



March 2015



Coordinator's Corner

March is here, and I think we are all hoping it to be the end of winter weather. Even if it's still a little chilly outside, we have plenty to look forward to in the coming weeks. Spring is always a busy time for Safe Routes to School as communities across the state start to prepare for Bike to School Day (BTSD) on May 6. This month's newsletter has more information about BTSD itself and ways to prepare for your event, such as hosting your own bike rodeo beforehand.

The Friends & Faces column also returns this month with a profile on Mae Johnson of Brain Injury Services of Southwest Virginia and the work they do to teach students about helmet safety.



We are pleased to recognize the QuickStart Mini-grant winners from February. Remember -- the final due date for the spring [QuickStart Mini-grants](#) is **April 9**. In addition, the last day to submit Non-Infrastructure grant applications is **March 31**. More information on SRTS funding opportunities is available on our [website](#).

This month's Did You Know? column takes a look at school transportation and public health costs and some of the ways SRTS programs can be part of the mix. The Virginia Department of Social Services also shares helpful information about how to assess a child's level of independence.

I hope this month's newsletter inspires and helps support the spring SRTS events in your school. If you have questions or would like more information on any of the topics included here, please call the Virginia SRTS Hotline at 1-855-601-7787 or send an email to info@virginiarts.org.

Regards,

Rob Williams
Virginia SRTS State Coordinator

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CALENDAR

MARCH

31: Non-Infrastructure Grant Application Due

APRIL

9: QuickStart Mini-grant Application Due
20-21: Weight of the State Conference
22: Earth Day

MAY

6: Bike to School Day
15: Bike to Work Day

Let us know about SRTS events in your community!

Click [here](#) to send your information to be included in the calendar.

Friends & Faces

Mae Johnson, Director of Development & Marketing at the Brain Injury Services of Southwest Virginia (Roanoke) works to teach adults and students about helmet safety and brain injury prevention. Recently, we talked with Mae, a past QuickStart Mini-grant recipient, about her helmet safety work, SRTS, and how she is preparing for Bike to School Day.

What does Brain Injury Services of Southwest Virginia (BISSWVA) do? BISSWVA's mission is to make a positive, measurable difference in brain injury survivors' abilities to fulfill their service potential and optimize their reintegration into their families and communities. We also promote brain injury awareness all year long, but especially in March, which is [Brain Injury Awareness Month](#).



Students at Preston Park Elementary in Roanoke decorate helmets provided by BISSWVA.

How are you involved with Safe Routes to School? We received a QuickStart Mini-grant in 2013 to provide classes on proper helmet fitting and other information to students at Preston Park Elementary starting that summer and have been offering the class ever since. We teach helmet safety to elementary school aged children through a special program by the Roanoke City Parks and Recreation Department, supported by Preston Park Elementary School. We plan to expand our training to include students from another local school before the end of the school year.

How do you teach students about helmet safety and injury prevention? I work collaboratively with our Youth and Adolescent Case Manager to conduct training classes with the students showing them how to properly wear a bicycle helmet, bicycle safety, and some quick facts about the brain. Encouraging properly worn helmets for students who ride their bicycles to school is important in the prevention of concussions and other traumatic brain injuries.

What advice do you have for a school or community group that may be interested in working with your organization or hosting their own helmet and bicycle safety event? I'd recommend getting all of your collaborators involved as soon as possible in the planning process and to help promote the event. For example, the recreation center was very helpful in promoting our event to the participating students and their parents through flyers sent home with the students. I'd plan a month or two ahead of time, avoiding school holidays and being flexible for weather cancellations. Also, allow yourself enough time for your product orders just in case you need to exchange or return any of your order or if there are unexpected shipping delays.



A brain mold helps teach students about the importance of wearing a helmet.

If you are interested in exploring a partnership with Brain Injury Services of Southwest Virginia, Mae can be reached at (540) 344-1200.

Bike to School Day is May 6!

We are less than two months away from the biggest SRTS event of the spring - National Bike to School Day!

Remember to register your school's event on the www.walkbiketoschool.org website so your event can be part of the buzz leading up to and after the event. Registration is simple and only takes a few minutes. In 2014, there were 121 registered events in the state of Virginia. **Please help us reach 150 events in 2015!**



The National Center for Safe Routes to School and Schwinn's Helmets on Heads program just announced the National Bike to School Day Helmets on Heads Bike Share Giveaway. This second annual Bike Share Giveaway will provide 10 bikes and 20 helmets to 10 schools and community organizations across the US, with drawings beginning on April 15. Click here for or more giveaway details.

This year, National Bike to School Day falls on Wednesday, **May 6**, but we encourage schools to hold one or more biking events throughout the month of May as their schedules allow.



Jennie Dean Elementary, Manassas

The [Virginia SRTS Bike to School Day webpage](#) has plenty of resources to help you get ready for Bike to School Day, including tip sheets, flyers and sticker templates.

Prepare for Bike to School Day with a Bike Rodeo

Prepare Bike to School Day participants ahead of time with a bike rodeo to practice basic bicycling skills and teach bicycle safety. Bike rodeos require advance planning and several adult facilitators to manage each station and ensure the event runs smoothly. Consider reaching out to your local police department, university students or bicycle club members to recruit volunteers.



Bike rodeo at Belle View Elementary, Fairfax County

The following resources will help you plan and implement a bike rodeo from start to finish:

- [Cycling Skills Clinic Guide](#) - In addition to a general overview and organizer's summary, this NHTSA (National Highway Transportation Safety Administration) guide is complete with several appendices containing template materials to use at the bike rodeo. These include safety quizzes, consent waivers, station signs and clinic evaluation forms.
- [Boy Scouts of America](#) has materials to assist with volunteer recruitment and rodeo station planning on their website.

- [Bike rodeo station ideas](#) - This website provides a few variations on bike rodeo stations, including a station for the longest glide, riding in a spiral and newspaper delivery practice.



Bike rodeo at Berryville Elementary, Berryville

The Virginia Foundation for Healthy Youth and Prevention Connections are hosting the fourth Weight of the State Conference on childhood obesity prevention, featuring national, state and local experts. The 2015 Conference aims to:

- **Strengthen** and expand local, regional, and state capacity to achieve change to increase access to healthy foods and nutrition, opportunities for physical activity, and reduce obesity.
- **Engage** and network with peers to share knowledge and best practices and strategies to sustain momentum throughout.
- **Share** emerging trends in health care, school and after-school programs, research, community collaboration, healthy nutrition, and physical activity aimed at Virginia youth.

To learn more, review [session topics](#) and [register for the conference](#), visit the Weight of the State website.

Weight of the State Conference includes SRTS

Virginia's 2015 Weight of the State Conference, at the Hilton Richmond Hotel in Short Pump, on April 20-21, 2015, will include a session focusing on establishing safe walking and biking policies in schools, and information from local groups about their Safe Routes to School success stories. Attendees can also participate in a Walk to School Day event at local elementary school in Henrico County.



Did You Know? School Transportation Costs

Many people celebrate St. Patrick's Day on March 17 by wearing green, but did you know that increasing the number of students who walk and bike to school can help your school division save (a lot of) green? Check out the case studies and highlights from recent research below.

- [Streetsblog](#) reports that it typically costs \$500 per year to bus one student to and from school. In addition to ever increasing bus fleet fuel and maintenance costs, school districts also face challenges in recruiting and retaining qualified bus drivers due to split schedules and challenges inherent to the job.
- [Lakewood City School District](#), which serves students that live in an inner ring suburb of Cleveland, Ohio calls itself a "walking school district." Schools are sited within residential neighborhoods so that the majority of students have a less than one mile commute to school. Aside from a small school transportation system

that serves students with special needs, the Lakewood City School District does not provide busing. A district representative estimates the district saves about \$1 million per year in transportation costs, which can be reallocated for more classroom resources.



Photo: Lakewood City School District



Previous bike rodeo at Graham Road Elementary, Falls Church

These \$1,000 reimbursement grants are a great way to fund a bike rodeo to teach safe bicycling skills in advance of Bike to School Day in May. Applications are reviewed in the order they are received, so remember to apply early. If you wait, you run the risk of the process becoming more competitive.

There is one more opportunity to [apply](#) for a QuickStart Mini-grant this spring. The final due date for the spring is **April 9**.

At what age can students walk to school by themselves?

There is no federal or Virginia state law setting a legal age minimum before children can walk or bike to school alone. Before sending your student to school on their own, be sure to contact the school district or school where the child attends to determine if they have a policy that prohibits children under a certain age from walking to school alone. Some municipalities may also have ordinances concerning the age at which a child may be left without supervision. Contact your [local department of social services](#) to ask if they have any specific ordinances or policies.

QuickStart Mini-grants

Congratulations to the February QuickStart Mini-grant winners:

- **Fort Hunt Elementary School, Fairfax County** - Bike racks to support Bike to School Day event
- **Graham Road Elementary School, Falls Church** - Bike rodeo with helmet and bike light giveaways

According to the National Highway Transportation Safety Administration (NHTSA), most children are not ready to cross a street without supervision until age ten. However, age alone is not a very good indicator of a child's maturity level or ability to get herself to school safely. More information on how to prepare students to walk to school independently is in the National Center for Safe Routes to School "Teaching Children to Walk Safely as they Grow and Develop" resource.

You may also find it helpful to understand the criteria child protective services (CPS) uses when determining whether or not a child is capable of being left alone. CPS will assess:

- Child's level of maturity. Is the child physically capable of taking care of himself? Can she recognize and avoid danger? Does he know what to do and whom to call if an emergency arises?
- Accessibility of those responsible for the child. What is the location and proximity of the parents? Can they be reached by phone? Can they get to the child quickly if needed? Does the child know the parents' location and how to reach them?
- The situation. Are the home and neighborhood safe? Have the parents arranged for nearby adults to be available in case of an emergency?

Special thanks to Mary Walter, CPS Policy Specialist, Virginia Department of Social Services for providing the information above.

