

Brockton students hit the road, walking and bicycling to school

Five schools join Safe Routes to School program

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BROCKTON — This year, students in five Brockton schools are participating in the Safe Routes to School program, a grant-funded initiative aimed at building student physical fitness and reducing traffic congestion.

Kim Wensley, Brockton's local program coordinator, said more than 100 children participated in the state-sponsored program last year with family members. She said the program has helped children get to school safely and efficiently, while reducing traffic congestion, improving air quality and boosting healthy physical activity.

She noted that it's important that drivers show their support by obeying crossing guards, driving slowly in the area and giving pedestrians the right of way.

The Safe Routes to School Program works with students, parents, school staff and local police in 94 communities and more than 235 schools statewide, according to a press release from the governor's office.

State-provided figures illustrate that fewer students today walk to school and driving children to school adds to traffic congestion:

In 1969, 42 percent of American students bicycled or walked to school.

Today, less than 16 percent of children walk or bicycle to classes.

Nationally, 19 percent of children age 6-11 years old are overweight, more than triple the percentages from 1969.

In Massachusetts, almost one-third of high school and middle school students are overweight or obese.

And in some communities, school-related traffic can contribute up to 25 percent of morning rush-hour traffic volumes, as well as significant air pollution.

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