

Opportunity Walks

How Mount Vernon School District is Creating the Healthiest Next Generation



The Healthiest Next Generation Initiative

The goal of the Healthiest Next Generation Initiative is to help all children maintain a healthy weight, enjoy active lives and eat well by creating healthy early learning settings, schools and communities.

Join partner organizations, the Departments of Health and Early Learning and Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction in elevating local success statewide.

We profiled the district in 2012 and checked back to see how their plans unfolded to create the healthiest next generation.

QUICK FACTS

Mount Vernon School District:
6,402 students in 9 schools

Legislative Districts:
10, 39 and 40

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Opportunity

Several years ago, Superintendent Dr. Carl Bruner had a vision for a comprehensive transportation policy within the Mount Vernon School District. This new approach would increase physical activity, cut the cost of school busses, reduce traffic congestion and improve the streets and sidewalks in the surrounding neighborhoods. The policy also had the potential to improve academic success, since students who are physically active do better in school. Fortunately, since 2003, the district had been collaborating with the City of Mount Vernon on a successive series of Safe Routes to School (SRTS) grants from the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) and funding from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to support this change.

Action

Working closely with the Skagit County Public Health Department and Skagit Valley Hospital, the District developed a multi-step policy approach. Beginning in 2011, they changed the morning “bell time” schedule so schools would start sequentially. Then, using a newly developed Pupil Transportation Policy they assessed the streets surrounding the school, classifying them as safe or unsafe for walking.

During the 2013-2014 school year, the district implemented a policy to eliminate bussing for students living within one mile of the schools where a safe route exists. To help parents and students feel comfortable walking to school, crossing guards took on the role of Walking Monitors and walked students to and from school. The district also created walking maps and supported a community-wide “Stop for Walkers” campaign. Funding from a SRTS grant coupled these efforts with physical improvements to sidewalks and roads around the schools. These efforts built on the district’s implementation of a K-4 pedestrian education program in 2009 and a 5-6 grade bicycle and pedestrian education program in 2011.

Impact

The district reduced its bus fleet from 27 to 12, eased traffic congestion near schools and saved approximately \$60,000 through the bell time policy change which was re-invested in the Walking Monitors. They estimate that 600 students are now walking to school. And the work hasn’t stopped there!

Leveraging previous state and federal funding, the City of Mount Vernon and the district received another WSDOT SRTS grant for 2014-2016 to build a roundabout on a local thoroughfare. The district continues to find creative solutions to ease traffic congestion, improve student safety and get more students active.

To learn more about the Healthiest Next Generation Initiative, visit: www.doh.wa.gov/healthiestnextgen or join us at hashtag #HealthiestNextGen