

MASSACHUSETTS
Safe Routes to School

Inclusion & Abilities Guide

Inclusion & Accessibility in Safe Routes to School Education

The Massachusetts Safe Routes to School (SRTS) Program's educational resources and offerings are intended to engage all students, regardless of their physical abilities. We are working to update the program's Pedestrian Safety and Bicycle Safety units to better include and make the lessons more accessible for students with disabilities and students with other clothing and hairstyle considerations for biking.

We invite you to learn more about inclusion and accessibility with us. Use this document to understand:

- What language we use to consistently talk about and include students with disabilities
- How to support students' specific needs so they can participate in the program
- Who to coordinate with to improve access for our students with disabilities

Defining All Abilities & Disabilities

All Abilities

Students of *all abilities* means students with a broad range of physical, mental, emotional, legal, and socioeconomic skills and/or needs. Why do we want to ensure our program welcomes students of all abilities?

- We reach more students. When we reach more students, we are teaching more students to be safe, active stewards of our communities equipped with the tools to be healthy and more independent.

When we welcome and incorporate students of all abilities into SRTS activities, all students can:

- Learn about how people get around safely using similar and different techniques
- Enjoy each other's company while valuing each other's unique abilities
- Observe how adapted equipment accommodates various considerations and allows students to safely bike and walk

Disabilities

There are numerous and evolving ways to refer to a student's ability or experience that may differ from the "typical" or "expected" physical, behavioral, or cognitive norms of students in their age range. Just like each student has unique needs, they may refer to their abilities using different terms, such as disorder, disease, disability, or difference. We encourage you to follow the student's lead on how they identify.

"Disability" is used when a student performs below average on a standardized measure of functioning and when this causes suffering in a particular environment.[1] The three broad categories of disabilities are cognitive, physical, and emotional. Students may have a combination of two or more of these disability types. Disabilities can also vary widely by type, severity, and duration (short- or long-term). **Table 1** lists the common types of disabilities and potential considerations to help your student(s) learn pedestrian and bicycle safety skills.[2]

Table 1. Common types of disabilities and potential needs

Category	Description	Potential Needs
Mobility	Limited movement and/or stabilizations in a part of their body or entire body. May be accompanied by limited energy or stamina.	• Physical support person • Assistance pushing a wheelchair and/or pedaling • Finding an adaptive bicycle • Additional space in obstacle course
Auditory	Low or no hearing. Difficulty processing auditory information.	• American Sign Language (ASL) interpreter or other support person • Support devices (personal Frequency Modulation (FM) systems, also known as Radio Aids) • Limiting background noise • Include students at the front of the lesson space
Physical – Visual	Limited or no vision.	• Guiding person, bicycle buddy, and/or cane • Include students at the front of the lesson space • Careful description of activities and placement of obstacles or course • Finding an adaptive bicycle

[1] Baron-Cohen, Simon. The Concept of Neurodiversity Is Dividing the Autism Community. *Scientific American*. 30 April 2019. https://blogs.scientificamerican.com/observations/the-concept-of-neurodiversity-is-dividing-the-autism-community/

[2] Compiled and summarized from the National Safe Routes to School Partnership's report *Engaging Students with Disabilities in Safe Routes to School* (2018), as well as the United States Department of Education's Individuals with Disabilities Act.

Category	Description	Potential Needs
Cognitive – Neurodiversity	Varying cognitive strengths and abilities, commonly associated with students who have some form of autism.	• Support person or buddy system • One-on-one instruction • Clear, simple instruction • Additional time to learn concepts or skills
Emotional – Behavioral[3]	Internalization or externalization of emotions in ways that may make connecting with peers and learning difficult. Examples often cited include ADHD, ADD, depression, anxiety, and some neurodiversity associated disorders.	• Smaller group sizes • Higher adult to student ratio for support and supervision • Practice or a run-through prior to class • Supportive contact with student prior to lesson(s), accompanied by reviewing progress throughout



Individualized Education Program Team Members are Accessibility Experts

Students with disabilities are provided with an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) and an IEP team, which often includes families, teachers, students, and others such as physical or occupational therapists and aides. Work with the IEP team to:

(1) identify potential barriers
(2) establish the adaptive needs
(3) secure or implement the needed accommodations

While not disabilities, other physical considerations that may limit students' participation in SRTS bicycle education and encouragement activities are shown in **Table 2**.

[3] Emotional and behavioral needs are more commonly known as and rooted in a disorder, but can present a disability in the classroom

Table 2. Additional adaptive considerations to inclusion

Category	Description	Adaptive Considerations
Cultural Dress	Some bicycles make wearing one's cultural dress and/or maintaining full leg coverage challenging.	• Check with parents/guardians about specific instructions to support their student's involvement in the lesson • Be careful not to exclude them or tell them their attire is unsafe. Focus on statements that suggest maintaining a full range of motion and line of sight for safety reasons. • Provide a step-through bicycle that limits how much a long garment rides up
Hair Style	Some youth helmets do not accommodate select hair styles or religious headwear well (e.g. some natural hair styles, afros, locs, high pony tails, high pigtails, beads/poms/bows, and thicker materialled headwraps and kippahs).	• Check with parents/guardians about hair style considerations[4] and offering suggestions, like to bring a bandana/hair wrap and to remove beads,[5] so that their student can use a helmet safely • Offer this guidance well in advance of the lesson, so families have time to plan for or adjust hair styles, as needed and if possible • Provide some larger helmets, while ensuring the helmet still fits snugly, covers the head, and is fully secured and stabilized on the head – sizing up is normal and can be necessary • Keep the talk positive so the students do not feel their hair style is a "problem;" consider, "while it is tricky to properly fit your helmet today [over ponytails, pigtails, etc.], it will be easier next time if you wear your hair like this [in a bun or low style and show examples]," then explain how the helmet should fit

Thoughtful Communication

We encourage you to use following strategies when talking with students, parents/guardians, teachers, and the student's IEP team to make your SRTS programming accessible to and inclusive of students with disabilities.

Talk about it to Normalize it

Talking about disabilities in a thoughtful way can normalize the different ways people can be pedestrians or bicyclists. Rather than prescribing one way and then adding in "the alternative," emphasize that there are many different ways to do things.

[4] Natural hair and afro hair styles for wearing a helmet. https://www.keepitsimpelle.com/natural-hair-styles-cycling/
[5] Hair and Helmets. *Beaded Hair*. https://helmets.org/hair.htm

Use Person First Language

Use person first language to talk about students who live with, have, or experience a disability. For example, say "students with a disability," "a person without a disability," "a child who is deaf or hard of hearing," etc. This strategy centers the student as a person first, who, secondary to their humanhood, may have a disability.

It's not Walking, it's Walking & Rolling

Students with disabilities who may use a rolling mobility device are still pedestrians! Here are some helpful and more inclusive words to swap into your vocabulary:

Instead of Saying	**Use This Term**
Walk	Walk & Roll
Bike	Bike & Roll
Walker	Pedestrian
Stand at the curb	Wait at the curb
Listen and Look	Be alert (using cues that can be visual, audible, and/or tactile; some cues are even smells!)

Be Clear about Provisions

Provide all participants in your SRTS programming an overview of what you plan to offer and what extra information you need from teachers or IEP team members. Then ask for or about additional support a student may need to facilitate their learning. Providing this information helps to provide each involved team member with greater context to make the right choice for them/the student, which in turn, honors their autonomy.

Share Broadly. Follow up Individually

Communicate how your program is inclusive, the accessibility options you plan to provide, and contact information for any questions. Then, follow up individually to known students with disabilities and/or their families about wanting to include them and see them participate, checking in on potential needs, and discussing ways to address any barriers.[6]

[6] The SRTS Program does not communicate individually with students. The recommendations are for school staff and/or authorized school representatives when communicating details of SRTS programs.

Roles for Inclusive SRTS Programming

Table 3 provides suggested roles in being an inclusion champion and steps that each stakeholder can take to improve access to and inclusion in SRTS educational programs.

Table 3. Roles for Creating Inclusive SRTS Educational Programs

Stakeholder	How Can You Champion Inclusion?	Steps You Can Take
Teacher	You can provide access to your student(s) with disabilities the needed resources so that they can participate fully along with other students.	• Provide the SRTS team with information on adaptive needs • Loop in the IEP staff members • Elevate parent/guardian concerns • Advise and advocate for your student
Student with disability(ies)	You can and are welcome to participate with your classmates. You can ask for and find support as you need.	• Participate and show your classmates that you are also a pedestrian/bicyclist
Parent/Guardian	We want your child to feel included and be integrated into this learning opportunity. The SRTS Program wants to hear from you and welcomes your feedback.	• Share details about your child's needs with the event or educational coordinator • Participate in the safety units as needed or desired
IEP support team	You can advise and participate to support the student. The SRTS Program wants to hear from you and welcomes your feedback.	• Advise on best strategies and tools for the student's learning • Step in to provide suggestions and support, as you are able
Other students/families	This Program is for all your classmates, with or without disabilities! It's a great opportunity to learn how we all get around in different ways and we all want to be safe while doing so.	• Welcome, encourage, respect, and celebrate our differences • Be willing to be a buddy to another student, if that students needs and wants your buddy-support!

Conclusion

Recognizing differences in human ability and strategies to achieve the same goal is an important component of Safe Routes to School education. You play a critical role in helping students without disabilities see their classmates with disabilities as able participants. Most importantly, you can provide students with disabilities with the opportunity to learn essential life skills to support living independently later in life. Thank you for championing inclusion and accessibility!