



Students learn the safe route

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Maquan students learned about crossing the street safely using guidelines developed by Safe Routes to School, a program in connection with MassRides, and the Massachusetts Department of Transportation.

Rosa Carson, of WalkBoston, spent several hours training PTO members, parent volunteers and teachers the correct techniques to educate children about safety while crossing the street. Her materials were all based on the Smart Routes educational initiative, getting children and families to develop healthy ways to move about the towns where they reside.

The Massachusetts Safe Routes to School program helps to reduce air pollution and traffic congestion near schools, while increasing the health, safety, and physical activity of elementary and middle school students.

Carson urged children and parents to actively think about walking to school when homes are less than one mile from school.

“Many parents do not allow their children to walk to school or ride their bikes,” said Carson.

“Nearly two decades ago, there were 60 percent of children walking or biking to school compared to just 13 percent today,” she said.

Many factors come into play when allowing children to walk to school such as: physical safety, lack of small neighborhood schools, heavily traveled roadways, and unfinished sidewalks.

Tara Kaune, of Hanson, decided to get involved with other parent volunteers to form a sub-committee and bring the program Safe Routes to Maquan.

The program is free and Kaune wanted to show her family the safest way to cross the street, especially since she lives on a road without sidewalks.

During the training, Carson and parents strolled their pre-planned route prior to being joined by their second graders along School Street.

They spent several minutes in each area when students joined them.

Kaune, along with other volunteers, practiced ‘Sneak and Peak’ a technique, which reminds children to stay close to the car they exited from and gradually take small steps peaking until they can see around the back of the car and into the parking area. This can also be applied to large shrubs, which may block a line of sight for a child and driver.

“It is important for children to know that due to their size they are not visible to many trucks, and higher SUVs,” said Carson.

During the hands-on practice students and parents wore reflective vests and talked about different scenarios such as dropping something in the road.

“It is normal for someone to want to stop and pick up the item they dropped, said Lori Sawtelle, who was working with two second graders.

“We are teaching the kids that once they have assessed the time they have to get across the road safely, they need to keep going even if they drop something. Then when they have reached the other side they can reassess whether it is safe to cross again and pick up the item continuing onto the other side,” she said.

Carson also reminded the students about momentum when they are running or playing in an area cautioning them to look for breaks in the sidewalk for a driveway.

“It takes several extra seconds to stop yourself from running than it does while walking.” Students got to practice starting and stopping to see the difference in where they would end up if they were running along a sidewalk where cars pull in and out.

Sara Roberts, a second grader at Maquan, practiced dropping something and returning to get the item the correct way.

“I learned if you drop a toy or something you keep walking and then check again for cars. We learned about safety and it was fun,” said Roberts.

Information regarding the Safe Routes program is available online.

Many of the first programs, which were started by the Massachusetts chapters of Smart Routes, have been shared with schools across the country, according to Carson. They have over 1,000 schools that have been educated on this important topic, she added.