

Safe Routes to School Travel Plan Task Force – Meeting Minutes: 21 February 2012 (Page 1)

In attendance: Tracy Bull (Chair), Peter Flood, Mary Frazzetta, Rick Greenier, Officer Rob Kelleher, Jean Mazzarella (3:50pm), Principal Marsha McGill, Sarah Ruffell, Matt Waitkins (NRPC)

The meeting was called to order by committee Chair Tracy Bull at 3:31pm. She welcomed committee members and announced that Mr. Cummings and Mrs. Rothman were excused, and that Principal Fabrizio and Ms. Mazzarella would be joining the meeting following their staff meeting.

Mrs. Bull made a request for any corrections or clarifications to the draft minutes from the meeting dated 31 January 2012. Mr. Waitkins (NRPC) offered several clauses designed to provide further clarification to his presentation from that meeting, which he read aloud. He further expressed his intent to email all changes to the Chair. Mrs. Bull indicated she would distribute the final draft to all committee members via email as well as submit them to the Town Manager's Office for online posting. A motion was made by Mr. Waitkins to accept the minutes as amended, and was seconded by Mrs. Frazzetta. The motion carried 8-0-0.

Mrs. Bull explained that Mr. Waitkins would be outlining the two surveys the committee will be implementing shortly. She indicated that she and Mr. Waitkins had already taken the opportunity to present the surveys before the School Board on 17 January 2012, and their request to administer them was approved by the Board under their consent agenda on 06 February 2012.

Mr. Waitkins distributed copies of the Safe Routes to School Data Collection Overview from the National Center for Safe Routes to School website:
http://www.saferoutesinfo.org/sites/default/files/resources/1_Brief_SRTS_Data_Collection_Description11-2011.pdf He walked the committee through the sheet which describes what the Student Travel Tally and Parent Survey are designed to do, and further indicated that the survey forms are both available for download online. He also distributed copies of both surveys.

The Student Travel Tally is administered to students in Grades K-8 at participating schools, in this case both James Mastricola Elementary School (MES) and James Mastricola Upper Elementary School (JMUES). Classroom teachers will be responsible for polling and recording data across a three day period, Tuesday through Thursday, with students indicating by a show of hands the manner by which each of them arrives and departs from school on each of those days. Students will be specifically asked to indicate if they walk, bike, ride a school bus, ride in a family vehicle, carpool with other families, use transit such as another bus or facility vehicle, or any other means such as skateboard, scooter, etc. Data will be recorded by tallying a count of responding students in each category. Information pertaining to weather conditions each day will also be recorded, as well as any disruptions to the counts or any unusual travel conditions to and from school on the days of the tally.

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The Parent Survey is administered to parents of students in Grades K-8 of the participating schools; again being MES and JMUES for the purposes of this committee's research. Each family will complete only one parent survey per school that their children attend. If more than one child from a school brings a survey home, parents will fill out the survey for the child with the next birthday from the date that the survey is brought home. The survey can be provided via take-home distribution, for instance administered as a homework or extra-credit assignment, or done via online surveying. Although it may be done, the committee does not expect to complete the Parent Survey as part of parent-teacher conferences. The survey asks parents to offer basic student information, such as which school their student attends, student grade and gender, and to list the intersection nearest their home. Parents are asked to indicate how far their student lives from school in increments of $\frac{1}{4}$, $\frac{1}{2}$, 1, 2 or 2+ miles, as well as via what means their student arrives and leaves school most days. The survey also asks how long it normally takes for students to travel to and from school.

The survey continues by examining parental dispositions towards allowing students to bike or walk to school. Questions include whether a student has requested permission to walk or bike to or from school in the last year, along with what grade parents would feel comfortable in allowing their student to do so. Parents are asked to indicate what issues have affected their decision to allow or not allow their students to do so, and whether their decision would be affected if those issues were changed or approved. Options include considerations such as distance, convenience of driving, time, student activities before or after school, speed and amount of traffic along route, availability of adults to walk or bike with, safety of intersections and crossings, crossing guards, violence or crime, and weather or climate.

The survey finishes by asking parental opinions as to the degree they feel their child's school encourages or discourages walking and biking to and from school, how much fun it is to do so, and how healthy it is to do so. Parents are asked to indicate their highest completed level of education, as well as to briefly offer any additional written comments they might have. This survey typically takes less than 10 minutes to complete.

Mr. Waitkins stated that some parents might be unwilling to complete the survey, and asked the committee membership to speak to anything in the survey they felt might be objectionable. Members did not find any issues with nature of the Parent Survey.

Once completed, data from both surveys can be entered via the National Center for Safe Routes to School's online tool or by remitting completed forms to their Data Entry Program in Chapel Hill, NC for processing. Once entered, the committee will be able to view the data through the online data system, and summary reports of the data can also be viewed and shared. The completed data will also become part of the National SRTS Program's tracking efforts.

The committee held discussion surrounding the best way to administer the two surveys at MES and JMUES, as well as dates and work to be completed in preparation for doing so, and

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preferences as to the approach to data entry once the surveys are complete and gathered. Mr. Greenier wondered if data would be inaccurate if tallied on a snow day. Mrs. Bull stated she felt the data should be recorded as it occurs on the dates selected, however, she agreed that a delayed start due to weather could influence data. Mr. Flood suggested that in the event of a weather disruption, the day in question could be tallied the following week instead. Mr. Waitkins noted there was a place on the tally sheet to record commentary as to weather and other influences.

Following some discussion, it was agreed that the Student Travel Tally could be easily administered by classroom teachers with one survey sheet per classroom. Teachers would be instructed on how to conduct the survey by Administration at a staff meeting. It was decided this survey would be administered the first week of April 2012, Tuesday through Thursday, the 3rd, 4th and 5th.

Regarding the Parent Survey, Principal McGill indicated that at her school (JMUES) and the elementary student level in general, much communication is done by sending papers home with students to their parents as this provides a reliable means at these grade levels. The school's email system could also be helpful in getting word out to parents, although not all parents are registered to receive those messages. Ms. Mazzarella indicated the parent-teacher group at MES utilizes a similar system that could be of equal use.

The committee considered whether it would be best to administer the Parent Survey via home distribution, online or by offering both means. Mr. Greenier raised the point that offering both options could become confusing to parents. For instance, some might be inclined to respond both ways, potentially creating inaccuracies due to duplicate data. Mrs. Frazzetta suggested having those parents opting to complete the survey online return the printed survey indicating they had done so. It was ultimately decided to request that parents complete the survey on paper and return it accordingly, and the NRPC will assist with the online entry of data gathered.

Mr. Waitkins inquired as to how many students there were at each school. Principal McGill indicated she had approximately 650 students with her at JMUES. Mrs. Bull stated she believed student population at MES was approximately 400 students. Mr. Waitkins indicated that the NRPC could be of assistance in preparing the necessary print copies of the surveys. A cover letter will be crafted by the administrators in each respective building to accompany the Parent Survey; Principal McGill (JMUES) and Principal Fabrizio (MES). In order to minimize paper going home, at MES, the Parent Survey can be distributed via the youngest sibling in instances where there are households with multiple students.

Principal McGill further suggested the committee might take advantage of upcoming parent/teacher conferences to assist in the roll-out of information to parents. Conferences at JMUES will take place on Tuesday, March 20th and Thursday, March 22nd, from approximately 4:00-7:00pm, however, conferences at MES are not scheduled to take place until Tuesday, April 17th, and Thursday April 19th. It was decided that the committee would take advantage of

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parent/teacher conference nights scheduled at JMUES by setting up a table with information and displays in order to assist with the survey roll-out. Mrs. Bull indicated that she would contact committee members via email so they could each respond individually as to their

availability to assist with the informational table on those dates in March. It was decided that the Parent Survey would also be administered during the first week of April 2012.

Preliminary discussion was held pertaining to undertaking effective communication and information dissemination to Masticola parents and the community during the Travel Plan project once official notice of the SRTS grant is received. Local news venues such as Merrimack Patch, parent/teacher group emails and newsletters, etc. will be taken into consideration for those purposes. However, due to meeting time already elapsed, it was decided to continue the discussion on communication at the committee's next meeting, which the membership agreed to schedule for Tuesday, March 27th, 2012, at 3:30pm in Room #122 at JMUES. Mrs. Bull asked Principal McGill if she could please reserve the room again, and she agreed to do so.

Mrs. Bull opened up the floor to comments. She shared that there has been recent discussion held by both the Town Council and the School Board pertinent to the tennis courts located on O'Gara Drive, which is immediately adjacent to one of the primary areas relevant to this committee as outlined in the SRTS Travel Plan grant application. Specifically, the cost of resurfacing the tennis courts is under consideration for inclusion in the Town's proposed 2012-2013 budget. The Town Manager inquired whether the School District would prefer to see the tennis court area maintained or reserved for possible future parking considerations. The School Board responded that they would prefer to see the tennis courts resurfaced and maintained accordingly. In addition, the tennis courts were originally developed with federal grant money for active recreational use of that land. In order to repurpose the area for non-recreational use, the State would first have to inactivate the space accordingly. Existing gravel parking in that area is expected to remain.

Mrs. Bull entertained a motion to adjourn the meeting, offered by Mrs. Frazzetta and seconded by Ms. Mazzarella. The motion carried 9-0-0, and the meeting was adjourned at 4:45pm.