

# Rural Community Gets Mobilized



The City of Delano, a rural community in Kern County, has a lot of leadership for active living. But when it received a Cycle 2 Safe Routes to School (SRTS) non-infrastructure award, it did not have the internal staff or community agencies ready to launch the new program. The city chose to work with Youth Educational Sports, Inc. (YES, Inc.), a nonprofit bicycling and pedestrian safety organization, to help facilitate and implement its SRTS program.

Delano's SRTS program began with observations at each school site before and after the school day. The observations included tallying the number of children arriving by car, as pedestrians, on bicycle with or without a helmet, and by bus. It was discovered

that some students started their walk an hour before the first school bell, when their parents left to harvest field crops. The observations were followed by parent and student surveys. All information gathered was used to develop recommendations for the city engineer and other partners. The data collected at the onset helped to identify each school's circumstance and provide a baseline for the evaluation.

In Delano, the average per capita income is just barely more than \$11,000 and 35 percent of the children are living under the federal poverty level. Also, given the early and late hours of agricultural workers, it is very hard for schools to support an active parent teacher organization or get parent volunteers to help with walking and bicycling to school efforts. Because of this, principals and teachers in Delano are typically very open to resources and programs that will benefit their students.

Delano's local police department and explorer/cadet program became valuable resources in promoting safe walking and bicycling to school as well. The police department assisted with special SRTS events like valet week or bicycle safety rodeos. The explorer/cadet program, which is made up of 15-24 years old who apply, qualify based on their grade point average, and are then selected to serve as uniformed representatives of the police department, assisted in Delano's SRTS program by helping children practice traffic safety in a theatrical stage setting with large photos from Delano's roads.



## KEYS TO DELANO'S SUCCESS:

- Collecting data early on to show where the project started and using it to plan for where the project should go
- Demonstrating that the program is a win-win for the school, principals, teachers, and especially students. If principals know how the program can help meet their own goals, they are more likely to embrace the program's objectives
- Recognizing law enforcement as allies and enlisting law enforcement's help with program implementation