Resources for Including Students of All Abilities in Safe Routes to School

Internal Only

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MASSACHUSETTS Safe Routes to School
Mass.gov/MassDOT/SafeRoutes

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Massachusetts Department of Transportation

Introduction

This guide serves to provide Safe Routes to School (SRTS) outreach coordinators with the following:

- The legal framework for providing services in an equitable manner and the SRTS founding purpose abilities
- Information on updating existing MA SRTS resources to include students of all abilities through the 6 E's:
  - Equity
  - Encouragement
  - Education
  - Enforcement
  - Evaluation
  - Engineering

In most cases, children with disabilities can participate in SRTS activities alongside their peers.

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*This guide is for incorporating children with physical disabilities, unless otherwise noted.

Legal Framework

Incorporating resources and opportunities for students of all abilities to participate in MA SRTS is not only the right thing to do, it is legally required.

- **Title VI of the Civil Rights Act** prohibits discrimination based upon race, color, and national origin. https://www.justice.gov/crt/fcs/TitleVI-Overview

- The **Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)** prohibits discrimination against people with disabilities in employment, transportation, public accommodation, communications, and governmental activities. (This is critical when it comes to ensuring that engineering designs and infrastructure are accessible to people with disabilities, as will be described below in "Engineering.") https://www.ada.gov/

- **MassDOT's official policy** is to "make every effort to ensure nondiscrimination in all of its programs and activities, whether they are federally funded or not, and that services and benefits are fairly distributed to all people, regardless of race, color, national origin, or income." MA SRTS is a state-wide federally-funded initiative of MassDOT. https://www.massdot.state.ma.us/OfficeofCivilRights/TitleVI.aspx

- The **founding purpose of SRTS** is "To enable and encourage children, including those with disabilities, to walk and bicycle to school; to make walking and bicycling to school safe and more appealing; and to facilitate the planning, development and implementation of projects that will improve safety, and reduce traffic, fuel consumption, and air pollution in the vicinity of schools." https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/safetealu/factsheets/saferoutes.htm

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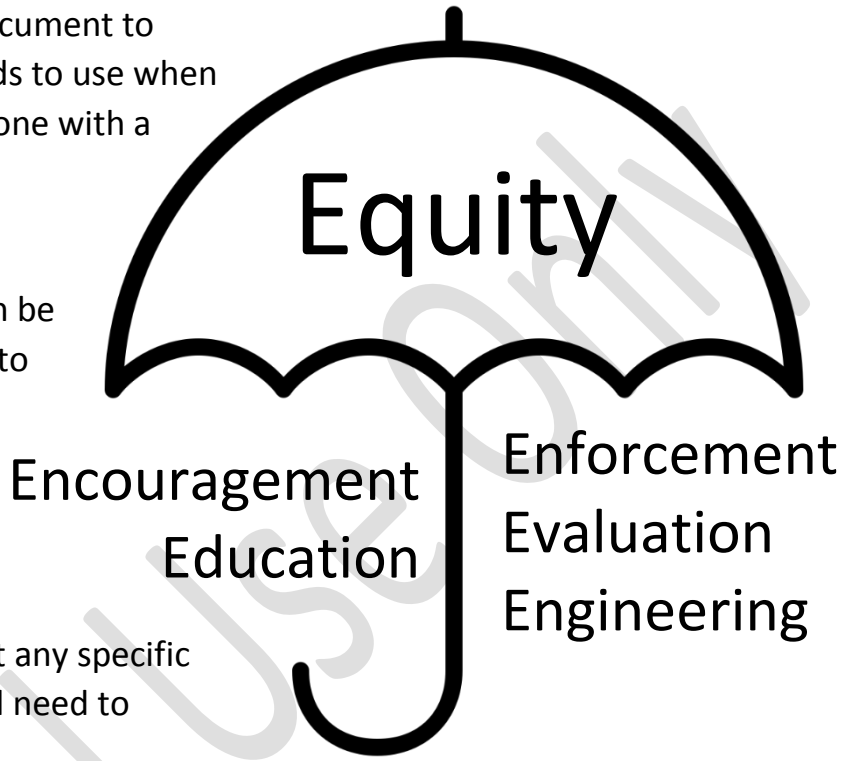
Equity

Equity can be considered the overarching SRTS. Equity is used in this document to discuss the language and words to use when speaking or referring to someone with a disability.



Be Proactive

Teachers and coordinators can be proactive by focusing on how to involve students rather than on a potential barrier that may prevent them from participating. Therefore, instead of asking about a child's disability, inquire about any specific accommodations the child will need to participate in SRTS programs.

Avoid separation

In most cases, children with disabilities can participate in SRTS activities alongside their peers. Equity is about including people, so keep students with their peers as much as possible.

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There are two main types of language used to refer to disability: person-first language and what is known as identity-first language. Whenever possible, the key is to ask how a person chooses to identify, rather than making assumptions. The most important thing to remember is to always show respect for a person and their preferences.

Person First Language (PFL)

Person first language puts the person before the disability, placing the disability descriptor second as simply a medical diagnosis. When writing or speaking using person first language, the language emphasizes the individual and not the disability.

Terms such as "the disabled children" or "special ed children" place the focus on the disability, not the child. They can also act as group designations that a child may or may not identify with.

Identity-First Language (IFL)

In IFL, "disabled" is a perfectly acceptable way for a person to identify. For some people, "disabled" is more than a descriptor, it is an identity and culture unto itself. It may even be a source of pride.

Here's a simple breakdown of IFL and how it's used:

- "Disability" and "disabled" are indicators of culture and identity. Thus, "disabled person" is an accepted term.
- Within the Autistic community, IFL may be preferred and consciously chosen, because Autism is considered an identity.
- A similar line of thinking is followed by many people with a hearing impairment. While some people identify only as little-"d" deaf (referring to a physical state of being), others capitalize the "D" to indicate being Deaf as a culture and identity. Using the principles of IFL, one would say "d/Deaf person."

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Equity

- The use of IFL language does not apply when it comes to a term strictly for its medical definition. For instance, it is never okay to say something such as "Down syndrome person" or "cerebral palsy person." Referring to a person by diagnosis can be dehumanizing.
- The same is true for people using mobility assistive devices. It's not appropriate to call someone a "wheelchair person." Instead, you would say "wheelchair user" if you were using IFL.

Person First	Identity First
Child with a disability	Disabled child
Child who uses a wheelchair	Wheelchair user
Child who is deaf	Deaf child
Child with epilepsy	Epileptic child
Child who receives special ed services	Special ed child

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Encouragement

This section suggests ways that encouragement events and contests can be updated to ensure that students of all abilities can participate in SRTS.

Walk, Bike, & Roll to School Days/Walking & Wheeling Days

Traditionally this event has been themed 'walk and bike' to school. By including 'roll' or 'wheel' (e.g., 'walking and wheeling'), those using mobility devices are included. Consider allowing extra time for children to learn the school walking/rolling route and ensuring that routes are clear of debris and snow if the event takes place during the winter months.

Bicycle Trains

Bicycle trains, or bike buses, are a fun way for students to be physically active and practice their bicycle skills. To create a more inclusive program, allow extra time for children with cognitive disabilities to learn the route and consider what safety skills they will need to practice along the way. When selecting a designated bicycle train route, consider the feasibility of students with physical disabilities (for example, students using wheelchairs or with hearing impairments) participating in the event.

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Walking & Wheeling School Buses

Walking school buses are a fun, social, physically active, and environmentally-friendly form of transportation. Include trained adult aides along the route who know the children by name, and who have a clear protocol to follow to ensure that students with disabilities can participate.

Monthly Walk & Roll Events

Events that are especially useful for a comprehensive SRTS program are contests. Instead of focusing on highest number of miles or steps walked, contests can be more inclusive by focusing on the number of days that students participated.

In some circumstances, it may be necessary to set up intermediate drop- off points along walk/bike/roll routes, or to set up entirely separate routes and activities for children with disabilities. If this is the case, consider a group activity or meeting point at which to bring all children together at some point.

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Education

The current MA SRTS program educates children on the importance of walking and biking to school safely. In general, keep children of all abilities together during these activities. However, children with cognitive disabilities may sometimes require review and practice sessions to obtain mastery of the material.

Children with cognitive disabilities may be able to answer questions correctly on one day, but not on the next day. Attention-switching and concentration skills are essential for safe walking and develop as children mature. Children with disabilities may develop these higher executive functioning skills later on or in different ways. Consider the entire performance of the child in school, on the playground, and in leisure activities before determining that it is safe for the child to walk alone. It may be best to provide students with an official "walking/rolling buddy" while assessing their skills. Monitors stationed at intervals along a route can also provide support.

For children with **cognitive disabilities**, the main accommodations to the education content includes:

1) Provide opportunities to practice the new skills
2) Adjust the amount of information delivered at each training session
3) Provide refresher sessions cover the information
4) Be aware of different learning styles (visual/auditory/kinesthetic)

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Education

For children with **physical disabilities**, the content should be adapted to include safety information specific to assistive devices they use and their functional abilities. Students may also benefit from having an official "walking/rolling buddy."

To summarize, key considerations to accommodations are:

1) Appropriate training period
2) Hands-on practice time
3) Walking/rolling "buddies" are encouraged

Enforcement

MA SRTS partners with local police officers, safety officers, and school resource officers to create a community approach to enhance and ensure the safety of students walking and bicycling. The program focuses on the enforcement of driver behaviors such as driving speeds, yielding to pedestrians in crosswalks, and also through the enforcement of pedestrian and bicyclist behaviors.

Enforcement can also include ensuring reserved parking (for persons with disabilities) and van accessible spaces are reserved for vehicles with placards.

Additionally, enforcement can include issuing fines for a lack of snow and ice removal. Snow and ice often inhibit the movement of people with disabilities. Winter maintenance around bus stops is critical to guaranteeing safe access for all users. Ensuring a four foot minimum path is cleared to connect the bus stop landing area to the sidewalk and then to building entrances is paramount.

Snow and ice often inhibit the movement of people with disabilities.

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It is important to consider the built infrastructure around the school neighborhood and how that impacts students with disabilities. See the evaluation checklist on page 14 for examples.

Accessible Infrastructure

Accessible infrastructure can be used by anyone regardless of ability. For example, a person using a wheelchair or other mobility assistance device may have trouble getting over the curb that separates the sidewalk from the street. A curb ramp (usually located at a crosswalk) is traversable by anyone whether they are walking or using a mobility device.

When visiting a school, consider the "accessible path of travel." Is the infrastructure accessible for someone with a disability to get from Point A (for example, getting off the bus) to Point B (the classroom)? If so, what are the barriers or impediments along the route?

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Engineering

Maintenance is a particularly important part of ensuring that there is an accessible path of travel. Upheaved sidewalks can present obstacles to someone using a mobility assistance device. A broken audible cue at a crosswalk can make crossing the street challenging for a person with a visual disability. Report any issues to the school administration or the local municipality.

When designing SRTS infrastructure projects, it is critical that all aspects of the project comply with current ADA guidelines to ensure that it is accessible to anyone with a disability. The ADA guidelines help ensure that equitable access is provided to all users and should serve as the starting point for all accessibility improvements.

When visiting a school, consider the "accessible path of travel."

In addition, high-quality wayfinding is useful to students with cognitive, hearing, and sight impairments because they are highly visible, not blocked by tall poles or plants, and use colors or textures that identify distinguish between destinations.

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Evaluation

Monitoring outcomes is an important component of SRTS programs to make sure that they are effective and relevant.

One of the most valuable ways to evaluate whether or not a SRTS program has effectively included students with disabilities is to ask the students if they felt that they were able to participate successfully. A parent questionnaire is also helpful in evaluating success by obtaining the parent's perspective of their child's experience.

Surveys and other materials should be made available in alternate formats to ensure that they are accessible to people who use screen readers or other devices. MassDOT has a guide on developing accessible documents that can be consulted to ensure compliance.

Accessibility can be evaluated as part of a SRTS walk audit. Walk audits are important tools in assessing barriers to safe walking and rolling to school. The following design elements should be considered to evaluate the accessibility of infrastructure:

- For signals with pedestrian phases, are the pedestrian clearance intervals timed appropriately? Pedestrian clearance time is computed as the crossing distance divided by the walking speed. The speed of pedestrians is a critical assumption in determining this parameter. The Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD) recommends a walking speed value of 4.0 feet per second (ft/s). The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Accessibility Guidelines for Buildings and Facilities recommends 3.0 ft/s.
- Are sight lines adequate for all crossings?
- At school entrances, are there ramps in place of or in addition to stairways?
- Are an adequate number of accessible parking spaces provided? Is there an accessible path of travel from the parking spaces into the school?
- Is the bus-drop off location accessible? Is there an accessible path of travel from the bus drop-off to the school?
- If there are grates or openings along an accessible route, are the openings no larger than 1/2"? Is the long dimension perpendicular to the dominant direction of travel?

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Evaluation

- Are ADA accessible curb ramps available at all intersections along a walking/rolling to school route?
- Are sidewalk surface materials stable, firm, slip resistant and easy to maintain?
- Are sidewalk surfaces well-maintained and smooth?
- Are sidewalks and outdoor paths of travel cleared of snow and ice?
- Are street crossings short and comfortable when traversed at all speeds?
- Are crosswalks visible?
- Are there audible crossing cues for pedestrians at intersections?
- Is there sufficient width for wheelchairs at doorways (the clear width must be a minimum of 32 inches and a maximum of 48 inches)?

A full checklist for assessing ADA compliance is available here: https://www.adachecklist.org/doc/fullchecklist/ada-checklist.pdf

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Summary

Some concepts to keep in mind to make sure that students with disabilities are included in SRTS and benefit from the program are:

- In most cases, children with disabilities can participate in SRTS activities alongside their peers.
- Instead of asking about a child's disability, inquire about specific accommodations the child will need to participate in SRTS programs.
- Always show respect for a person and their preferences.
- Education accommodations may require:
  - Appropriate training period
  - Hands-on practice time
  - Walking/rolling "buddies" are encouraged
- When visiting a school, consider the "accessible path of travel."
- Maintenance is especially important to ensuring that infrastructure is accessible to people with disabilities.