

**Safe Routes to School Plan FY2011
Southwestern Elementary School**

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Publication and Publicity

Disclaimer

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Section 1. - Safe Routes to School Team and Community Involvement

Introduction

Southwestern Elementary School is committed to ensuring that all of its students can utilize a physically active transportation method, such as walking and bicycling, for a safe and enjoyable trip to school. This Safe Routes to School Plan aims to address the issues that will impede active transportation and seeks to strategically solve these problems by implementing a Safe Routes to School program. Our community is motivated to pursue Safe Routes to School because:

- ⓫ We value student physical activity and health
- ⓫ We wish to improve unsafe or insufficient walkways, bikeways, and crossings
- ⓫ We are committed to reducing speeding and reckless driving near school
- ⓫ Our students are threatened by illegal behaviors near school

The Safe Routes to School Committee

Our Safe Routes to School Team believes that having an active participation from diverse members in the community will allow us to develop a more successful Safe Routes to School Plan. Our team is comprised of a variety of stakeholders and community leaders, each lending their own unique perspective and expertise in order to make walking and bicycling to school more safe, accessible, and fun for students at Southwestern Elementary.

Our Safe Routes to School Team is composed of the following:

Julio Portillo	<i>RVRC Safe Routes to School Project Coordinator</i>
Kayra Velez	<i>RVRC Safe Routes Project Assistant</i>
Nykia Burke	<i>Safe Routes Resource Center Representative, South Georgia</i>
Mrs. Suzi Giannoni	<i>Southwestern Elementary School Principal</i>
Lisa Goodin	<i>Southwestern Elementary School Assistant Principal</i>
Christy Alexander	<i>Southwestern Elementary School Secretary</i>
Barrett Wilkes	<i>Southwestern Elementary School, Physical Education Teacher</i>

The participation of each of the stakeholders in this committee has been of great importance in the development of the Safe Routes to School Plan. Each of the members of this committee contributed to developing and administering student surveys, walk-ability and bike-ability assessments, observed and documented pedestrian and traffic behavior during school rush hours, and developed the goals, objectives, and recommendations to the plan.

School Description:

Southwestern Elementary School is located in Cordele, Georgia and is one of four elementary schools in the Crisp County School District. Students in grades 3rd through 5th are taught. As of May 2011, there were a total of 505 students enrolled at the school. The demographical breakdown for the student population is as follows:

Female Students	259
Male Students	248
Asian	10
Hispanic	12
African-American	278
White	194
Multi-Racial	13

Southwestern Elementary’s Mission Statement:

“Learning Today, Leading Tomorrow.”

Community Profile:

Crisp County was created in 1905 from territory formerly belonging to Dooly County. It was named for Charles Frederick Crisp, a jurist, and Speaker of the U. S. House of Representatives between 1891 and 1893. Cordele, the county seat, was a "child of the railroad" having built up at a junction of the Savannah, Americus, and Montgomery Railroads. It was named for the daughter of the railroad's president. Crisp County became the first county in the nation to own and operate its own electrical power plant. It was started in 1930, with Lake Blackshear on the Flint River providing its power source. The county is the gateway to the Presidential Pathways Travel Region with many attractions within easy driving distance of Cordele. The Little White House, Plains (home of Jimmy Carter), Westville, the Little Grand Canyon, and Andersonville Confederate Prison Site are a few of the historic attractions in this area. Georgia Veterans Memorial State Park, an 8,700-acre park on the banks of Lake Blackshear, was established as a permanent memorial to the U. S. Veterans who served, fought, and died for freedom. Cordele, the Watermelon Capital of the World, hosts an annual Watermelon Festival every July.

Section 2. - Evaluation of existing conditions

Mapping – School Boundary

Southwestern Elementary is one of four elementary schools in Crisp County that provides its educational services to all residents within the county boundary limits at a no-cost tuition assistance program. (*See attached County Boundary Map*)

Bicycling and Walking Assessments

In order to create an efficient and effective Safe Routes to School Plan for Southwestern Elementary School, we must first evaluate the current conditions and feasibility for the children to either walk and/or ride their bicycles to the school. These assessments took place within a 0.5-1.5 mile radius from the school campus towards to the most highly populated areas where Southwestern Elementary School children live. A completed walk-ability and bike-ability assessment form was completed as provided by the National Pedestrian and Bicycle Information Center and Georgia Department of Transportation. The results from the observations are as follows:

1. Need for better School Speed Limit Signage on 24th Street and repainting of crosswalks.
2. Need for sidewalks to be cleared of debris and overgrowth.
3. Need for traffic calming signs to alert motorists of pedestrians and bicyclists.
4. Electronic crossing signs and bicycle racks for the school.
5. Poor handicap accessibility to the sidewalks. Truncated domes could be extremely helpful.

Walk-Ability and Bike-Ability Assessment Photos



15th Street has a sidewalk that is easily accessible to students, but it is not maintained and lacks handicap accessibility. The crosswalk shown at the end of the sidewalk would benefit from better painted lines, both horizontally and vertically.

There is signage around Southwestern Elementary to indicate a school zone, however, the school speed limit sign is rather small and lacks proper flashing lights. There is also nothing to indicate to motorists that there are pedestrians or cyclists.



This illustrates where the network of sidewalks around Southwestern Elementary begins, and also proper handicap accessibility. This sidewalk, however, could benefit from the use of truncated domes to better accommodate those who are visually impaired.



Located on the corner of 4th street and 24th street, this is an excellent example of proper handicap accessibility and painted crosswalks.

This photo demonstrates a 4 way intersection on 24th Street with proper electronic pedestrian crossing signs and adequate crosswalks.



There is a housing authority within the identified 2 mile radius of Southwestern Elementary School, where several children live. This shows a network of sidewalks that would allow children to walk and/or bike to school from the authority.

Section 3. - Data Collection and Analysis

The process of collecting Safe Routes to School data for Southwestern Elementary School was done through observations, interviews, walk-ability and bike-ability assessments, and student surveys. A total of 470 children were surveyed (see survey in Appendix 4). Traffic counts, average speed of vehicles, and crash data were provided by Cordele Officials and the local Police Department.

Projected Enrollment - Student Characteristics

At the start of 2010-2011, the student population for the school was approximately 500 students. There are currently 505 students enrolled at Southwestern Elementary School from grades 3rd through 5th. According to Ms. Suzi Giannoni, School Principal, they are not expecting a significant change in the size of the student population.

Student Survey Analysis

The following table illustrates the number of children surveyed and their preferred and current method of transportation to and from the school campus:

	Walking	Biking	School Bus	Family Vehicle	Carpool
Morning	20	0	178	258	28
Afternoon	60	0	240	141	17
% of Total	4.3 % (Morning) 12.8% (Afternoon)	0% (Morning) 0% (Afternoon)	37.9% (Morning) 51.1% (Afternoon)	54.9% (Morning) 30% (Afternoon)	5.9% (Morning) 3.6% (Afternoon)

These results clearly demonstrate the low number of children who are walking and cycling to and from school. However, despite the low number of children walking and cycling, our research reflects that both distance traveled and age affects the parents' and children's decision to choose these alternative methods of transportation to arrive to school.

Distance that you live from the school (Miles)			
0-0.5 Miles	0.6-1.0 Miles	1.1-2 Miles	Over 2 Miles
37	66	68	132

Transportation Data

Traffic Counts

Traffic counts for Southwestern Elementary School were provided by the Georgia Department of Transportation. Traffic counts are as follows*: ¹

Street	Traffic Count
24 th Avenue W	544
15 th Street S	533
7 th Street	305
16 th Avenue	1147

Average Speed of Vehicles

The average speed of vehicles for a 2 mile radius from Southwestern Elementary School was provided by the Cordele Police Department. According to their records, most vehicles drive at a speed of approximately 35MPH within most surrounding streets inside the 2 mile radius to include 24th Avenue, 15th Street, 7th Street, and 16th Avenue. This speed limit is in clear accordance with the regular speed limit of 35 MPH, but is 10 miles over the school rush hour speed limit of 25 MPH, which poses a serious issue.

Crash Data

Automotive crash data for Crisp County was provided by the Georgia Department of Transportation. The most recent data available compiles information from 1996-2003:

Crisp County (1996-2003)	
Actual Number of Crashes	6232
Rate per 10,000 Licensed Drivers	534.6

Automotive crash data for a 2 mile radius from Southwestern Elementary School was provided by Cordele Police Department. The following table demonstrates the number of crashes and average speed of vehicles for each street within the 2 mile radius. The data shown reflects a 6 month time period (January 1, 2011-June 30th 2011):

Location	Average Speed of Vehicles	Total Number of Accidents
24 th Avenue W	35	1
15 th Street S	35	0
7 th Street	35	3
16 th Avenue	35	3

Conclusion of Traffic Findings:

While streets within the identified 2 mile radius have relatively low numbers in terms of accidents, the streets are still heavily traveled. On several instances, cars travel at an average rate of 35 miles per hour during school hours, which is in clear violation of the 25 miles per hour school zone speed limit.

¹ Most frequently used streets

Section 4. - Policies / Plans

Southwestern Elementary School does not prohibit walking and/or biking to the school campus. However, our research shows that the school has not yet implemented a health and fitness policy in its student handbook. While the school is located in the center of a residential area within the city of Cordele, the number of students walking to school is relatively low (40 students on average). However, there are several students (209 students on average) that travel to and from school using the school bus. It is therefore evident that Southwestern Elementary has a School Bus Policy in place for students and parents to follow. Such policy states measures to ensure both the children's and motorists' safety while on the road.

Despite the fact that Southwestern Elementary School embraces physical activity for its students, they do not have a wellness policy in place; hence there is no current reference to any Safe Routes to School Program. But due to their recent involvement in the program, as well as the partnership with the Safe Routes Resource Center, the school has decided to begin drafting a Health, Fitness, and Wellness Policy along with their support and involvement in the Safe Routes to School Program. Their involvement with this program has earned them a Silver Sponsorship level with the Safe Routes to School Resource Center. Also, as part of their new Health, Fitness, and Wellness Policy, the school will participate in both the International Walk to School Day and the Georgia Walk to School Day.

There are currently no current or future developments within a 2 mile radius from the school.

Section 5. - Goals and Objectives

After carefully reviewing traffic data, student survey results, walk-ability and bike-ability assessments, school policies, and overall students' means of transportation, our Safe Routes to School team was able to determine a set of goals from which to guide the development and implementation of our program.

- 1. Goal:** To increase the number of children riding their bicycles to and from school.
Objective: Increase the number of student bicycle riders by 10% over the next 2011-2012 academic year.
 - 2. Goal:** To develop and implement a Health, Fitness, and Wellness Policy which addresses the Safe Routes to School Program.
Objective: To develop the Health, Fitness, and Wellness policy within a 6 month period of approving the Safe Routes to School Plan and implement this policy within the remaining 6 months of the 2011-2012 academic year.
 - 3. Goal:** To participate in and include the National Walk and Bike to School Day and Georgia Walk to School Day on the school's Wellness Policy.
Objective: To participate in the National Walk and Bike to School Day on the first Wednesday of October of 2011 and participate in the Georgia Walk to School Day in March of 2012.
 - 4. Goal:** To develop and conduct a "Safe Walking and Safe Bicycling" class for all children attending elementary school.
Objective: To develop an adequate class syllabus (program) by September 2011 to be used during the 2011-2012 academic year.
 - 5. Goal:** To increase the number of bicycle racks at Southwestern Elementary School.
Objective: To increase the number of bicycle racks from 0 to 2 by Spring 2012.
 - 6. Goal:** To build community awareness and participation in the Safe Routes to School Program.
Objective: To increase the number of parents and community members who walk and/or bicycle with their children regularly from 0 to 15 by the end of the 2011-2012 academic year.
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Section 6. - Action Steps and Implementation Strategy

This section is based on using the data analysis, survey results, and community input in order to address the Five E's (Engineering, Evaluation, Education, Encouragement, and Enforcement).

Non-Infrastructure Education

"Everyone Should Know How to Be Safe"

The education section of this plan consists on the development and implementation of educational programs that teach safety skills to pedestrians, motorists, and cyclists. Through these educational programs, we intend to increase

awareness on the benefits of being physically active (walking and cycling) as well as raising awareness on issues which are related to school safety.

Activity	Bicycle Safety Training
Timeline	September 2011-May 2012
Task	Develop a bicycle safety training session which students can attend quarterly throughout the academic year. This training can also be available for parents who wish to engage in such activities and be taught during extra-curricular school hours. Research demonstrates that middle and elementary school level is the best time to begin this process of early education.
Who	Students, parents, and teachers.
Status	

Activity	Pedestrian Safety Training
Timeline	September 2011 – May 2012
Task	To teach student the basic pedestrian rules and how to safely use the roads as means of transportation. Sessions will be held quarterly.
Who	Physical Education teachers, students, and parents.
Status	

Activity	Bicycle/Pedestrian Safety Awareness Programs and Campaigns
Timeline	September 2011-May 2012
Task	Involve children in the creation of flyers, posters, banners, etc. in order to raise bicycle/pedestrian safety awareness throughout the school, as well as encouraging other children to participate in cycling/walking to school.
Who	Students, parents, and teachers.
Status	

Activity	Parental Safety Education Program
Timeline	September 2011-May 2012
Task	Educate parents on bicycle/pedestrian safety in order for them to educate their children as well; therefore, increasing the number of educated walkers and riders.
Who	Students, parents, and teachers.
Status	

Activity	Personal Safety Program
Timeline	September 2011-May 2012
Task	Develop a personal safety program which allows children to identify bullies and potential predators while on the street. This program is very important in order to provide a safe walking and cycling environment for kids.
Who	Students, parents, teachers, and law enforcement.
Status	School continues to exercise and enhance a “No Bullying” policy within the school and therefore, provide for a fun and safe environment for children to walk/bike to school.

Activity	“Making Math Fun” Education using cycling elements
Timeline	September 2011-May 2012
Task	Develop an additional element to the current Mathematics curriculum in which teachers can educate children using elements from a bicycle; for example, geometry and standard measurements can be taught through this approach.
Who	Students, parents, and teachers.
Status	Program is currently being developed and will be implemented during March “Mathness” Program at the school.

Encouragement
“Being Fun and Creative”

The encouragement section of this plan will address the ways in which children, parents, teachers, and community members can become involved in developing and maintaining a Safe Routes to School Program active throughout the school year. These encouragement programs will consist of providing fun and educational activities that motivate and facilitate walking and bicycling to and from school. The Georgia Department of Transportation is committed to providing support during these promotional activities by providing fluorescent vests and personnel to attending as many activities as possible. It is important to not only develop student enthusiasm for these activities, but also to encourage parents and teachers to participate in as many Safe Routes activities as possible.

The following is a list of planned activities to support Encouragement efforts for the Safe Routes to School plan:

Activity	Park and Walk
Timeline	September 2011-May 2012
Task	Encourage those children who live outside the 1 mile radius of the school to walk to school through a system (method) known as “Park and Walk”. Through this method, parents can drive their children to a designated parking place usually within 1 mile or ½ a mile so that children can walk or bike to school from this point.
Who	Students, parents, and teachers.
Status	To be implemented

Activity	Activity Day “Giveaways”
Timeline	During the days of a bicycle/pedestrian activity
Task	During the days in which a bicycle/pedestrian activity will take place, giveaways will play an important role for increasing awareness as well as promoting the current and future bicycle/pedestrian activities. Such giveaways include, but are not limited to t-shirts, bumper stickers, hats, reflective gear, etc.
Who	Students, teachers, school staff, parents.
Status	To be implemented

Activity	Seasonal Rides
Timeline	September 2011-May 2012
Task	Seasonal Rides consists of organizing bicycle rides or walks celebrate the seasons. For example, “Welcome Spring Ride”, “Celebrate the Autumn Ride”, etc. These rides/walks can be organized once every season or during a festive holiday; “Turkey Ride”, “the Santa Side”, etc.
Who	Students, teachers, school staff, parents.
Status	To be implemented

Activity	Walk and Ride Bus
Timeline	September 2011-May 2012
Task	Walking and Riding buses consists of organizing a group of students that meet at the same time and place and walk or ride to school together. Walking and Riding buses should include adult supervision and include active parents who wish to engage in such activities. Walking and Riding buses can also be organized according to neighborhoods where a significant number of residents attend Clay County Elementary & Middle School and wish to get organized to walk and bike to school together.
Who	Students and parents.
Status	Program to be developed and implemented.

Enforcement

“Following the Safety Rules”

This section focuses on the legal aspects of enforcing traffic laws. Developing an adequate enforcement strategy will provide the basis for educating motorists as well as cyclists and pedestrians; however, there is a greater focus on motorist education and safety. Earlier in this plan, crash data, as well as traffic counts and average speed were provided. This information demonstrates an average speed of 35 MPH in a 2 mile radius from Southwestern Elementary School. According to officials at the City of Cordele Police Department, this average speed may not provide for a safe walking and cycling environment, for it is only 10 miles over the School Zone speed limit. Education and Encouragement efforts deal mainly with training and educating children, parents, and teachers; little is done to educate motorists.

An Enforcement strategy will require active participation from local law enforcement officials as well as parents, teachers and even the students themselves. Developing and establishing Safe Routes to School policies and procedures for drivers will be the initial part of this enforcement strategy. These policies will be created in conjunction with law enforcement officials, local city officials, and Southwestern Elementary School Staff. Following the development of such policies and procedures, enforcement efforts can begin.

The following are law enforcement strategies which will allow us to educate motorists within the surrounding 2-mile radius of Southwestern Elementary School:

Activity	Hire a full-time crossing guard for the school.
Timeline	Ongoing
Task	To hire a full time crossing guard to aid students who walk and cycle to school in providing safety means of crossing the main intersections by the school campus.
Who	Students, parents, teachers, crossing guards.
Status	The City of Cordele is currently not encouraging much walking or riding to school other than for special events with police escort due to the lack of safe pedestrian facilities in place.
Activity	“Pace Your Car Program”
Timeline	September 2011-May 2012
Task	This program will consist of pacing the speed of motor-vehicles on the surrounding roads of Southwestern Elementary School. We intend to approach this task in a creative manner, using colorful and attractive signs in both English and Spanish, and use specific dates to promote the program.
Who	Students, parents, teachers, traffic engineers, law enforcement.
Status	Program to be developed and implemented.

Evaluation

“Identifying and Addressing the Problem”

Evaluating both the development and progress of our Safe Routes to School Plan will allow us to monitor the effectiveness of our program. Maintaining a close monitoring of our program provides us with the advantage of detecting mistakes at an early stage, hence being able to develop an appropriate solution to the problem. Recognizing mistakes and taking prompt action to solve them ensures the steadiness and consistency of our program during its implementation stages.

The following table illustrates three key elements (Objective, Data Collection/Methodology, and Timeline) which will be monitored in order to ensure the accomplishment of our stated objectives:

Objective	Data collection / Methodology	Timeline
Increase the number of student cyclists by 10% over the next academic year (2011-2012)	 Developing cycling awareness campaigns (including giveaways)  Parent and teacher initiative to support program and get children involved.	Begin: September 2011 End: May 2012
To develop the Wellness Policy within a 6 month period of approving the Safe Routes to School plan and implement this	 Georgia Department of Health plays a key role in developing the policies.  Must be approved by the Muscogee County Board of Education and Clay	Begin: September 2011 End: May 2012

policy within the remaining 6 months of the academic year 2011-2012. This will be an ongoing effort.	County Elementary & Middle School. ☺ Should address Safe Routes to School as a means of physical activity.
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Objective	Data Collection / Methodology	Timeline
Continue to participate in the National Walk and Bike to School Day on October, 2011. Develop an adequate class syllabus for “Safe Walking and Safe Bicycling” class by September 2011 to be used during the 2011-2012 academic year.	☺ Develop student-designed campaigns.	October, 2011
	☺ Involve parents, teachers, and community members.	
	☺ Using a previous model, develop a Safe Walking syllabus for teachers.	Begin: September 2011 End: May 2012
Increase the number of bicycle racks from 0 to 4 by May 2012.	☺ Using a previous model, develop a Safe Bicycling syllabus for teachers.	
	☺ This class can be taught as part of the P.E curriculum or as an extracurricular activity.	
	☺ Request and/or generate funds to purchase bicycle racks.	Deadline: May 2012
Increase the number of parents and community members who walk and bicycle with their children by the end of the academic year 2011-2012.	☺ Should be supported by school officials and will promote bicycle riding to the students.	
	☺ Developing walking and cycling campaigns.	Begin: September 2011 End: May 2012
	☺ Developing awareness posters and banners.	
	☺ Promoting the program to parents and the community through students and teachers.	

**Infrastructure
Engineering**

“Designing Improvements”

This section consists of determining if new road designs and operational techniques are needed in order to reduce traffic volumes, to decrease speed, and to improve bicycle/pedestrian safety. During the scope of performing the walk-ability and bike-ability assessments, we were able to determine areas where engineering would be needed in order to increase bicycle/pedestrian safety. Our findings are as follows:

Problems:

1. **School Zone Speed Limit Signs:** There is currently only one School Zone Speed Limit sign, which is small, deteriorated, and has no flashing lights. This sign is only placed on 24th Street Southbound; there is no sign Northbound, which poses a clear threat to children who are walking or biking to school. Furthermore, there are no school-crossing signs to let motorists become aware of children crossing.
2. **Traffic Calming Signs:** While there is some signage to let motorists know that they are entering a school zone, the signage is not placed at a distance far enough away to allow motorists to prepare to slow down. Although there is a posted School Zone Speed Limit sign, vehicles continue to drive through this area at an average of 35MPH, according to the City of Cordele Police Department. Traffic calming mechanisms like rumble strips and flashing speed limit signs for the school zone would have a tremendous impact on reducing the average speed of vehicles.
3. **Painted Crossing Lines:** While children and parents that have the ability to walk to school within a 1 mile radius have adequate safety measures and infrastructure to do so, there are still improvements that can be made. Several crosswalks within the identified two mile radius are not painted properly or have paint that is wearing away. There is only one marked pedestrian crossing sign within the two mile radius, which could pose a threat to any pedestrians in the area.

4. **Electronic Crossing Signs and Bicycle racks for the school:** Our Safe Routes to School team believes that students could benefit from an electronic crossing signs at each crosswalk within a 2 mile radius of the school campus. Also, the school has no bicycle racks in place for students who wish to ride their bikes to school. This is one of the reasons that both students and teachers agreed on why children do not ride their bicycle to school.
5. **Handicap Access and Sidewalk Improvements:** While there is some handicap access within the main sidewalks in Cordele, GA, several others lack it, and existing sidewalks lack truncated domes. There are also sidewalks that need to be cleared of overgrowth and other debris to make them more attractive to pedestrians. Making additions and improvements to handicap accessibility and existing sidewalks will be a great part of any infrastructure improvements that take place as part of this Safe Routes to School Project.

As stated above, there were some issues resulted from both our walk-ability and bike-ability assessments. Our final evaluation of the physical conditions of the roads and sidewalks verify the need for engineering activities to take place in order to address the aforementioned issues. Our research and evaluations demonstrate that an adequate number of children who attend Southwestern Elementary School are walking through these streets and sidewalks, however, infrastructure improvements can definitely be made to allow for a larger number of children to walk safely to and from school. Funding for such activities will not only alleviate the current conditions of these roads, but will also provide safer means for children to walk and bike to school, therefore, accomplishing our main goal of increasing the number of cyclists and pedestrians, and providing a safe route to and from school for these children.