

AUGUST 2023

ORANGE COUNTY SAFE TRAVELS EDUCATION PROGRAM (OC STEP)



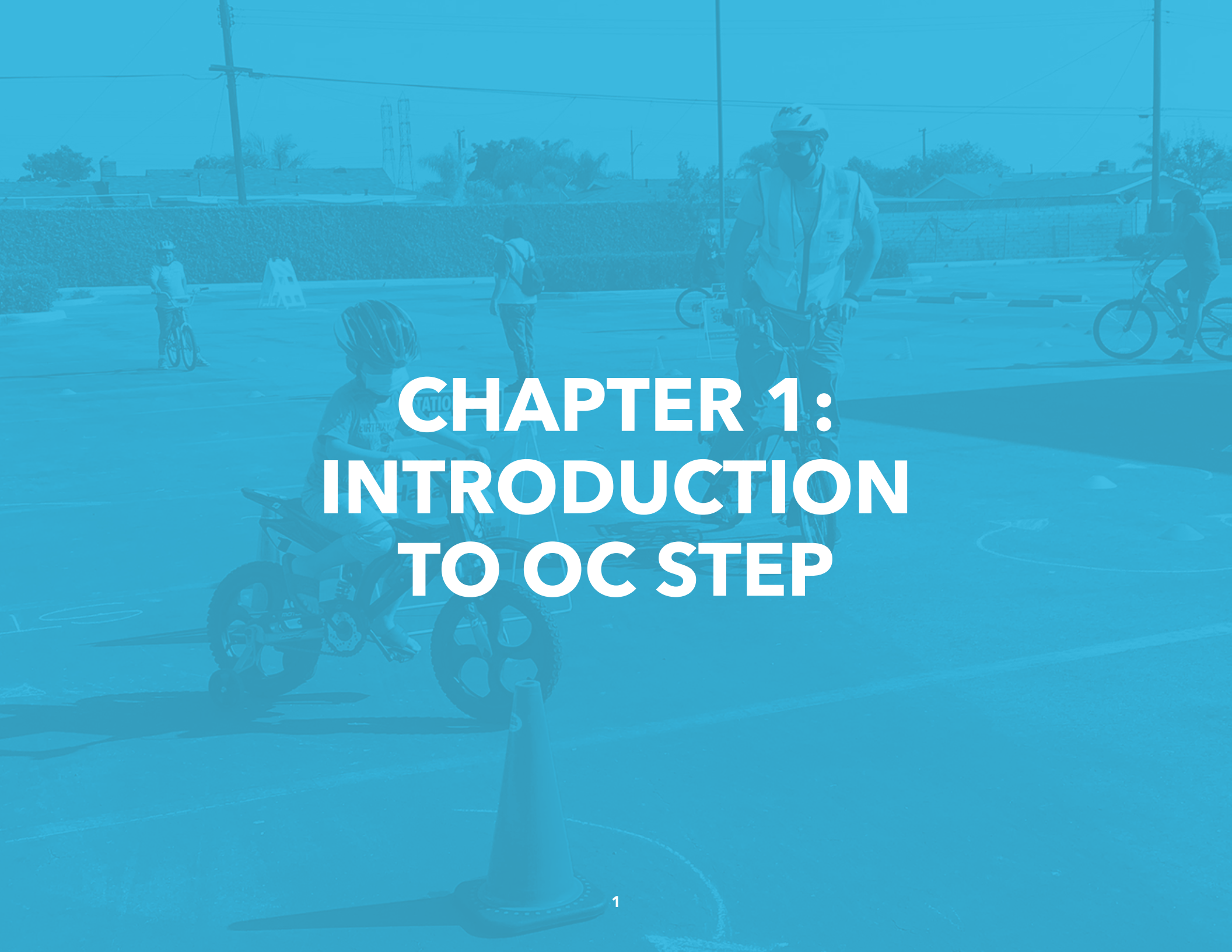
OC STEP

AUGUST 2023



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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO OC STEP

INTRODUCTION TO OC STEP

The Orange County Safe Travels Education Program (OC STEP) is a partnership project of the Orange County Transportation Authority (OCTA) and the Orange County Health Care Agency (OCHCA). The purpose of OC STEP is to provide schools in Orange County with Safe Routes to School (SRTS) resources, activities, and events to encourage students and families to walk and roll to school safely and more often.

OC STEP began in 2019 as a vision to deliver SRTS activities and education to schools serving disadvantaged communities throughout Orange County. OC STEP implementation was coordinated through a team of providers (OC STEP team), which included Alta Planning + Design, Latino Health Access, and Walk 'n Rollers. Funding for OC STEP was provided through a California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) Active Transportation Program (ATP) grant.

While OC STEP was initially funded for two years (2019-20 and 2020-21), the COVID-19 pandemic delayed implementation for nearly two more years (2021-22 and 2022-23). In the future, OCTA, OCHCA, and SRTS stakeholders are interested in maintaining the program to continue to provide consistent SRTS programming to the region.

This report summarizes the OC STEP program from 2019 to 2023. It includes lessons learned and shares recommendations for next steps should the program continue or be expanded.

OC STEP Objectives

- Engage 25 public elementary schools countywide
- Serve youth and families in disadvantaged communities
- Provide a range of walking and biking encouragement activities
- Provide educational opportunities to the students and family members
- Strengthen partnerships with transportation, health, and public safety officials
- Empower school champions to continue SRTS efforts following the project

What is Safe Routes to School?

Safe Routes to School (SRTS) is an initiative to encourage safe walking and biking to school. Most SRTS programs incorporate the six “E’s”: engagement, equity, encouragement, education, evaluation, and engineering. OC STEP focused on five of those “E’s” to provide noninfrastructure programming and activities to schools.

- **Engagement:** SRTS programs collaborate with school stakeholders to work with existing organizations and groups and create ongoing partnerships.
- **Equity:** SRTS programs benefit all students, with particular emphasis on communities that have been historically underserved.
- **Encouragement:** SRTS programs encourage students and families to walk and bike to school through activities and events.
- **Education:** SRTS programs teach students and families safe walking and biking skills and about the benefits of walking and biking.

- **Evaluation:** SRTS programs are assessed to determine which activities were most successful and which should be improved for future programming.

Engineering is typically a part of SRTS programs that include an infrastructure component to physically alter streets to make walking and biking more comfortable and safer. Although OC STEP did not include infrastructure recommendations, City and County staff were involved in OC STEP school and parent meetings to understand infrastructure concerns.

School Selection Process

After identifying schools in disadvantaged areas, the OC STEP team began reaching out to elementary schools to learn about existing SRTS programming. The team focused on recruiting schools that did not already have regular SRTS programming, but had school champions that were interested in encouraging walking and biking for students. Although 25 schools were initially included in OC STEP, the team also identified backup schools that could be brought in, in case one of the original schools was unable to continue with the OC STEP program.



WHO ARE SCHOOL CHAMPIONS?

School champions can be any school staff member, parent, or other stakeholder that can be empowered to continue SRTS programming at their school. School champions can help volunteer at events, encourage other parents/caregivers and families to participate in SRTS, and can even advocate for safer streets alongside school staff when meeting with local government officials.

The OC STEP Program was initially administered to 25 Orange County public elementary schools. Schools were selected for participation in OC STEP based on several metrics, including if they were located in a “disadvantaged community”. Learn more about disadvantaged communities on page 4.

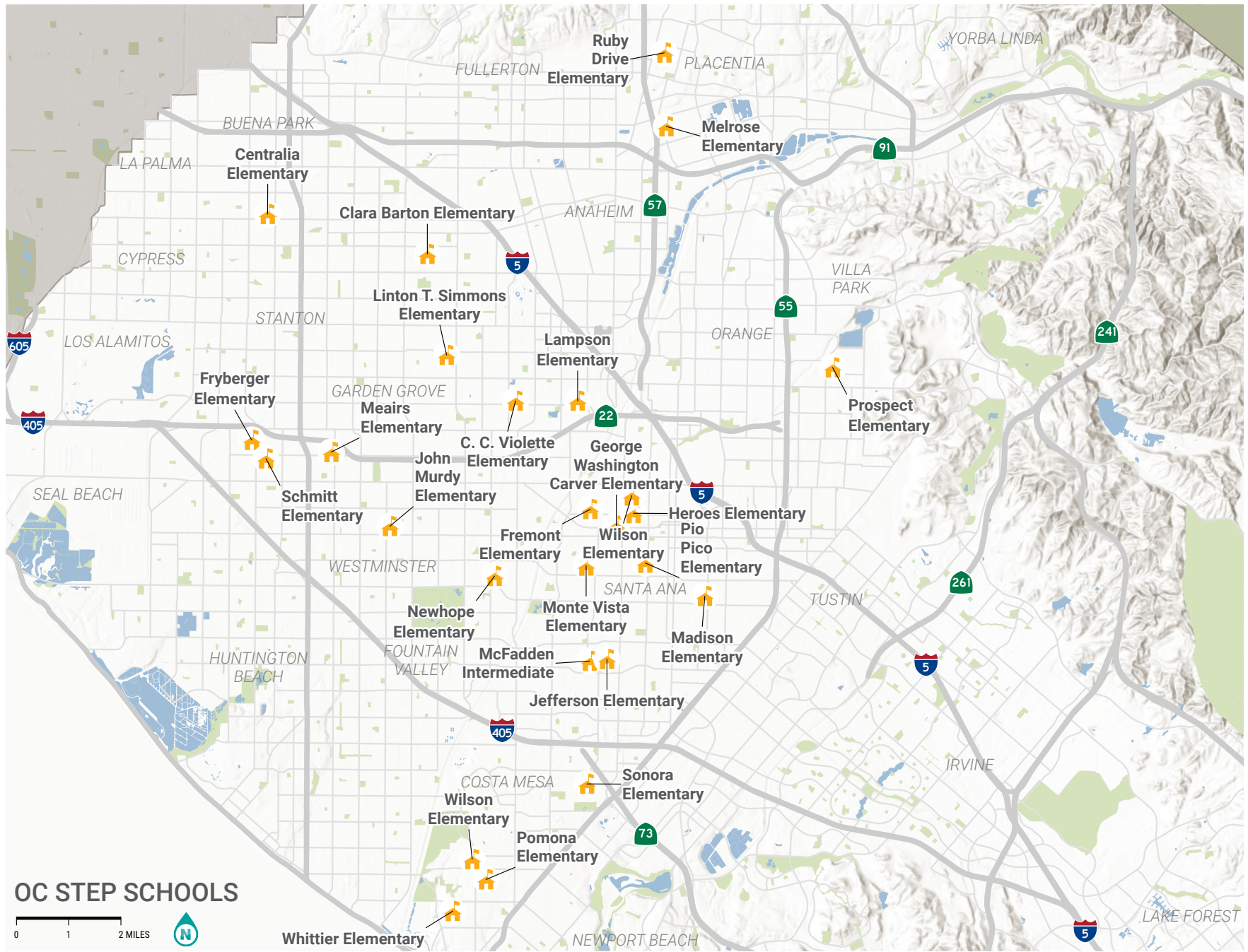
The 25 schools include:

1. Clara Barton Elementary, Anaheim Elementary School District, Anaheim

2. C.C. Violette Elementary, Garden Grove Unified School District, Garden Grove
3. Carver Elementary, Santa Ana Unified School District, Santa Ana
4. Centralia Elementary, Centralia Elementary School District, Anaheim
5. Everett A. Rea Elementary, Newport-Mesa Unified School District, Costa Mesa
6. Fremont Elementary, Santa Ana Unified School District, Santa Ana
7. Fryberger Elementary, Westminster Elementary School District, Westminster
8. Heroes Elementary, Santa Ana Unified School District, Santa Ana
9. Jefferson Elementary, Santa Ana Unified School District, Santa Ana
10. Linton T. Simmons Elementary, Garden Grove Unified School District, Garden Grove
11. Madison Elementary, Santa Ana Unified School District, Santa Ana
12. McFadden Institute of Technology, Santa Ana Unified School District, Santa Ana
13. Meairs Elementary, Westminster Elementary School District, Garden Grove
14. Melrose Elementary, Placentia-Yorba Linda Unified School District, Placentia
15. Monte Vista Elementary, Santa Ana Unified School District, Santa Ana
16. Murdy Elementary, Garden Grove Unified School District, Garden Grove
17. Newhope Elementary, Garden Grove Unified School District, Santa Ana
18. Pio Pico Elementary, Santa Ana Unified School District, Santa Ana
19. Pomona Elementary, Newport-Mesa Unified School District, Costa Mesa
20. Prospect Elementary, Orange Unified School District, Orange
21. Ruby Drive Elementary, Placentia-Yorba Linda Unified School District, Placentia
22. Schmitt Elementary, Westminster Elementary School District, Westminster
23. Sonora Elementary, Newport-Mesa Unified School District, Costa Mesa
24. Whittier Elementary, Newport-Mesa Unified School District, Costa Mesa
25. Wilson Elementary, Newport-Mesa Unified School District, Costa Mesa

DISADVANTAGED COMMUNITIES

There are over 400 public and public charter schools in Orange County, 137 of which can be classified as a disadvantaged school community. Disadvantaged school communities are based on the percentage of students that are eligible for free or reduced priced meals per the California Department of Education. Schools with more than 75% of eligible students are considered disadvantaged. Schools were further reviewed with metrics including the number of collisions near each school and healthy social indicators near each school based on the [California Healthy Places Index](#) tool.



Menu of Activities

The OC STEP team compiled a “Menu of Activities” to clearly communicate the options for engaging and educational activities that schools could choose for their campus. This menu helped schools understand the type of activities that OC STEP could provide, and helped in scheduling these activities around other existing school events. This menu was meant to be customizable to meet school’s priorities and schedule, and schools were encouraged to brainstorm additional activities that were not listed on the menu.



What is STEP?

STEP provides select schools with **FREE resources** to encourage families to walk/bike to school safely and more often.

Why STEP?

Students who walk/bike to school are healthier and arrive at school ready to learn! STEP helps families choose walking or biking and teaches them how to do so safely.

But our school doesn't have time for one more thing.

We know! That's why STEP keeps it simple with services that don't require a lot of your time.

By participating in STEP, your school will receive:

- Pedestrian and bike distance learning videos aligned with PE and HE standards
- Presentations for your PTA/PTO, school site councils, or other parent/caregiver/stakeholder groups
- Ready-to-forward e-blasts and/or tip sheets, e-newsletters, and educational materials to share with families
- Data about how your students get to and from school (hello Green Ribbon School Award!)
- Banner celebrating your school's efforts
- Suggested routes to school map that shows a preferred route to walk or bike to school

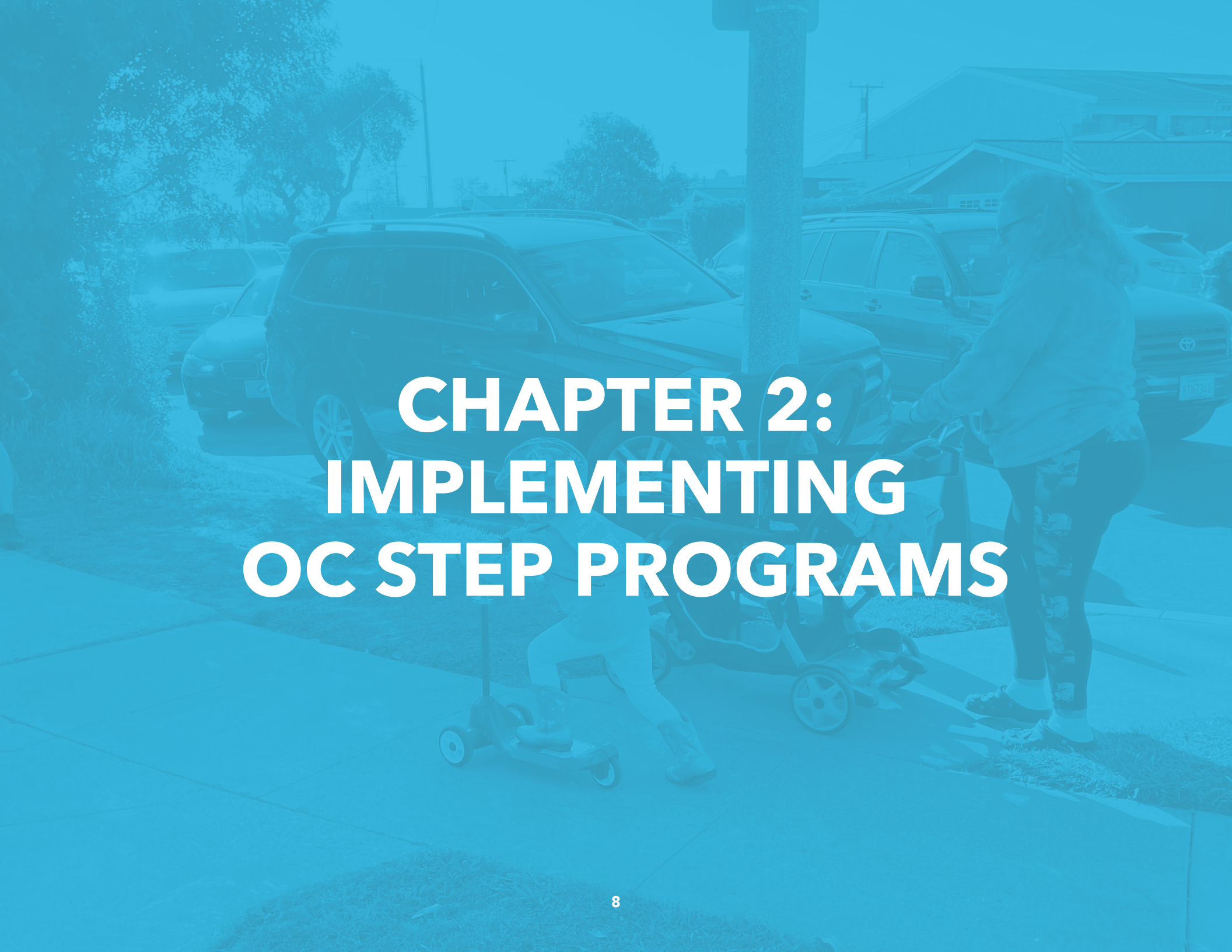
Check out the next page to see what additional services you can receive.

OC STEP Providers

Three providers divided up the 25 OC STEP schools to provide each school with adequate attention and relevant school programming. The providers worked together using their existing stakeholder connections to recruit schools into the OC STEP program until each provider had a roster of either eight or nine schools. The providers were the main contact for each school and were responsible for distributing materials, leading events, and engaging school staff and parents. The providers met with each other and with OCTA and OCHCA regularly to collaborate and support each other. The three providers were:

- Alta Planning + Design
- Latino Health Access
- Walk 'n Rollers

The logo for Alta, featuring the word "alta" in a lowercase, teal, sans-serif font.



CHAPTER 2: IMPLEMENTING OC STEP PROGRAMS

OC STEP Programs at a Glance

OC STEP offered a variety of in-person and online activities and programs for students, parents, and teachers. These programs taught students about safe walking and biking, encouraged walking and biking to school, brought together school stakeholders to collaborate, and considered each school's unique needs. These programs included:

- Pedestrian and bike safety videos
- Online parent resources
- Banners and lawn signs
- Suggested routes to school maps
- Parent newsletters
- Working group meetings
- Parent and stakeholder meetings
- Walk and bike to school days

- Mini main street
- Open houses
- Walking school bus
- Assemblies
- Pedestrian fairs and bicycle rodeos
- Incentives



Safe Routes to School During a Pandemic

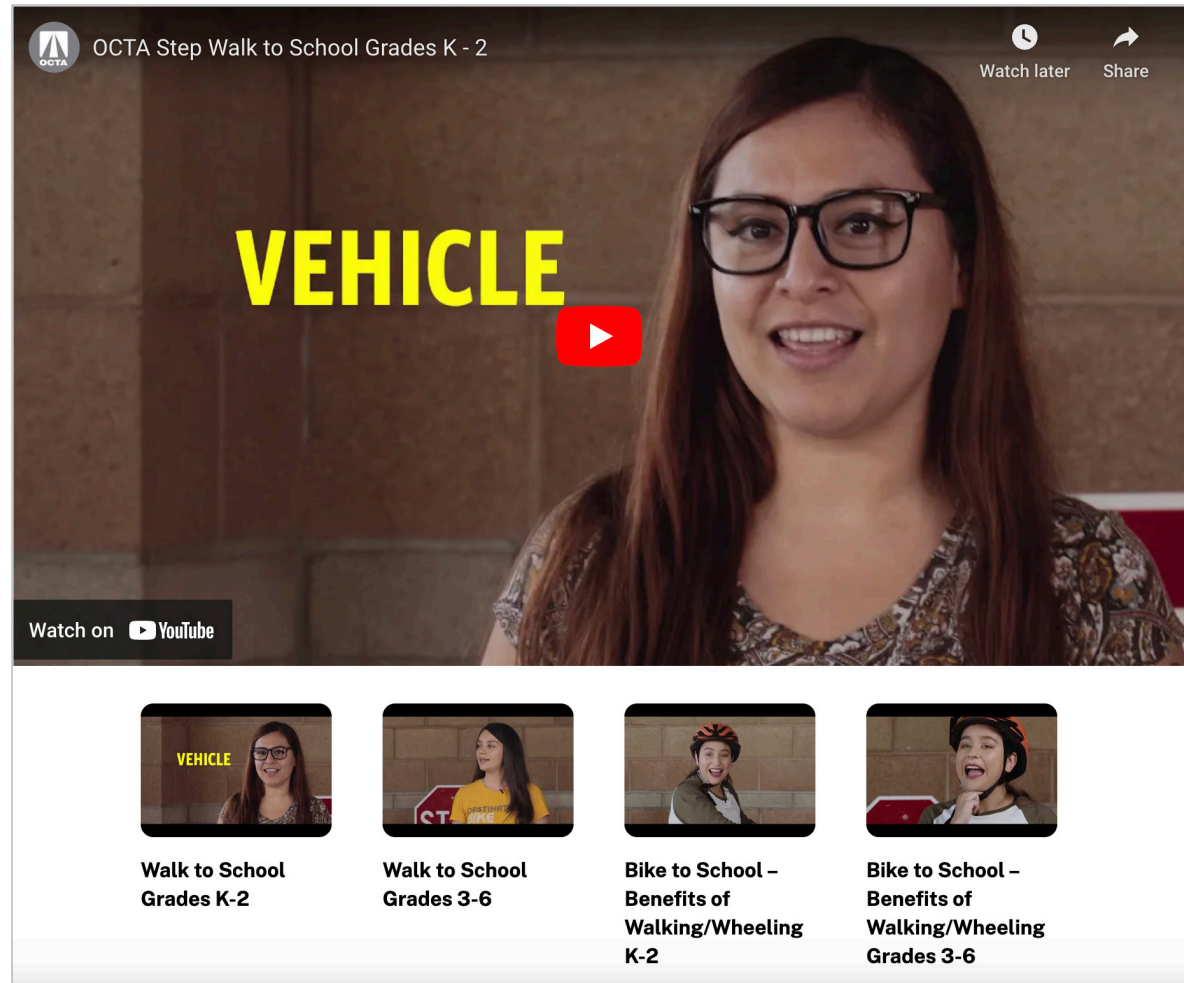
The COVID-19 pandemic dramatically impacted the ability to complete OC STEP activities on school campuses. From the years 2020 to 2022, many students learned from home and schools strictly limited the number of visitors on their campuses to protect students and staff. However, OC STEP was still able to provide activities that students could participate in, no matter their distance learning environment.



Pedestrian and Bike Safety Videos

The OC STEP team created pedestrian and bicycle safety videos, which are available on the [OC STEP website](#) for teachers to show their students. These videos were developed by OC STEP to align with California Department of Education (CDE) Health Education and Physical Education Standards. The team created multiple videos to cater to Pre-K through 2nd grade students and 3rd grade through 6th grade students. These videos teach students and families about the benefits of walking and biking to school and around their neighborhood.

These safety videos are interactive and encourage students to practice their safety skills with the presenters. Students learn about pedestrian and bicyclist infrastructure such as sidewalks and crosswalks and how to use them. Students also learn about the importance of wearing a helmet, how to do basic bicycle maintenance, and how to follow road rules when bicycling.



OCTA Step Walk to School Grades K - 2

Watch later Share

VEHICLE

Watch on YouTube

- Walk to School Grades K-2**
- Walk to School Grades 3-6**
- Bike to School – Benefits of Walking/Wheeling K-2**
- Bike to School – Benefits of Walking/Wheeling Grades 3-6**

Videos available at: octa.net/getting-around/active/oc-walk/oc-step/

Parent and Student Resources

The OC STEP website also provides resources and activities for parents/ caregivers to do with their students. These resources include a toolkit and video to teach families about SRTS and the value it brings to schools; a helmet fitting checklist; and resources for students using OCTA transit. Online packets are also available for students to learn bicycle and pedestrian safety while playing games and doing other activities.

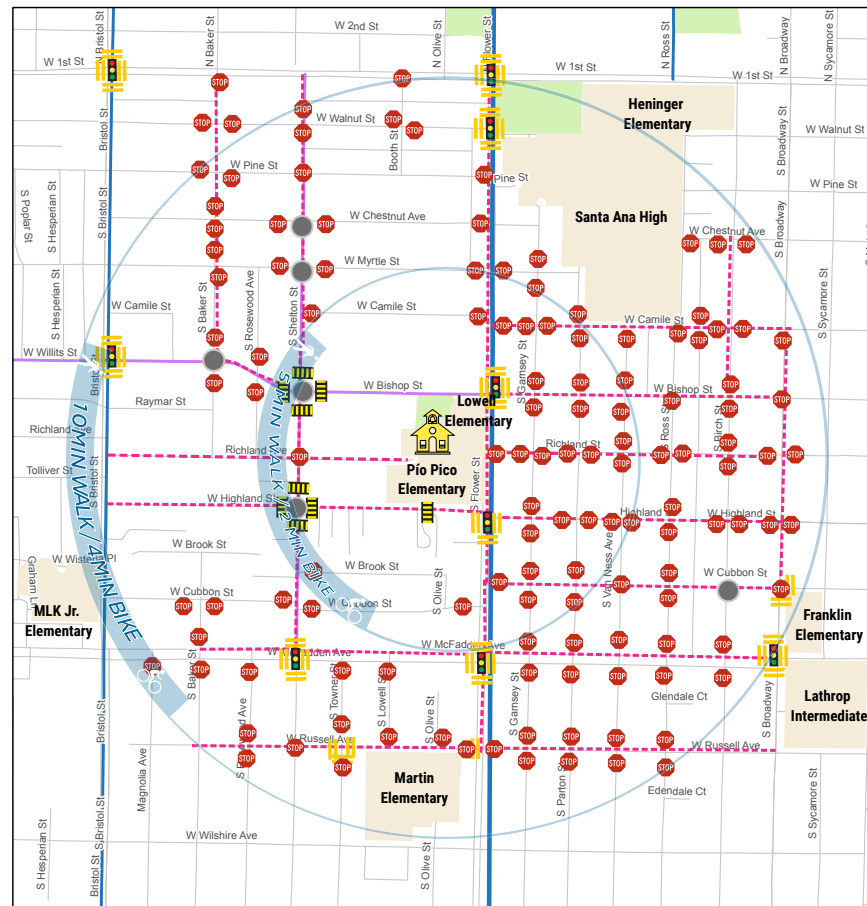
Banners and Lawn Signs

SRTS banners and lawn signs were distributed to project schools. These banners and signs brand each school as an OC STEP school and show each school's commitment to walking and biking to school. The lawn signs also remind drivers to slow down near the school. The lawn signs were printed in English, Spanish and Vietnamese. The banners and lawn signs are reusable so schools can continue to use them for future events.



Suggested Routes to School Maps

Suggested routes to school maps were created for each project school. The maps show a half-mile radius around each school with icons for existing road infrastructure like crosswalks, traffic signals, traffic circles, bike lanes, pedestrian signals, and stop signs. The maps show the suggested routes students can take to walk to school. These suggested routes typically include the paths that have pedestrian infrastructure and safer crossings. These maps are also meant to be an educational tool for students and parents/caregivers to talk about the places in their neighborhoods where they can safely walk. While the maps provide suggested routes to schools, it is ultimately up to parents/caregivers to decide the best route based on their knowledge of their neighborhood and the skill level of their student. Suggested routes to school maps were produced in English, Spanish, and Vietnamese.



Pío Pico Elementary School Suggested Route to School

- Bike Lane
- Bike Route
- Suggested Route
- High-Visibility Crosswalk
- Marked Crosswalk
- Traffic Signal
- Stop Sign
- Traffic Circle



STEP

An Orange County Safe Routes to School Program



Newsletters

Newsletters promoting safe and frequent walking and biking to school were sent to school staff and parents / caregivers. Newsletters also updated SRTS stakeholders about upcoming school activities and provided tips for walking and biking to school. These newsletters were a simple way to keep stakeholders engaged in SRTS and to remind schools of the activities that OC STEP offered. Newsletters were produced in English and Spanish.

SPRING 2022 STEP NEWSLETTER



May is National Bike Month

May is National Bike Month, promoted by the League of American Bicyclists and celebrated in several communities around the country. Established in 1956, National Bike Month is a chance to showcase the many benefits of bicycling and encourage and educate riders. Grab your bike, go for a ride and enjoy the Spring flowers!

You can find more information on events and activities this month on the [Orange County Transportation Agency \(OCTA\) website](http://www.octa.net).


Fun Fact

In 2011, Austrian racing cyclist Markus Stöckl drove an ordinary bicycle down the hill of a volcano. He reached a speed of 102 mph!

What is STEP?

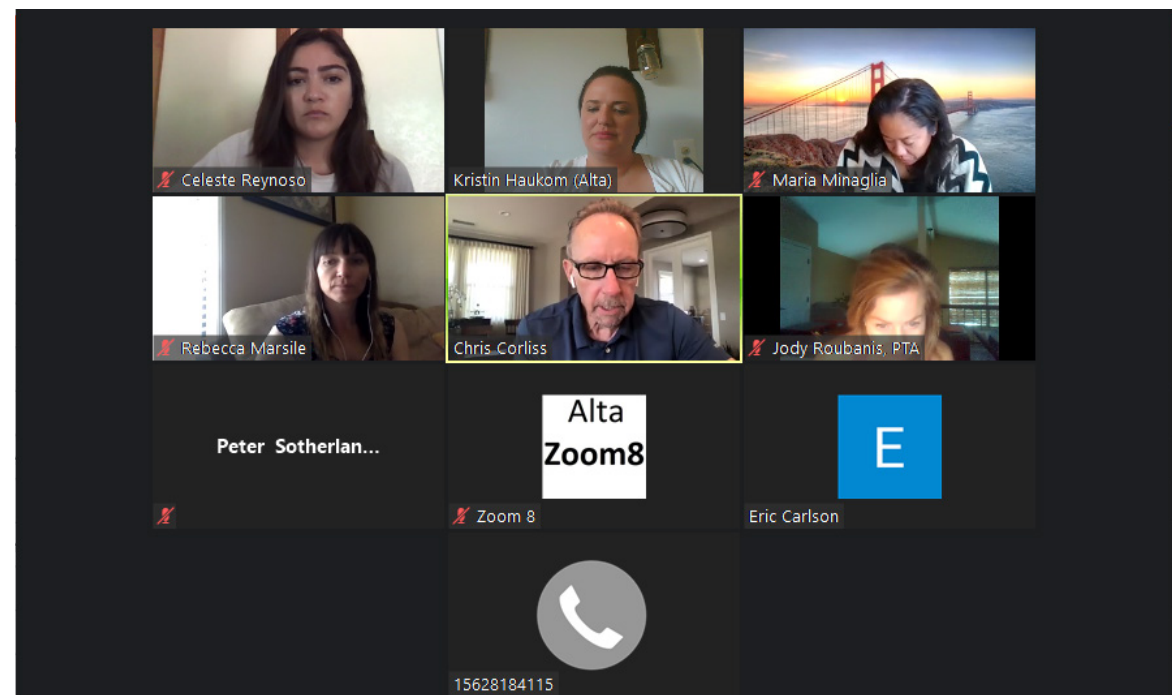
The Safe Transportation Education Program (STEP) provides free Safe Routes to School (SRTS) resources to select elementary schools to encourage students and families to walk, bike, and roll to school and in everyday life. During the pandemic, STEP is providing distance learning materials to keep kids moving.

For more information, visit:
<http://www.octa.net/Walk/Safe-Routes-to-School/OC-Step/>



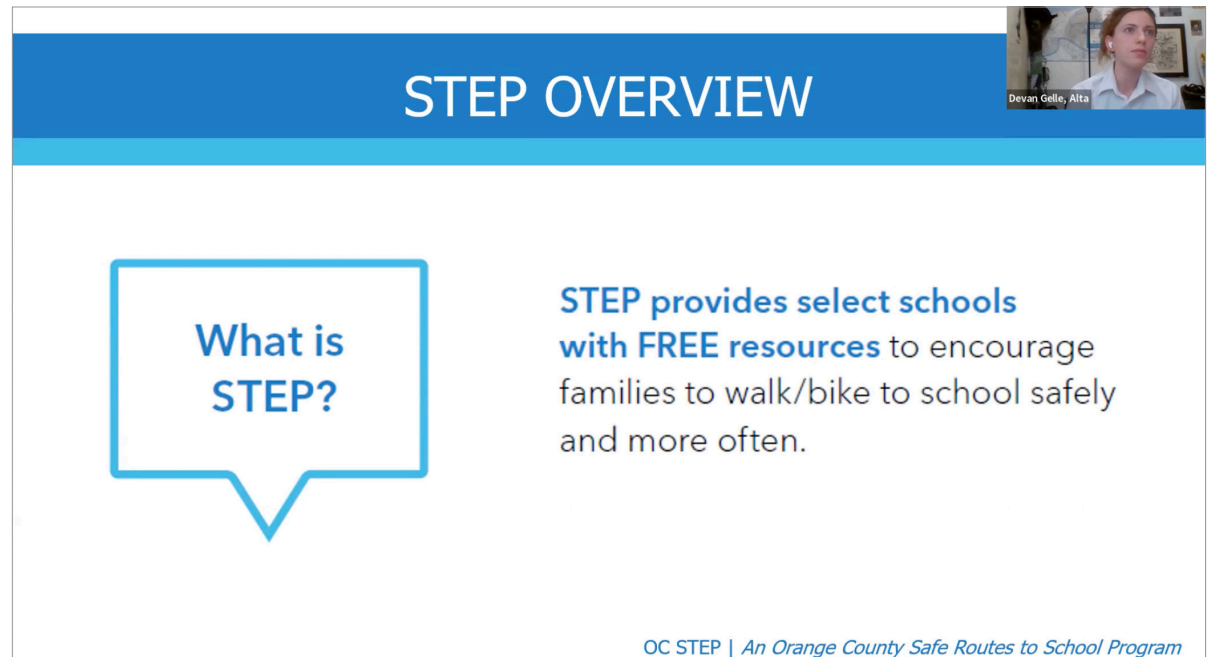
Working Group Meetings

Working group meetings helped to shape OC STEP during the pandemic. Working group members include staff from OCTA, OCHCA, the OC STEP team, PTA members, school staff, and Orange County staff. Working group members brainstormed the type of distance learning resources that OC STEP could create for parents/caregivers, students, and teachers. These meetings kept attendees up to date on the project to ensure the program stayed on track for recruiting schools and implementing activities despite social distancing protocols. The working group also provided feedback on OC STEP materials like banners, newsletters and the menu of activities, and helped to recruit schools for OC STEP.



Virtual Stakeholder Meetings

Prior to the pandemic, the OC STEP team planned to meet with Parent Teacher Associations (PTA) or similar parent/caregiver groups at every project school. However, the pandemic made it difficult to schedule regular meetings with parents/caregivers and school staff that were dealing with constantly changing schedules and protocols. In late 2022, when COVID protocols began to be lifted and school schedules were more regular, the OC STEP team began scheduling virtual stakeholder meetings in order to meet with these caregiver/stakeholder groups. Schools were divided into their respective cities and the team convened school staff, parents/caregivers, school district staff, and city staff to meet in Zoom meetings. These meetings allowed the team to review the goals of OC STEP and to encourage participants to get involved in SRTS activities at their schools.



The slide features a blue header with the text "STEP OVERVIEW" in white. Below the header is a light blue horizontal bar. The main content area is white and contains a blue speech bubble on the left with the text "What is STEP?". To the right of the speech bubble, the text reads: "STEP provides select schools with FREE resources to encourage families to walk/bike to school safely and more often." At the bottom right of the slide, there is a small video inset showing a woman with red hair, identified as Devan Gelle, Alta. Below the video inset, the text "OC STEP | An Orange County Safe Routes to School Program" is displayed in a small blue font.

The stakeholder meetings also provided an excellent opportunity for school staff to relay their infrastructure concerns to city staff. City staff answered questions about upcoming infrastructure improvements and how requests could be sent to public works staff. These meetings were particularly important because the OC

STEP project did not include infrastructure recommendations in this round of funding. After the meetings, attendees were encouraged to send information to other parents/caregivers and to continue to contact the OC STEP team with SRTS suggestions and concerns.



VALUE OF COORDINATION: CROSSING GUARDS IN ANAHEIM

*The virtual stakeholder meetings allowed school staff to directly ask city staff questions about improving road infrastructure near their schools. During one virtual stakeholder meeting, school staff from **Centralia Elementary School** relayed concerns about a crosswalk at Lincoln Avenue and Westchester Drive. Parents/caregivers have repeatedly asked the school to implement a crossing guard at the intersection because some drivers run the red light at this intersection or pull into the crosswalk. During the stakeholder meeting, City of Anaheim public works staff were able to answer questions about this intersection and provide information about requesting a crossing guard through the City's traffic engineering department. School staff were grateful for this interaction as they had been previously unsuccessful in communicating concerns about this intersection.*

Completed OC STEP Activities

The following activities were completed in-person at project schools throughout Orange County. These activities ranged in cost, time, and level of effort from project staff. Each activity aimed to educate students about safe walking and biking, and to encourage students to try walking and biking to school if possible. Some of these activities also engaged parents/caregivers to encourage drivers to pay extra attention in school zones and to consider using active transportation with their students.

Walk and Bike to School Days

Each year in May and October schools across the country celebrate Walk to School Day and Bike to School Day. These events range in size, but ultimately get students excited about walking and biking. These walk and bike to school days often include additional activities like a walking school bus or a group bike ride to school. OC STEP helped organize these walk and bike to school days alongside other Orange County groups like school districts, the Orange County Department of Education, local organizations, and law enforcement.



Wilson Elementary Walk to School Day Spring 2022. Students at Wilson Elementary designed their own signs to carry while they walked to school.



Carver Elementary School Walk to School Day Fall 2022. Hosted by Santa Ana Unified School District, Carver Elementary School had a 1980's themed walk to school day event in Fall 2022. The day included an assembly, a police escorted walking school bus, costumes, and music. OC STEP team joined to help support the walking school bus and to hand out bracelets and stickers to students walking to school.



Whittier Elementary School Bike to School Day Fall 2022. In collaboration with the City of Costa Mesa, Whittier Elementary School hosted a bike to school day in Fall 2022. The day started off in the morning with a group bike ride from a nearby park to school. OC STEP attended the event to cheer on students biking to school and to pass out incentives and suggested routes to school maps.

Mini Main Street

Mini Main Street is an interactive simulation that allows students to experience traffic situations in a safe and fun learning environment. Using customizable “buildings” and small-scale traffic signs, students practice safe crossing and walking skills. Mini Main Street allowed students to learn about safely using a crosswalk and to practice using their crossing skills. Students were encouraged to explore Mini Main Street and to point out signs and buildings that they recognized. OC STEP staff then taught students how to look both ways and make eye contact with drivers before they walk across a crosswalk. After learning how to use the crosswalk, students practiced crossing while watching for cars and other hazards on the road.

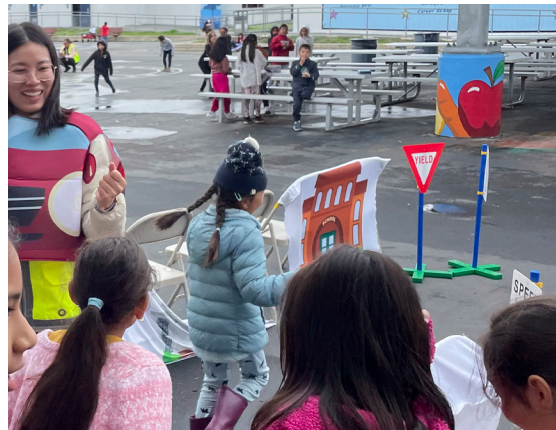
Mini Main Street can be implemented in different ways. In an auditorium setting, students first listen to an interactive presentation in which they learn about safe walking and biking methods. After the presentation students can practice what they learned on the Mini Main Street crosswalk. Mini Main Street worked effectively when set up during recess periods. Recess events allowed students to stop by Mini Main Street and practice using the crosswalk when they wanted, rather than requiring students to listen to a more formal presentation. Mini Main Street worked for all ages, with younger students learning the basics of using a crosswalk and older students learning more advanced information about street signage and traffic laws.



Students at **Clara Barton Elementary** lined up to practice making eye contact with drivers before crossing the street.



Students at **Fryberger Elementary** explored Mini Main Street and pointed out “buildings” and street signs that they recognized.



During recess at **Whittier Elementary** students could visit Mini Main Street and practice using the crosswalk.



Students at **McFadden Institute of Technology** listened to an interactive presentation prior to practicing their crossing skills at Mini Main Street.

Open House and Family Night Events

Pop-up events are smaller activities where OC STEP team members join an existing event at a school. In most of these cases, the OC STEP team set up a booth or table at already planned school events and engaged with students and their families. Depending on the type of event, the OC STEP team distributed suggested routes to school maps and other information about SRTS to parents/caregivers, and answered questions about how to safely walk and bike to school. These pop-up events were excellent opportunities to engage parents/caregivers that are not typically involved in SRTS activities.



During **Clara Barton Elementary's Parent Open House** in Fall 2022, the OC STEP team engaged with parents/caregivers about the benefits of walking and biking to school.



In Spring 2022 and 2023 OC STEP set up a table at **Fryberger Elementary's Family Science Night**. This event provided an opportunity to connect SRTS with Earth Day, and to engage with families about SRTS.

Walking School Bus

A walking school bus provides an opportunity for students that do not usually walk to school to do so in a safe and fun environment. Typically for walking school bus events, parents/caregivers and students will meet at one of the designated “bus stop” locations along a route to school. School staff and volunteers then walk to each bus stop picking up students along the way. The walking school bus grows in size until it reaches the school. OC STEP helped to lead these walking school buses for one-day events, but schools can choose to implement a walking school bus long term if volunteers can regularly staff the walk.



Walking school buses can be implemented during other events, like walk to school days. Students at **Centralia Elementary** participated in a walking school bus with help from OC STEP and the local police department.

Assemblies

Assemblies are a fun way to educate students about safely walking and biking to school. OC STEP assemblies included presentations, skits, and interactive activities. Assemblies were modified to fit the needs of different age groups to keep students engaged with the presentations.



Madison Elementary Students participated in an assembly where they learned about the crosswalks near their school.



Older students at **Ruby Drive Elementary** learned how to properly put on their helmet during an OC STEP assembly.



In January 2022 OC STEP visited **C.C. Violette Elementary**. The assembly was presented outside due to social distancing guidance.



Students at **Wilson Elementary** participated in an assembly prior to Walk to School Day in Spring 2021.

Pedestrian Fairs and Bicycle Rodeos

Pedestrian fairs and bicycle rodeos are highly interactive events where students get hands-on learning experiences. Pedestrian fairs can have different stations that students can visit to learn different walking and biking skills. Fairs can combine different OC STEP activities like Mini Main Street and assembly presentations into condensed activities so students can experience learning in different ways. Pedestrian fairs also include fun elements like games and prizes.

Bicycle rodeos are interactive skills events where students learn how to safely ride a bike. Students can bring their own bicycle and helmet to the event and visit different stations such as helmet fitting stations, a rules of the road station, an avoiding hazards station, and a bike maintenance station. These events can take place during school or after school. OC STEP led many bicycle rodeos, providing helmets for participating students.



A pedestrian resource fair at **Monte Vista Elementary** invited students to learn through playing games and practicing walking skills.



A bicycle rodeo at **Schmitt Elementary** allowed students to visit different skills stations to learn how to safely ride a bicycle.



INCENTIVES

Incentives are items that students receive after participating in an OC STEP event. These remind students of what they learned during the OC STEP event and can help encourage them to try walking and biking with their families. Examples of incentives include:

- Branded pencils
- Reflective stickers
- Branded bracelets
- Pedometers
- Bookmarks
- Educational/safety coloring sheets
- safety tip sheets

Customizing Events to Fit School's Needs

Overall, each OC STEP event could be customized to fit a school's needs. Some OC STEP schools had already been hosting events like walk and bike to school days, while other OC STEP schools had never been able to offer SRTS programs before. Some OC STEP schools struggled to encourage walking and biking to school due to their isolated location in a neighborhood, while other schools that were in proximity to each other were able to work together to create multi-school events. The OC STEP program helped schools find activities that fit their needs and the needs of their students.

PARENT MEETINGS

*OC STEP joined an in-person parent meeting at **Melrose Elementary** in Placentia. The team presented on the STEP program and explained the importance of having safe routes to school. Parents and caregivers then had the opportunity to ask questions and give comments about their experience walking to school with their students. This and other parent meetings helped to facilitate collaboration between OC STEP, school stakeholders, the school, and City staff.*





MCFADDEN WALK TO SCHOOL DAY, FALL 2021

Each year, the Santa Ana Unified School District chooses a focus school for Walk to School Day. In Fall 2021 the school district chose **McFadden Institute of Technology**. Events at the school included an assembly, a walking school bus, incentives, Star Wars characters and other mascots, and a performance from the school band. OC STEP dressed in their conehead costumes and helped lead students to school in a walking school bus. The OC STEP team also helped pass out pedometers to students to encourage them to continue walking beyond the event.



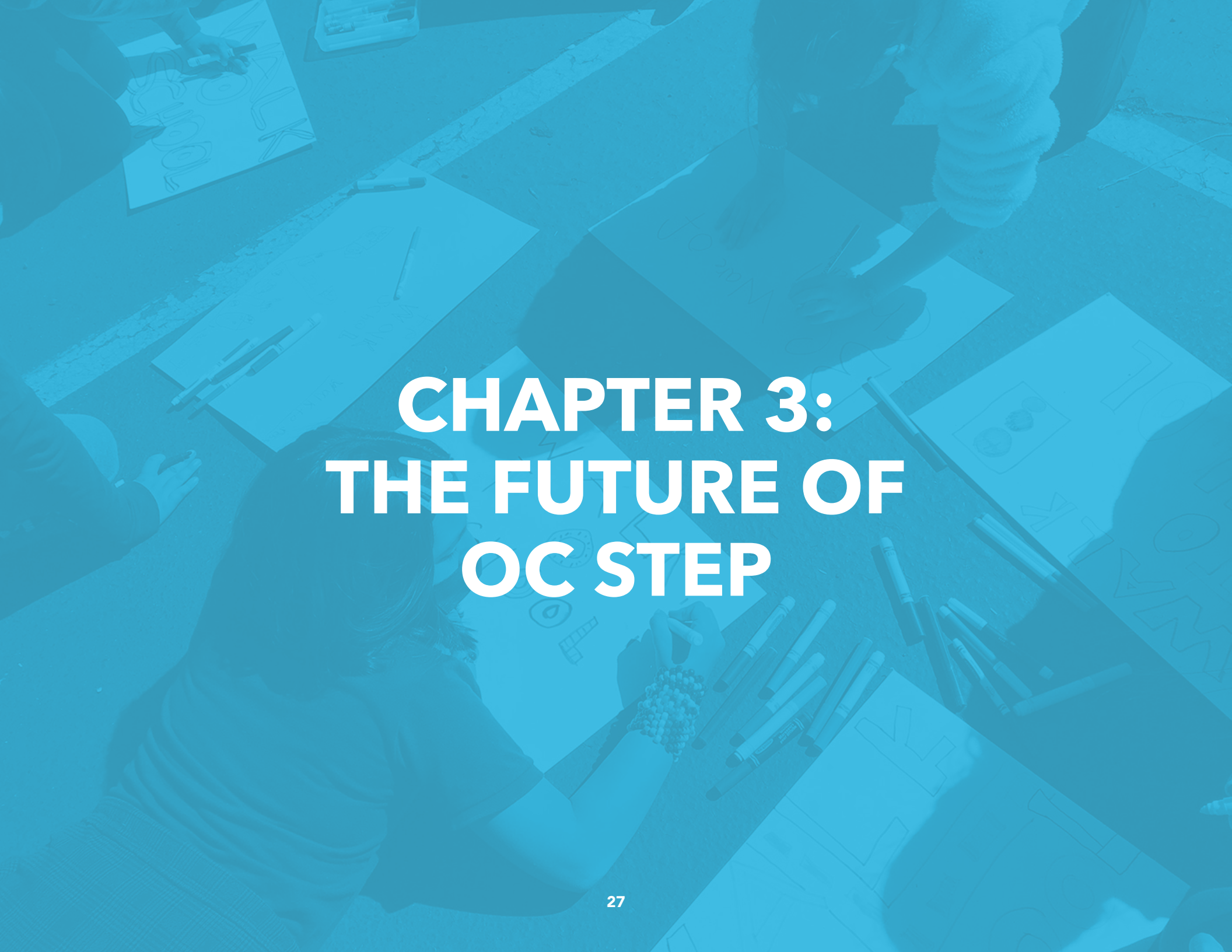
MURDY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL BACK TO SCHOOL DAY POP-UP, FALL 2022

On the first day of school, OC STEP joined school staff at **Murdy Elementary** to pass out suggested route maps to parents/caregivers in the school drop-off lane. This small activity helped set the intention for Murdy Elementary for the rest of the school year as a school that encouraged walking and biking. This event also allowed OC STEP to hear about specific concerns from school staff about infrastructure and programmatic improvements that are needed at the school, and to see firsthand how many students typically walk, bike, take the bus, or get dropped off at the school.



WALK AND ROLL FESTIVAL, SPRING 2023

OC STEP hosted a Walk and Roll Festival at **Estancia High School** for all students in Costa Mesa. Students learned how to bike safely including on an e-bike, received a free helmet and bike tune-up, and participated in a group walk. This event provided a hands-on learning opportunity for students to improve their bike skills and learn how to take care of their bikes. Students who attended this event also received a free goody bag and were entered to win a new e-bike. Several organizations partnered with STEP for this event including AAA, local bike shops, the Newport Beach Sunrise Rotary Club, and the Costa Mesa Firefighters.



CHAPTER 3: THE FUTURE OF OC STEP

Lessons Learned

Through the OC STEP project, the OC STEP team introduced many activities to schools in Orange County. These activities differed in the level of effort required from the OC STEP team and the school, costs and materiality, and amounts of time. Depending on the funding for future phases of OC STEP, OCTA can tailor activities to fit the availability of staff members and the needs of schools.

Mini Main Street

Mini Main Street is a low-cost interactive event. After the initial costs of the kit the event costs are low for OC STEP. Two staff members are needed from OC STEP to effectively present Mini Main Street, although three staff members are preferred, as the number of students can be overwhelming at larger schools. Mini Main Street takes longer than smaller pop-up events. OC STEP staff should expect to be at each school for two to three hours for Mini Main Street events.



Walk and Bike to School Days

Some events like walk and bike to school days can be scaled based on the OC STEP resources available. Events can be as simple as cheering on students that walk to school and celebrating the day with music or signs during school drop-off. These events can be completed with minimal materials and staff time. For larger walk and bike to school day events, OC STEP can partner with other organizations. Since walk and bike to school days are national events, other school and city staff are usually aware of the event and its purpose.

Pop-up Events

Pop-up events are less time intensive and require less planning than other OC STEP activities. Pop-up events happen in tandem with existing school events, like parent conference night, or can act as smaller scale activities on their own to keep up the SRTS momentum. Pop-up events can range in scope from cheering on students walking to school, to passing out incentives, to setting aside time to be available for parent questions. Pop-up events can generally be completed with

only one or two OC STEP team members, and can be used as an opportunity to meet face-to-face with school staff to further discuss larger SRTS events or any concerns the school may have about walking and biking to school.

Suggested Route Maps

Suggested route maps are useful tool for families and school staff to have conversations about safe walking and biking to school. These maps provide suggested walking and biking routes for students to get to school, however; these maps only provide suggested routes for a snapshot in time. As roadways change and new active transportation infrastructure is implemented, the suggested routes may also need to adapt. OCTA has begun to digitize each suggested route map for each OC STEP school using an on-line GIS platform. These maps can easily be edited by the OCTA team and can be uploaded to an online server that allows families to view the most up-to-date suggested route maps, and provide comments to OCTA about changes that need to be made.



Assemblies and Fairs

Assemblies, bicycle rodeos, and pedestrian fairs are more time intensive and require more preparation from the school and OC STEP staff. There should be several staff members at these types of events to help present and work on a more individual basis with students. For some events, like bicycle rodeos, OC STEP staff should have experience teaching students how to ride a bicycle. OC STEP can provide students with informational or activity packets or other types of incentives to thank them for participating and to remind them of what they learned during the event. While these events are higher effort for the OC STEP team, they provide a comprehensive educational component by allowing students to ask questions and get hands on experience using pedestrian infrastructure or learning bicycle safety. Assemblies and fairs are also excellent opportunities for OC STEP to partner with local stakeholders, such as law enforcement, bike shops, and community organizations.



Surveys

Surveys allowed OC STEP to understand how the programming affected student's travel habits to and from school. Parent/caregivers surveys asked guardians about their level of comfort in letting their student walk or bike to school. These surveys helped the OC STEP team learn about parent's common concerns for not allowing their student to walk or bike to school and about how their student typically arrives and leaves school whether by walking, biking, carpooling, bus, or being picked up in the family car. Understanding student travel habits can help OC STEP staff cater activities to schools. If students are already walking or biking at a school, activities can teach students about traffic laws and safely using pedestrian and bicyclist infrastructure. For schools where students do not typically walk or bike, activities and events can focus on encouraging these habits.

Student tallies were also sent to each OC STEP school. Over the course of one week, teachers asked students how they got to school that day. Similarly to the parent surveys, the tally survey provides a classroom overview of student's travel habits and can help the OC STEP team understand what type of programming is most appropriate for each school.

Typically in a SRTS project, these surveys are distributed once during the beginning of the project and once during the completion of the project to see changing trends. While the surveys were sent to schools at the beginning of the project, the response was minimal. The lack of responses was very likely due to the pandemic, as teachers and parents/caregivers worked to stay updated with changing guidance from their school district while also learning how to juggle distance learning.

Surveys and tally sheets can be a difficult ask of school staff and parents that already are required to juggle many priorities throughout the school day. Standardizing the distribution and collection of these surveys may make it easier for these SRTS stakeholders to respond to the surveys, and for the STEP team to measure changes over time. One option for standardizing these surveys is to include them in with Census Day. Every year in October, attending students are counted for census purposes. Since October is also the month for Walk and Roll to School Day, this could be an opportunity for the STEP program to encourage teachers and parents to talk to their students about walking and rolling to school and to take the survey.

The Future of OC STEP

Non-infrastructure programming helps teach students and families about the benefits of walking and biking, and encourages them to try using active transportation rather than driving for the school commute. Infrastructure improvements are also crucial in enhancing the built environment to make walking and biking safer and more comfortable. Future iterations of STEP can help build enthusiasm for these infrastructure improvements. In addition, STEP activities may vary depending on funding resources, but the programming can be adapted to fit changing scopes and differing school needs.



Infrastructure Improvements

Throughout the course of the STEP program, parents/caregivers, teachers, staff, and students have expressed their need for improved pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure near their schools. A lack of safe infrastructure can force pedestrians and bicyclists to take unsafe routes to school and to other destinations in their communities. Infrastructure fits in with the 6th “E,” engineering, and may include the implementation of crosswalks, sidewalks, paths, bike lanes, and other physical changes to create a safe and comfortable active transportation environment.

Some cities in Orange County, like Garden Grove and Santa Ana, have SRTS plans that include infrastructure elements. In these types of plans, active transportation recommendations are made for each City school, and then the recommendations are prioritized for implementation. OC STEP can continue encouraging and supporting cities in Orange County to create their own SRTS plans. OCTA and OCHCA can also work with other County agencies to ensure that these City plans are reviewed for regional planning efforts. In order to receive funding for infrastructure

improvements, most cities will need to apply for state or federal grants. These funding opportunities usually require a community engagement component that shows community members want the recommended improvements. The STEP program can help leverage community engagement, so cities can create successful funding applications and successful projects.

The STEP program can also create intercity connections for regional projects. City collaboration is typically an untapped method of applying for funding, but can be an excellent way for cities to bolster applications. Particularly in cities with overlapping school districts, cities can share resources and create regional pedestrian and bicycle improvements.

Collaboration with Stakeholders

STEP stakeholder meetings provided excellent opportunities for parents/caregivers, school staff, and other school stakeholders to collaborate with OCTA and OCHCA about SRTS programming and infrastructure concerns. These meetings also created space to share resources and information between City and County, school districts, and schools. STEP should continue these meetings and formalize them at regular intervals. These meetings can be used as spaces for parents and school staff to share success stories, ask questions, and voice concerns about safe pedestrian and bicycle programs and infrastructure near their schools.

Regular STEP stakeholder meetings will provide opportunities for stakeholders to work together on events and activities or for the STEP program team to learn about already planned school events for which they can add a SRTS element. The STEP program should ensure that there is an organized system for meeting minutes with clear action items and responsible parties and that information from the meeting is shared out to other stakeholders.

Updating Route Maps

Cities in Orange County continue to implement active transportation infrastructure and programming that can be used by students walking and biking to school. As infrastructure and programming is updated, the STEP suggested route maps become outdated and may no longer show the safest routes to school. However, as OCTA completes the digitization of each map, the maps will become easily editable and can account for infrastructure changes. Updating these maps provides a way to celebrate SRTS successes by highlighting newer, safer routes to school.



Highlighting Successes

Everyday in Orange County there are school stakeholders working to make walking and biking safer for students. The STEP program should amplify this hard work being done, and celebrate all SRTS achievements throughout the County. OCTA and OCHCA have been working together for years even prior to STEP to improve active transportation conditions in the County, and parents, caregivers, and teachers have been advocates for their students and schools. The STEP program can recognize this work through articles, social media posts, and celebrations. Highlighting this work can bring more awareness to SRTS campaigns and can educate all residents about the importance of safe and frequent walking and biking for the school commute. Additionally, STEP can celebrate staff like crossing guards that work everyday to keep students safe through campaigns like Crossing Guard Appreciation Day.



Next STEP

Through California's Active Transportation (ATP) and the Regional Early Action Planning (REAP) 2.0 grant programs, OCTA has received funding for Next STEP, the second iteration of the noninfrastructure STEP program. With this funding, the STEP program can expand to additional schools in Orange County. Using the lessons learned from this first round of STEP, Next STEP will provide activities, events, and resources to students, teachers, and families. Next STEP will continue OCTA and OCHCA's collaboration with SRTS stakeholders and will use stakeholder feedback to understand the challenges and opportunities of walking and biking in Orange County neighborhoods.



