A Contextual Look at SRTS Implementation in Texas: Results of Qualitative Interviews

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Background

- **Texas Childhood Obesity Prevention Policy Evaluation (T-COPPE)**
  8 year project designed to evaluate the statewide implementation of:
  - Safe Routes to School Program
  - Revised WIC Food Package

- **During final year of data collection:**
  - Schools still implementing SRTS grant
  - Some clarification was needed

- **Interviews conducted** to understand the SRTS grant process and implementation
Purpose

To gain a more comprehensive understanding of the implementation of the SRTS program in Texas, including:

- Grant planning process
- Implementation
- Future plans for the SRTS program
- Other school safety programs
Sample

- **Community Level Interviews (n=31):**
  - Selected from 8 Texas communities that received 2007 SRTS grants and were part of the T-COPPE sample
  - Infrastructure: n=15
  - Non-Infrastructure: n=16

- **State Level Interviews (n=3):**
  - TxDOT Bicycle Advisory Committee members
Design

• February to May 2014
  – Developed structured phone interviews
  – Conducted Interviews
  – Recorded and transcribed
  – Transcribed responses organized and grouped according to thematic elements

• Interview questionnaires
  – Series of open-ended and multiple-choice with follow-up
  – Separate for community and state-level
Results - Planning

• Why did communities apply?
  – Saw a need to improve safety at their schools, especially in low-income neighborhoods; and/or
  – Wanted to increase opportunities for physical activity by enhancing the built environment around the school.

• SRTS Teams included multiple city/community partners.

• All sought public input and received
  – strong opinions; or
  – very little input.
Results - Implementation

• Achievements:
  – Improved infrastructure
  – Perceived increased walking to/from school
  – Enhanced neighborhood pride
  – Improved commitment from schools

• Barriers:
  – Lack of communication with granting agency/community
  – Changes in construction design standards
  – Regulatory issues
  – Lack of up-front funding
Results - Implementation

- Mostly positive reactions from parents, students, and teachers.
- SRTS Plan used through process but seen as a “living document.”
- Multiple outreach strategies:
  - School presentations,
  - Community meetings, and
  - Advertising/PSAs.
- Most did not conduct formal evaluation.
- Believe environment safer for students to walk/bike to/from school.
Results - Sustainability

• Continue to look for more funds:
  – Sustain safety/education programs, and
  – Create improvements at other campuses.

• Use grant writers or city/district staff to locate and write grants for more funds.

• Believe the program is important and needed in Texas:
  – Need dedicated funding, and
  – Open to more communities.
Conclusions

• Communities in Texas want to provide their students with a safe environment to walk and bike to and from school.

• SRTS program was perceived as beneficial due to providing funds for infrastructure and education projects.

• Challenges with communication and navigation through approval processes and policies caused delays in the completion of the project.
Implications for Practice and Policy

• Implementation without subsequent technical assistance and support is difficult and inefficient.

• Communities that had dedicated grant writers or resources, viable partnerships with local decision-makers, and community support were more likely to report more favorable results.

• Future grants should include at least partial funding up-front, rather than relying totally on cost reimbursement policies, especially in smaller communities with less resources.
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