

## Path to Success Led by a Local Public Health Department

### Oakdale Heights Elementary, Butte County:

#### *Building capacity for walk to school day in a rural community*

Butte County Public Health Department (BCPH) has had a role in promoting Safe Routes to School (SRTS) in the county since the inception of Walk to School Week. BCPH was initially able to mount an active pedestrian and bicycle safety campaign within the Greater Oroville Area, the most diverse population center in this rural county with a population of about 55,000. According to staff at BCPH, school, city and county officials serving in the Greater Oroville Area have always been enthusiastic and open to trying new things to improve the quality of life throughout their community.



Lean budget times interfered with BCPH staff being able to sustain Walk to School Day efforts in the greater Oroville area until they reignited the spark in 2010. This effort began by approaching the school superintendents and principals to determine which schools were interested in pursuing an educational program. BCPH staff also worked closely with County of Butte Public Works staff to determine which Oroville area schools would benefit from Safe Routes to School funding. Both processes identified Oakdale Heights Elementary as being a school desiring education as well as a school with severe infrastructure issues. The County of Butte Public Works Department, in collaboration with Oroville City Elementary School District and Butte County Public Health Department applied for and was awarded a federal SRTS grant in 2011.

SRTS funding often takes time to reach the intended schools. In the meantime, BCPH staff decided to concentrate their limited resources on promoting Walk to School Day at Oakdale Heights Elementary, which had not held this event since 2001. This neighborhood school has just over 300 students, with 227 students living within a two mile radius of the school. Even though many students live close enough to walk, there are barriers that prevent them from doing so safely. According to parent surveys, 60 percent of parents are concerned about the speed of traffic on the busy two-lane road to school. The high school is also located about a mile away on the same road, and parents have expressed concern about their young children sharing the road with teenage drivers. In addition, sidewalks are sporadic around the school and there is no white stripe on the road to separate bicyclists and pedestrians from automobiles, meaning many children walk to school on a dirt shoulder.

BCPH staff put an emphasis on **building capacity within the school** to make Walk to School Day successful, as opposed to simply conducting the event for the school. BCPH staff met with the Oakdale Heights Elementary principal to discuss the event, connected with teachers, and identified a teacher champion who was willing to “own the event”. The PTO president and members were supportive, and parent volunteers were successfully recruited to assist coordinating the event. Additionally, the school sent out bilingual flyers about Walk to School Day, provided announcements, and publicized the event at Back to School Night.



Because of the large commuter population, the PTO identified a “Park-and-Walk” site for Walk to School Day and publicized it to the parent community. There was great participation at the Park-and-Walk site, and many parents chose to park at the site and walk the short distance to school with their children. BCPH staff also participated at the Park-and-Walk pre-event, including nutrition staff members dressed as your favorite fruits and vegetables!

Oakdale Heights Elementary **incentivized participation** by initiating a “golden sneaker contest”. Prior to Walk to School Day, each student created a paper shoe cut-out with their classroom teacher. The paper shoes were collected and put out on the Walk to School Day greeting table. Students who walked to school (including those who rode the bus and walked a lap around the school) picked out a paper shoe and put it up on a tally poster for their classroom. The classroom with the highest number of shoes won the golden sneaker (a mounted size 22 high top shoe painted gold) to keep in their classroom. The event itself was a low-cost operation; the only thing that was purchased for the event was the shoe for the golden sneaker contest. Coffee for volunteers and parents walking with their children on the morning of the event was donated by a local business, Mugshots.

Walk to School Day at Oakdale Heights Elementary was a huge success. It motivated BCPH staff to continue promoting Walk to School events in the region in the hopes of continuing to build capacity to keep children physically active in Butte County.



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