

# Rural Communities

## CASE STUDY

## Belchertown

EDUCATION **ENCOURAGEMENT** ENGAGEMENT EVALUATION ENGINEERING EQUITY | URBAN **RURAL** SUBURBAN

### Background

Belchertown Public Schools reached out to Safe Routes to School (SRTS) in 2022 after the town installed new sidewalks and bike lanes in the downtown area, nearby two elementary schools and the high school. The town is rural in nature and the schools had few regular walkers and bikers. With the new infrastructure improvements, the schools were hoping to partner to increase safe walking, biking, and rolling.

After discussing with the School Committee and the Safer and Healthy Schools subcommittee, the administration decided to start with a large Walk to School Day for International Walk, Bike, and Roll to School Day. At first, SRTS and administration started to explore the possibility of organizing a drop-off location downtown so students could walk to school utilizing the new infrastructure. However, the team pivoted to utilizing an on-campus solution because of concern with traffic and circulation issues at the initial drop-off location.

### Overview

Two elementary schools and the high school share a campus. Bussed students and students at the two elementary schools arriving by family vehicle were dropped off at the high school athletic fields. They all walked across campus to their respective schools together with their teachers and school administrators.

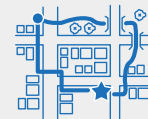
The superintendent and assistant superintendent worked with SRTS to design the route and organize the event. It was initially met with skepticism by teachers who had never participated in such an activity, but at the event, the students' joy and excitement won everyone over. The high school pep band joined them to play some walking tunes, too. Hundreds of students participated in the event!

### Lessons Learned

- ✓ Celebrating Flagship Days can be a great way to engage a whole school community and raise awareness about the different active transportation choices that are possible even within settings with limited infrastructure or traffic and circulation challenges
- ✓ There are many different ways to participate in Flagship events, from walking together to playing walking tunes that support and encourage those walking!



### Impacts



Walking and rolling routes were designed to support student walking and will be used when celebrating additional Flagship Days



Those who were skeptical about the school community's ability to walk to school became enthusiastic advocates for this now annual walking celebration