



# New Jersey Safe Routes to School Urban Demonstration Program

## Ivy Hill Elementary School

Newark, NJ

### School Travel Plan Brief

During the spring of 2008, the New Jersey Department of Transportation (NJDOT) reached out to the City of Newark to invite them to participate in the Safe Routes to School (SRTS) Urban Demonstration Program. As one of the top ten cities in New Jersey for pedestrian fatalities, Newark was an ideal location to target SRTS. The City was already actively engaged in activities that supported SRTS programs, including the City's School Safety Program to implement engineering improvements in school neighborhoods and had already exhibited an interest in SRTS through its application for NJDOT SRTS grant funding. Unfortunately, their NJDOT SRTS grant application did not score high enough to receive funding. To address this short-coming, the City was invited to choose two pilot schools to be a part of NJDOT's Urban Demonstration Program with the intent that they would be able to develop a sustainable SRTS program and strengthen their SRTS application for the next funding cycle.

The City agreed to participate in the program and chose Ivy Hill Elementary School and Hawthorne Avenue School as the two pilot schools to receive assistance in developing a SRTS program.

NJDOT with technical assistance from The RBA Group, the National Center for Bicycling and Walking and the Voorhees Transportation Center at Rutgers University provided planning assistance to Ivy Hill Elementary School to develop a SRTS School Travel Plan.

A School Travel Plan "maps out" how to improve pedestrian and bike travel to and from school. A School Travel Plan identifies:

- Where students currently walk and/or bike
- Where students would walk or bike if they could
- What changes need to be made so that students can and will walk and bike safely to school

The Ivy Hill Elementary School Travel Plan is a working document intended to set priorities for increasing the number and safety of students walking and bicycling to and from school. The School Travel Plan serves as a basis for the organizing and funding of those priorities and as a model that can be replicated across Camden and in other areas of New Jersey. In order for a School Travel Plan to be complete, it must contain six elements:

- |   |                                     |
|---|-------------------------------------|
| 1 School Description                                | 4 Maps of the School Neighborhood   |
| 2 SRTS Task Force and Partnerships                  | 5 Action Plan                       |
| 3 Barriers & Opportunities to Walking and Bicycling | 6 Program Evaluation and Monitoring |

This School Travel Plan Brief is a summary of these six elements as identified in the Ivy Hill Elementary School Travel Plan.

One of the objectives of the Safe Routes to School program is to make the program accessible to diverse participants, especially schools and communities with limited resources and staffing to spearhead new initiatives. This is particularly important, as schools in low income areas often have higher than average child pedestrian crash rates and a greater need for a SRTS program, yet may not be able to successfully access these funds.



The purpose of the New Jersey Department of Transportation Urban Demonstration Program was to ensure that all children, regardless of where they live, can benefit from SRTS programs. The goals of the program are to:

- Assist urban areas that have shown interest in SRTS programs but may not have the resources to succeed on their own, and
- Develop a model for use in urban areas across the state.

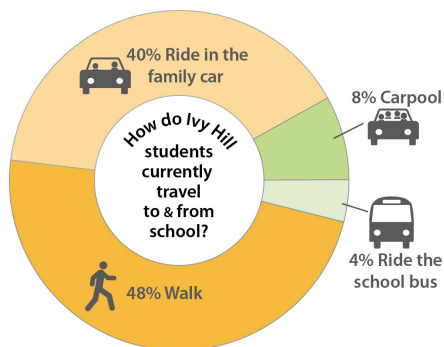
The Urban Demonstration Program focused on schools in Camden, Trenton and Newark. It was modeled after an earlier demonstration program completed in 2006 which consisted of pilot testing the New Jersey SRTS program in three communities - urban, suburban and rural. Both programs resulted in the development of School Travel Plans for each of the pilot schools.



## 1. School Description

Ivy Hill Elementary School is located at 107 Ivy Street in Newark's West Ward. This section of Newark, known as Upper Vailsburg, has approximately 55,000 residents and its ethnic neighborhoods are primarily comprised of African Americans and Haitians. The area has the suburban characteristics of single-family residences but remains notably urban. All students live within 2 miles of the school. There is no district busing except for special needs students.

**Student Population:** 366  
**Grade Levels:** K-6<sup>th</sup> grade (expanding to 8th grade in 2009-2010 school year)  
**School District:** Newark City



## 3. Barriers & Opportunities to Walking and Bicycling

Information gathered from stakeholder interviews, student travel surveys, a community workshop, a field investigation, and crime data and crash analysis was used to assess existing conditions and identify opportunities to improve conditions for students on their way to and from school.

### Key Issues/Concerns

The following were identified as concerns around the school neighborhood by parents, students, teachers and police and community leaders:

- Lack of crossing guards
- Concurrent dismissal with neighboring schools
- Congestion during pick-up / drop-off
- Crime
- Cars parked in no parking zones



*Limited space on sidewalk for students waiting for school bus pick-up*



*Parents parked in the "no parking" school bus zone*

## 2. SRTS Task Force and Partnerships

A key element in the process was to conduct outreach efforts to the city and school community to establish a Task Force. The aim was to engage active community groups and local organizers who will support and sustain the SRTS program over time.

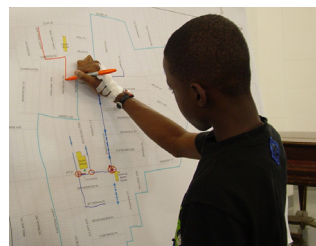
Task force members attended a program awareness meeting to receive an overview of SRTS and the Urban Demonstration Program while helping the project team gather insight to specific issues/concerns within the school community. In Newark, the Task Force was comprised of:

- The Mayor's Office
- Engineering Dept.
- Police Dept.
- Meadowlink Transportation Management Agency
- The University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey (UMDNJ)
- The Pedestrian Injury Prevention Partnership (PIPP)
- Tri-State Transportation Campaign
- Ironbound East Family Success Center
- School Leadership Team III Parent Leaders Executive Council
- One Newark Education Coalition (ONEC)
- Newark Public School District



### Classroom Session

The project team spoke with a 4th grade class during the school day and some 5th graders from an after school program. For the most part, students feel very safe walking in the immediate neighborhood.

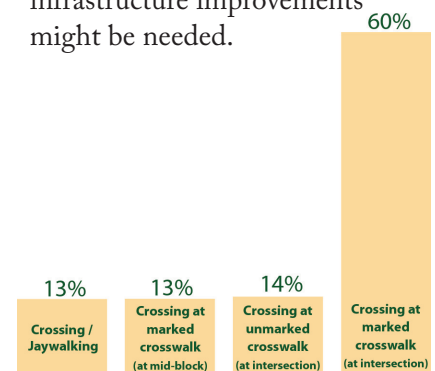


Primary threats identified by students were:

- Drivers ignoring stop signs
- Drivers not respecting the crosswalk
- Occasional negative person
- Lack of secure bicycle parking

### Pedestrian/Bicyclist Crash Analysis

Between 2004-2006, 95 accidents occurred within a 2-mile radius surrounding the school. 83 of the 95 accidents involved an injured pedestrian, none of which were fatal. This information was useful in determining where infrastructure improvements might be needed.

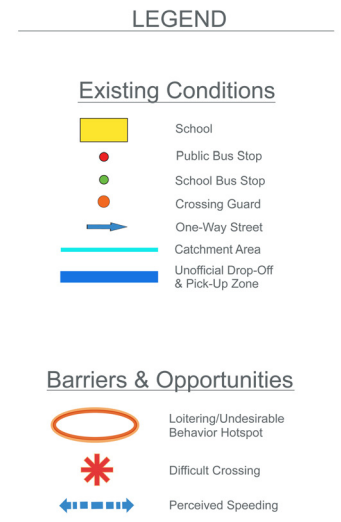


**Pedestrian/Bicyclist Pre-Crash Action**

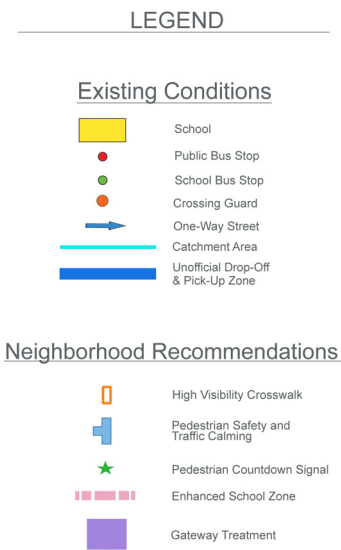
## 4. Maps of the School Neighborhood

These maps illustrate the existing conditions in the neighborhood of the Ivy Hill Elementary School, the Barriers and Opportunities for students walking to and from school, and some Neighborhood Recommendations to improving facilities so their trips are safer.

### Barriers & Opportunities



### Neighborhood Recommendations



## 5. Action Plan

The plan of action for implementing the Ivy Hill Elementary School SRTS program is intended to increase safety for students on their walk to and from school and when appropriate, encourage more students to walk. In addition to the actions, the School Travel Plan identifies a responsible party for implementing them, a time frame and a level of cost. Listed below are 5E action items from the School Travel Plan.

### Engineering

- Provide high visibility crosswalks within the school zone
- Install pedestrian pushbuttons and pedestrian signal heads with countdown timers at the intersection of Sanford Avenue and Ivy Street
- Clearly define and enhance school zones
- Consider forced street closure during morning and afternoon school drop-off/pick-up on Ivy Street
- Construct driveway for drop-off along Ellery Avenue
- Move fence back and widen sidewalk in front and at side of school
- Enhance/Designate school routes

### Education

- Conduct community wide outreach on benefits of SRTS programs
- Inform neighborhood of any designated routes
- Include health benefits of SRTS in teacher training programs and in student curriculum
- Educate parents and students about the established drop-off and pick-up procedures
- Distribute walking school bus options to school families
- Circulate school walking event information with municipal utility or tax bills

### Encouragement

- Define recommended walking routes by providing maps and installing pavement markings and/or signs
- Establish a SRTS Committee to lead the effort
- Prepare for and participate in International Walk to School Days
- Establish walking school buses
- Start a “Frequent Walker Card” system or a “Golden Sneaker” award for classrooms
- Hold a bicycle rodeo
- City should consider taking on snow removal responsibility along identified routes to school

## 6. Program Evaluation and Monitoring

Utilizing the NJDOT SRTS Toolbox Fact Sheet, “*Evaluating your SRTS Program*” as a guide, Ivy Hill Elementary School will conduct classroom/student hands-up travel pattern surveys and parent/caregiver take-home attitudinal surveys to evaluate its SRTS Program over time.

## Definitions

**En•gin•eer•ing:** creating operational and physical improvements to the infrastructure surrounding schools that reduce speeds and potential conflicts with motor vehicle traffic, and establish safe and accessible crossings, walkways, trails and bikeways.

**En•force•ment:** partnering with local law enforcement to ensure traffic laws (i.e. speeding, idling, cell phone, yield-to-pedestrian) are obeyed in the vicinity of schools and initiating community enforcement, such as crossing guard programs.

**Ed•u•ca•tion:** teaching children and parents about the broad range of transportation choices, instructing them in important lifelong bicycling and walking safety skills, and launching driver safety campaigns in the vicinity of schools.

**En•cour•age•ment:** using events and activities to promote walking and bicycling to school on a regular basis.

**E•val•u•a•tion:** monitoring and documenting outcomes and trends through the collection of data, including the collection of data before and after the intervention.

### Enforcement

- Post clear parking regulation signs at all drop-off and pick-up locations
- Include education materials about the dangers of speeding or other violations when issuing warnings or citations
- Conduct a series of pedestrian stings
- Maintain police presence at major pedestrian crossing locations such as Ivy Street and Sanford Avenue
- Police should work within the school to educate students on bicycle and pedestrian safety
- Prioritize/enhance police presence in areas of loitering, undesirable behavior and vacant properties/buildings
- Lower speed limit on Ivy Street in school zones

### Evaluation

- Conduct a survey to define mode choice so there is a baseline to assess future efforts
- Conduct school commute time parking studies
- Conduct a preference survey to determine what families would like to see and have available
- Conduct tracking exercises for distances students walk

