

“Walking School Bus” Hub Helps Students Go the Distance

Issue

Crescent Harbor Elementary is a kindergarten through fifth grade school with about 500 children in Oak Harbor on Whidbey Island. The school is located near the edge of town, surrounded by Navy housing. Nearby roads are busy and often congested. The school needed to find creative ways to encourage physical activity, and bicycle and walking safety.

Justin Ronning is a physical activity instructor at Crescent Harbor Elementary. He worked with his principal, a team of colleagues, and staff at the Island County Public Health to apply for funding through “Communities Putting Prevention to Work” (CPPW). CPPW provides federal stimulus dollars for towns and cities to make changes that encourage healthy eating, more physical activity, and reduced tobacco use. Projects that receive funding focus on policies and neighborhood changes that are shown to be effective in reducing obesity and smoking.

Intervention

First, members of the Safe Routes to School Committee worked to improve the school walking path so it’s safer and easier for students to use. Then in spring 2011, Crescent Harbor Elementary formed a “walking school bus.” Since many families live a long way from the school, their kids can’t walk there directly. So the school identified a “hub” for parents to drop off and pick up their kids. Justin walked with the students to school and back. This had two benefits. It reduced traffic congestion near the school and encouraged students—even those who live far away from school—to walk.

Part of the grant paid for new bike racks, slated for installation over the 2011 winter break. The school also formed a jump rope club to encourage more physical activity. Two ongoing programs include free after-school soccer, volleyball, and softball, and a running club that meets once a week for 45 minutes. Justin expected about 10 runners, but ended up with 40. They jog a one-mile route to a nearby beach and back, and use punch cards to record the number of laps. Justin gives running tips to individual members. School assemblies on bike and pedestrian safety featured local firefighters and information from the county health department.

Impact

Current activities are sustainable and the school expects participation to increase. Crescent Harbor Elementary involves the community in motivating their students and families to be active, safe, and healthy. They plan to start an annual Family Health Night in 2012 involving many organizations from the community. The school and local health department believe their success with CPPW grant activities is strengthening the community and showing that prevention can make a difference.

County population: 78,506

City population: 22,075

Island County Public Health

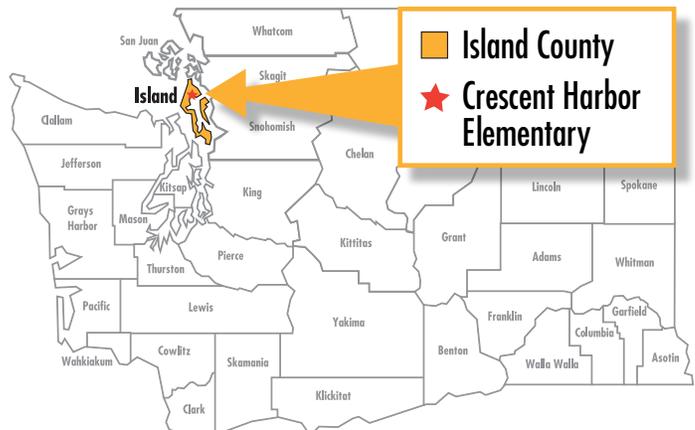
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