school boards, schools, and other community stakeholders. The first constant contact email went out on February 9 to 165 email addresses, and the reminder constant contact email went out on February 23. The survey data was downloaded from the SurveyMonkey database into IBM SPSS Statistics 22 for quantitative analysis, and into an excel spreadsheet for qualitative analysis. Frequencies were run for dichotomous variables (questions that prompted a yes or no response) and for questions that were responded to using a likert scale (i.e., very useful, useful, somewhat useful, not useful, etc).

Results

Overview of Respondents

Overall, 82 people opened the first constant contact email, with 50 unique click-throughs, and 66 people opened the reminder constant contact email, with 29 unique click-throughs. In total, there were 72 unique survey respondents, representing a wide range of organizations across Ontario including but not limited to school boards and student transportation consortia, municipalities, public health, safety and enforcement agencies, and regional/county governments (See Table 1). Respondents held various titles including health promoters, Public Health Nurses, school travel advisors, and traffic/transportation analysts, all of which are listed in Table 1.

Who is Involved in AST and to What Extent?

Although all 72 respondents identified their organization, school board/region, and title, only 46 responded to the proceeding survey questions. Results are based on responses from these 46 participants. Almost all (89%) indicated that their organization delivers/provides support to AST programs such as Active & Safe Routes to School (ASRTS), School Travel Planning (STP), and Walk/Wheel to School programming. Respondents were asked to provide a brief description of the AST programming as well as their own role. Positions varied greatly in terms of involvement in AST including the facilitation, implementation, and provision of active transportation and STP at various schools within a region. Within such a role, one would provide support resources, chair all of the schools'

Doing AST programming for...

5+ years **47%**

3-5 years **24%**

0-2 years **29%**

STP committees, provide the schools with newsletter updates on the activities undertaken by the committees, use a variety of websites to gain information for the schools to use, and support events in each of the schools. Some respondents served in an advisory capacity to provide support to local schools in collaboration with the respective school board. This type of supportive role includes activities such as sending letters and flyers to parents at schools that wish to participate in AST, mapping safe walking routes, training student and parent leaders, and advocating to parent councils. While there are many respondents actively involved in AST, a few respondents are still in the initial stages of assessing local readiness for the implementation of AST initiatives.

Almost half (47%) of respondents have delivered/supported AST programming for 5+ years, while 24% have delivered it for 3-5 years and 29% for 0-2 years. There was great variation in the amount of staff/volunteers that support/deliver AST programming, as well as the extent to which those staff/volunteers are involved, and varied according to the capacity of the organization to deliver AST. In many cases, a lot of work is locally supported at the school level by various people and in different capacities/intensities. Staff often facilitate STP on a part-time basis (e.g., devote 5-10 hours per month on STP related programming), and there is fluctuation in the amount of staff and volunteer support depending on how many STP activities are currently happening. Furthermore, many of the respondents have engaged community partners. To illustrate this, one Public Health Nurse commented:

"...Difficult to estimate as various teams in public health provide a variety of supports (hands-on, print and electronic resources, stakeholder meeting support, program and policy development related...) so we have partial inputs from a number of teams to do the work across the Region (One dedicated lead staff at public health); volunteers and champions are not part of public health or the Region, however, they are crucial to the work being done at the school level."

Interesting roles that were likely unforeseen have also come forth from AST-related activities. For example, the coordinator of one program wrote:

"... We support teachers to lead extra-curricular clubs, and offer programming during class time as well. We also have one placement student contributing 100 hours of time this school year, and will be incorporating several workshop presenters to deliver about 80 workshops this calendar year, compensated at an hourly rate."

The amount of schools that participate in AST activities varies depending on the municipality and the nature of AST activities. The following response from a health promoter clearly demonstrates the variation in school involvement according to activities:

"There are 11 schools involved in an STP Pilot program which follows the 5-step process from GCC, there are 60 schools that are participating in STEPS to Active Transportation initiative where schools are supported in walk to school initiatives, and there are 42 schools participating in the Bicycle Parking Pilot Program."

Uncertainty about how many schools doing AST programming

67%
indicated their
AST program
has a local
steering
committee

Given that there are several different programs and initiatives that fall under the umbrella of AST activities, many respondents did not know how many schools participate in formal AST initiatives. A few respondents highlighted this:

"At least 40 (schools are participating in AST); however, sometimes (I) find out by chance, e.g., a news article. Schools do not always connect with the ASRTS committee, but may be doing programs on their own."

(Physical activity specialist)

"(It is) difficult to estimate as schools are involved in AST independent of public health support, some schools have Public Health Nurses supporting the ASRTS/walking activities, and some schools have STP support that is more comprehensive. Estimate of approximately 12 schools a year receive some level of STP-related support or consultation specifically. AST activities across the Region with schools has been reported in the Canada Walks Newsletter as upwards of 50 but again, public health is not aware of all schools independently carrying out these activities so the number would likely be higher."

(Public Health Nurse)

There was evidence of inconsistency in tracking the number of schools formally promoting AST in each region and this may be, as indicated by one respondent, "due to the limited staff time to do data collection (on the number of schools participating)" (School board senior planner). This suggests the need for a systematic, coordinated effort to monitor AST promotion. Notably, the number of schools participating in AST activities may be on the rise, as some respondents indicated things like, "Locally, we are just finalizing a new list as schools regionally are showing interest. Otherwise, approximately 10 schools have activities underway" (STP Facilitator). Although having only just formed a school travel committee, one participant described their objective of having "100% of schools in their region involved in or committed to school travel planning programs within 2 years including AT targets set for each school" (Chair, Town cycling committee).

Two-thirds (67.5%) of respondents indicated that their AST program has a local steering committee. There were numerous city departments, school boards, and community organizations represented in the steering committees. For example, a Public Health Nurse listed that their steering committee includes, "(the) City of Barrie, Simcoe Muskoka Catholic District School Board, Simcoe County District School Board, CAA, Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit, Environment Network, Brereton Field Naturalists' Club, Barrie-Simcoe Cycling Club, and Simcoe County Trails."

72%
collect data
on school
participation
in AST
activities

89%
use GCC's
Safe Routes
to School
website

Data Collection, Research and Evaluation

There is a range in the rigour of data collection undertaken. Seventy-two percent of respondents collect data on school participation in active school travel activities. Many respondents follow the GCC process for data collection for schools participating in STP which includes student and parent surveys, neighbourhood walkabouts and traffic counts. These modes of data collection inform implementation:

"We use the data collected to provide information to the school about their current travel behaviour. The data is then used to brainstorm with the school committee on where the opportunities are. For example, results from Family Travel Survey say that many parents actually return home after dropping off their child at school. Another example are the school walkabouts which are very helpful in identifying barriers to active routes to school and are conducted with key stakeholders in the community. The post-program implementation data that is collected is compared to the initial assessments to capture any changes in travel behaviour."

(Health Promoter)

"...(The data is) generally used to inform traffic plans and transportation solutions as well as create the argument for change while conducting STPs. Most of the use of the numbers (are) done by Public Health."

(Transportation Demand Management)

Some respondents reported other approaches to data collection. One respondent from the City of Ottawa reported collecting data related to crossing guard reviews, parking studies and traffic movement. Some data collection was as simple as counting bikes locked up outside the school. Unfortunately, some respondents reported not having resources to consistently collect baseline data. For example, one respondent indicated a lack of resources/capacity and said, "Occasionally we will try and collect baseline data but we have not had the resources to do this consistently" (Traffic analyst).

Use and Creation of AST Resources

Almost all (89%) respondents use the www.saferoutestoschool.ca website for resources and materials such as newsletter templates and newsletters, monthly e-blasts, promotional materials (i.e., for events like iWalk and Winter Walk), research and data collection tools, webinars, and resources for local presentation development and report development. Many respondents also direct others to the website, such as community partners or school administrators looking for more information. Seventy-two percent of respondents find the resources and information on the website "useful" or "very useful", and 22% find it "somewhat useful".

Many respondents (59%) create their own AST resources and programming which range from digital strategies to printed media. The types of AST resources and programming that have been created range from school newsletters to deliver messages to pilot school communities (e.g., what parents need to know about active transportation in winter months), to public announcements at school, a trivia wheel to engage parents, school newsletter articles, travel maps

43%
indicated that
AST policies
have been
created

with suggested routes, interactive school trip planners, frequent walker and biker cards, action planning checklists, and social media. It is very common that regions adapt materials, for example by personalizing the STP Manual to fit the specific needs of the local community and/or have school specific resources.

Policies, Funding and Sustainability

Less than half (43%) of respondents indicated that AST policies have been created in their community, region or municipality. Several school boards such as the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) have signed and adopted the Active Transportation Charter, called The TDSB Charter for Active, Safe and Sustainable Transportation. A school travel advisor from the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Region (GTHA) provided an example of the range of policies that have been adopted within their region:

"In the GTHA, school boards and municipalities have created policies. A few include Halton District School Board and TDSB creating charters, TCDSB creating a Transportation Demand Management (TDM) policy, etc. Peel region recently declared Bike to School Week (May 25-29, 2015)."

In Ottawa, the STP program is a formal element in the City's Transportation Demand Management Program, and therefore school boards and Ottawa Student Transportation Authority have a school Active Transportation Charter as indicated by a respondent from Green Communities Canada:

"ASRTS & STP are recognized in the City of Ottawa's Transportation Demand Management Strategy; ASRTS & STP are recognized in Ottawa Public Health's Healthy Eating and Active Living (HEAL) Strategy; Ottawa Student Transportation Authority, Ottawa-Carleton District School Board (DSB) and Ottawa Catholic DSB have adopted a School Active Transportation Charter. The need for a policy to reinforce the Charter has been identified but has not yet been developed."

Several school boards indicated that they are about to endorse an Active Transportation Charter, and some acknowledged the need to develop a policy to reinforce the active transportation charter. Several respondents were not sure or not aware of broader school travel policies. One participant indicated that they did not have an AST policy and requested more information on how to initiate such a policy.

Forty-six percent of respondents agreed that AST policies enhanced stakeholder commitment to promoting AST. As one respondent noted, policies enable staff to advocate for AST support. One city planner highlighted that through policies, "The number of partners has grown to include (among others) both public school boards and the local school transportation (bussing) authority." At a school level, policies have created "...changes to school site planning to include showers for staff and better bicycle storage/parking; stronger collaborations between community partners; stronger commitment at the school board level for STP support" (Public Health Nurse). Policies also allow for more partnerships

46%
**agreed that
AST policies
enhanced
stakeholder
commitment**

and recognition: “(We are) recognized champions within the TDSB with awards at the Toronto Bike Awards. (We) partnered with Heart and Stroke Foundation to host an event at one partner school. (We) assisted schools with fundraising efforts, with sourcing bike donations...” (Program coordinator). As one respondent indicated, “...broader school travel planning policies represent a key ingredient to successfully changing student transportation behaviours” (Chair, own cycling committee).

According to respondents, AST programs are usually sustained in various ways ranging from in-kind contributions of staff time, to having dedicated funding. For example, a Public Health Nurse indicated that, “Currently, the STP pilot project is being funded by the Healthy Communities Partnership Funding as well as Trillium funding.” Many respondents indicated that there was much in-kind support and resources being donated to AST projects such as survey printing and data analysis. Highlighting that the importance of this in-kind support cannot be understated, a Planner from a district school board commented, “We never really had much funding, so we have relied on the commitment of the partner organizations to allow staff time (and sometimes resources) to be used towards ASRTS programs.”

Grants and donations are also sometimes sought for additional program capacity. Despite this, a consistent issue brought up by participants regarded the sustainability of AST programs as in many cases, dedicated funding to support AST initiatives was not available. Highlighting how this has been a challenge in the past, a TDM coordinator wrote,

“The City is able to provide staff time only due to a dedicated funding stream to create a TDM Coordinator position. In lieu of this funding/position there has not been sufficient staff capacity to support the program in this way historically.”

Adding to this, a Public Health Nurse stated, “There is political will for a regional STP facilitator, however, existing budgets among the partners are not conducive to support such a position.” Moreover, the coordinator of a public health unit commented, “We are just barely keeping the program active. Ongoing funds are needed for a facilitator in order to sustain the program past this school year.” There remains a need for funding to support AST programs and initiatives.

Other challenges related to sustainability include things such as, “...provincial monies related to student transportation traditionally being focused on bussing and with no budget to support AST for those students not eligible for bussing” (Public Health Nurse).

Rural areas also face unique challenges, as explained by one Public Health Nurse:

“We are a largely rural area with many students being bussed. STP is not a priority for us. We have very limited capacity when it comes to Physical Activity Promotion at our health unit. We need to put our capacity where we have the most impact. This is currently promoting physical literacy in the early years, built environment work with municipalities (which can eventually include schools but we aren’t there yet), (and) daily physical activity (DPA).”

These challenges reflect the range of involvement and commitment to AST in school boards in regions across Ontario. A continuing priority will be to communicate the benefits of AST to local school communities that are not yet engaged in AST programming. Those that are already committed to implementing AST are in need of financial support and dedicated staff to support those initiatives. Since many of the challenges and barriers highlighted in this report reflect major differences in organizational capacity to implement/deliver AST, it is recommended that a model is created to help organizations allocate staff, time, and funding needed to successfully deliver AST in a consistent way across the province.

Conclusion

Participation in AST comes in many different levels, forms, and capacities in Ontario. There is a need to establish a process for monitoring engagement in AST initiatives across Ontario. This would also assist in identifying best practice that could be shared more broadly. A lack of funding remains a barrier to broader implementation of AST initiatives. AST policies may create stronger commitment to AST by directing resources and facilitating greater ownership among stakeholders of AST initiatives. Despite many challenges, there does appear to be momentum in supporting AST in Ontario. Dedicated resources are likely required to capitalize on this.

TABLE 1:

School Region/School Board Represented; Title and Organization Represented

School region/board	Frequency (N=73)	Title	Organization
"4 boards"	1	Health Promoter	Northwestern Health Unit
Avon Maitland District SB & Huron-Perth Catholic District SB	1	Public Health Promoter	Perth District Health Unit
Central West	1	Physical Activity Specialist	City of Hamilton Public Health Services
Durham & Kawartha/ Peterborough	1	Senior Planner	Region of Durham
Grey Bruce	1	Health Promoter	Grey Bruce Health Unit
GTHA	2	School Travel Advisor(2)	Metrolinx(2)
HDSB/HCDSB/Halton Region	4	Environmental Sustainability Coordinator	Halton DSB
		Health Promoter/Project Manager	Halton Region Public Health
		Health Promoter	Halton Region Public Health
		Sustainable Transportation Program Coordinator	Town of Oakville
Hastings & Prince Edward Counties District School Board	1	Public Health Nurse	Hastings & Prince Edward Counties Health Unit
KPRDSB/ PVNCCDSB	2	Executive Director	BIKE: The Peterborough Community Cycling Hub
		Transportation Program Coordinator	GreenUP
Lambton County-St. Clair Catholic & Lambton-Kent School Boards	1	Health Promoter	Lambton Public Health
Limestone and Algonquin & Lakeshore	1	Public Health Nurse	KFL&A Public Health
Niagara Region	2	Facilitator, STP Niagara Region (2)	Healthy Living Niagara (2)
		Coordinator, Healthy Living Niagara	Niagara Region Public Health
Northeast	1	Chronic Disease Prevention Coordinator	Porcupine Health Unit
Ottawa/OCDSB/Ottawa District School Board	15	Transportation Demand Management Program Coordinator	EnviroCentre
		Community Programs Manager	EnviroCentre
		Manager	EnviroCentre
		President	Citizens for Safe Cycling
		Director	Citizens for Safe Cycling
		Senior Project Manager, Sustainable Transportation (2)	City of Ottawa Transportation Planning Branch (2)
		Manager Traffic Management	City of Ottawa
		Project Manager, Cycling program	City of Ottawa
		Director	Ottawa Safety Council
		ASRTS Coordinator - Ottawa	Green Communities Canada
		ASRTS Program Coordinator - Ottawa & Eastern ON	Green Communities Canada
		General Manager/CAO	Ottawa Student Transportation Authority
		Executive Director	Share the Road Cycling Coalition
		Public Health Nurse	Ottawa Public Health

Ontario	1	Planning Officer	Ottawa Catholic School Board
PDSB/DPCDSB/Peel Region/Peel Public	5	Health Promoter (2)	Region of Peel (2)
		Traffic Technologist	Town of Caledon
		Health Promoter	Region of Peel
		Chair	Brampton Bicycle Advisory Committee
WRDSB/Region of Waterloo	2	Traffic Operations Program Manager	City of Waterloo
		Senior Planner	Waterloo Region District School Board
Renfrew County and District	1	Health Promoter	Renfrew County and District Health Unit
SCDSB/Simcoe County/Simcoe Muskoka	4	STP Coach	Active Transportation Barrie Working Group
		School Travel Planning Coach	Active Transportation Barrie
		Program Manager	Environment Network
		Public Health Nurse	Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit
TVDSB/LDCSB	3	St. Sebastian's STP Facilitator	London and area ASRTS
		Public Health Nurse	Middlesex London Health Unit
		TDM Coordinator	City of London
Thunder Bay, ON	1	Public Health Nurse	Thunder Bay District Health Unit
TLDSB	1	Public Health Worker	HKPR District Health Unit
TDSB/Toronto	3	Coordinator, Cycling Programs	CultureLink Settlement Services
		CW	GCC
		Membership & Ward Advocacy Manager	Cycle Toronto
UGDSB/WCDSB	3	School Travel Planning Facilitator	WDG Active and Safe Routes to School Committee
		TDM Coordinator	City of Guelph
		Environment, Health and Safety Officer	Wellington Catholic DSB
Upper Canada District School Board	2	Facilitator	Upper Canada School Travel Planning
		School Health Coordinator	Leeds, Grneville & Lanark District Health Unit
WRDSB/WCDSB/Waterloo	3	TDM Coordinator	City of Cambridge
		Public Health Nurse	Region of Waterloo, Public Health
		Principal Planner, TDM	Region of Waterloo
YRDSB	5	Traffic Analyst	Town of Richmond Hill
		Traffic Engineering Assistant (2)	Town of Richmond Hill (2)
		Public Health Nurse	The Regional Municipality of York
		Traffic/Transportation Analyst	Town of Aurora
Misc	4	CW	GCC
		Coordinator, School Zone Traffic Safety Program	City of Ottawa
		Transportation Demand Management	City of Hamilton
		n/a	n/a

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