

## Safe Routes to School

In the snow. Uphill. Both ways!

We chuckle about stories from 'back in the day' when kids had to find their own way to school and home again. And while it might be convenient to bus everyone, runaway budgets and childhood obesity make walking or biking to and from school an attractive alternative to the hoards of yellow school buses every morning and afternoon.

With funding provided by the Statewide Health Improvement Program (SHIP) and the federal Safe Routes to School Program (SR2S), WHKS has helped the towns of Eyota and Byron, MN make it both attractive and safe for children to get the twice-daily exercise and self-reliance that comes from walking or biking to school.

Eyota and Byron were among three towns in Olmsted County chosen because they have grown rapidly in the past decade and the option of walking or biking to school or community recreation facilities has been diminished. The project identified those areas where there were gaps between stretches of sidewalk or missing bike and walking trails through the local parks.

The top priority in this effort was child safety. While Mom and Dad might have walked to school without concern, today, even in small towns like Eyota and Byron, traffic volume has increased dramatically.

Eyota had a number of areas with missing sidewalks and one particularly vulnerable area that passed through a park with no bike path. Byron faced a similar situation in which the school was in a newer part of the town that had been built with sidewalks. They were lacking in the older section so new sidewalks were built to connect the two. Every intersection was provided with the shallow ramps that make it more convenient for people with disabilities to share the paths.

At a couple of locations in Byron, the path to school crosses a busy County road. So planners installed pedestrian signals. Kids simply push a button to light up a flashing pedestrian signal that alerts traffic to the fact that healthy kids are once more biking and walking to school.

Both ways!



*Before and after photos for Byron, Minnesota Safe Routes to School project*



*Before and after photos for Eyota, Minnesota Safe Routes to School project*