

Leveraging Existing Resources to Promote Student Health and Safety

Issue

Hawthorne Elementary School is a pre- through fifth grade school with about 540 children. It is located in the north end of Everett, Washington in Snohomish County. Hawthorne is an ethnically diverse school. Families of the students speak 17 different languages. The high traffic neighborhood makes walking or biking to school a safety concern. Many parents drive their kids, so the area gets even more congested before and after school when traffic is near its peak. The school needed to find creative ways to encourage physical activity, and bicycle and walking safety.

The Snohomish Health District invited area schools that met specific criteria to create a "Safe Routes to School" plan. The public health district offered technical assistance and 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. Hawthorne agreed to partner with the health district in 2010.

Intervention

School staff and volunteers attended training on how to successfully run a Safe Routes to School program. Working with the health district, they conducted a "walking audit" to identify broken sidewalks, busy streets and intersections, and areas needing crosswalks or other improvements. In spring 2011, Hawthorne started "Walking Wednesdays." Parent volunteers at various apartment complexes formed a "walking school bus." They escorted the children along the safe route, meeting up with other groups and walking together to school. The health district promoted the value of the program and offered grocery gift cards as incentives.

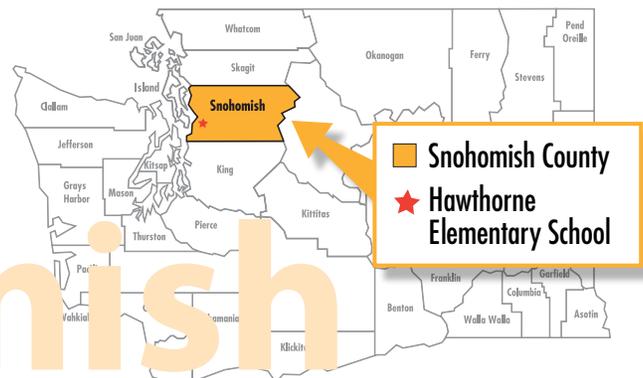
Hawthorne organized several school assemblies where health district staff offered safety tips and gave out bike locks, helmets, and bike safety jackets. Project staff and volunteers connected with the school's traffic safety committee, police officers, and other individuals to leverage existing community resources. Snohomish Health District is helping the school translate promotional and educational materials into several languages. Hawthorne also participates in a county-wide effort to educate drivers to slow down around schools and crosswalks.

Impact

As a result of this effort, many more children regularly and safely walk to school. Hawthorne has an empowered and involved group of parent volunteers, and a strong relationship with the local health district. In the coming year, they plan to continue Walking Wednesdays, involve more police officers in safety efforts, and tackle problem areas. For example, their walking audit identified a need for raised and lighted crosswalks. The school and local health district believe their success with CPPW grant activities is strengthening the community and showing that prevention can make a difference.

Snohomish County population: 713,335
Everett population: 103,019

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Snohomish