



Jackson County Department of Public Health

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2022-10
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
February 17, 2022

HEALTH DEPARTMENT WINS CHILD HEALTH AWARD

The Jackson County Department of Public Health (JCDPH) has been awarded the NC GlaxoSmithKline Foundation Child Health Recognition Award through the NC Public Health Association for its efforts through the Safe Routes to School (SRTS) Program.

Children walking and biking to or at school in the rural Appalachian Mountains may seem impossible to some, but it was a challenge the JCDPH's SRTS Coordinator Jackie Moore was willing to tackle. Moore has partnered with public, charter, and private schools to begin walking and biking programs with students. Since the inception, SRTS has integrated walking and biking into school and district cultures through district-level policies and procedures focusing on teaching and promoting safe walking and biking. As a result, over 14,000 students across four counties and the Qualla Boundary have opportunities to walk or bike to school and/or have access to walking and biking activities during their school day, and will benefit from long lasting infrastructure improvements within their towns and communities.

For 5 years, the Active Routes to School Program (ARTS) at JCDPH successfully planned and implemented walking and biking programs in the eight most western counties of the state. As a result, all implemented walking and biking programs at the schools and participated in International Walk and Bike to School Days. The ARTS program also encouraged walking and biking at the schools, which has allowed students to be more active during their time on the school's campus while simultaneously receiving education on bike and pedestrian safety.

In 2019, JCDPH was awarded the 3-year NC DOT Non-Infrastructure SRTS Program grant to continue to advance the success of the ARTS program. In addition to the ARTS focus areas of education, encouragement, and enforcement, SRTS also includes a focus on engineering, evaluation, and equity. Through SRTS partnerships, multiple schools have received grant funding for bikes, which began the establishment of sustainable bike clubs in several schools. Helmets have also been provided at no cost to students via grants received through SRTS and additional community partners such as local law enforcement agencies and Safe Kids coalitions. Let's Go NC! trainings have been provided to schools, local law enforcement, NC Highway Patrol, parks and recreation, and after school program staff.

In an effort to provide an opportunity for students to practice their pedestrian safety skills gained through the curriculum, schools and law enforcement have partnered together to implement a program called "Walk the Town." These walks include addressing traffic lights,



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pedestrian crosswalks, visibility, the correct direction to walk towards traffic, sign interpretation, and more. To date, three of the four counties represent district-level policies that support walk-at-school programming.

Several communities within the service area have participated in walkability audits that have led to environmental changes. Improvement examples include painting pedestrian crosswalks, identifying routes that encourage all abilities to be able to participate in events and programs, additional signs and lights, and more. These improvements have increased safe and effective walkability near schools to enhance the safety of children and families.

The award will be presented to JCDPH in April at the North Carolina Public Health Association's Educational Conference. The Child Health Recognition Awards Program honors public health professionals and programs that improve the health status of children through innovative, creative, and successful approaches.

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