

Massachusetts Department of Public Health Success Stories



MASS IN MOTION LOWELL



Making the Walk to School Safe for the Kids of Lowell

SUMMARY

As an urban city in northeastern Massachusetts, Lowell is filled with sidewalks and paths – but they aren't always safe for walking and biking. With the support of the MA Department of Transportation's (MassDOT) Safe Routes to School Program, Mass in Motion Lowell and the city's public schools, and additional stakeholders in Lowell took a deeper look at how kids were getting to school. Working together, they are re-evaluating policies and procedures and are developing concrete solutions. As a result, Lowell's kids are beginning to walk or bike to school again.

CHALLENGE

Walking or biking to school gives children the opportunity to be physically active, enjoy the outdoors, socialize with friends and family, and perform better in school. But when roads, sidewalks and paths are unsafe to use, kids are often driven to school by parents rather than biking or walking with friends. In Lowell, this has been the case for many years due to busy roads, poorly maintained or missing sidewalks, broken bike racks, and unsafe pathways.

But one of the many goals of Mass in Motion (MiM) Lowell, led by Coordinator Sidney Liang of the Lowell Community Health Center, is to build a coalition to educate and inspire the community to move more and eat better. The coalition aims to create a system where kids can safely walk to school throughout the year. The team also wants to help parents see the connection between physical activity and academic success.

SOLUTION

Spearheaded by Lowell Community Health Center, MiM Lowell partnered with many community organizations and MassDOT's Safe Routes to School program, which provides School Outreach Coordinators to teach children pedestrian and bicycle safety through classroom workshops and school assemblies. Safe Routes to School has been working in Lowell for several years, but with recently added support from Mass in Motion, three elementary schools — Lincoln, McAuliffe, and Moody — were able to officially access its resources available through MiM Lowell and MassDOT.

Using Safe Routes to School funds, a number of neighborhood infrastructure safety issues were addressed, many pavements and sidewalks were repaired and painted, and a new bike rack was installed at the McAuliffe school.

“Mass in Motion, parents, and teachers play a huge role in the health of kids. As adults we want to make sure walking or biking to school is safe, and to do that we need to educate kids about pedestrian and bike safety.”

SIDNEY LIANG
MASS IN MOTION LOWELL
PROGRAM COORDINATOR

For more information, visit www.mass.gov/massinmotion

PARTNERS

Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT), Lowell Community Health Center, Lowell Health Department, Greater Lowell Health Alliance, Community Teamwork Inc, City of Lowell, Mill City Grows, Superintendent of Schools, Mayor Patrick O. Murphy, Lowell Police Department, City Manager, teachers, parents, and students.

CONTACT

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RESULTS

With these improved sidewalks, bike lanes, pavement markings, new traffic and pedestrian warning signs, and accessible wheelchair ramps in place, more kids in Lowell are walking and biking to school.

MiM Lowell Coordinator Sidney Liang has begun to work on the Bicycle and Pedestrian Safety Advisory Committee, and assisted the Lowell Department of Planning and Development with bike audits and bike counts. MiM Lowell continues to distribute materials on pedestrian and bike safety to school principals and teachers to increase awareness on why it's important for students to have safer routes to school.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Seeing the success of McAuliffe Elementary School and others, Stoklosa Middle School recently joined the Safe Routes to School partnership, and Murkland Elementary School may be next. Sidney Liang and Samantha Fonseca-Moreira, Statewide Safe Routes to School Coordinator, have already met with Stoklosa's principal, school nurse, a parent liaison, and safety officer to inform them about Safe Routes to School. Next steps for these partners involve looking assessing the nearby neighborhoods for best routes and strategies for making change. Eventually, they hope to enroll all schools in the City to be a part of the Safe Routes to School Program.

YOUR INVOLVEMENT IS KEY

Mass in Motion Lowell and Safe Routes to Schools have a long way to go to reach all 21 Lowell public schools. With the momentum of the few schools and communities that are tackling this issue, we need to continue working with the school system, parents, and other local partners to get Lowell's kids walking and biking again. With assistance from the City of Lowell, partners, and key stakeholders, we can help reduce obesity and increase physical activities through the utilization of Mass in Motion Lowell Program.



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