

Rewarding Routes

Building a rewards program to encourage healthy habits for your students



Putting kids on a healthier path

Check it out at www.SafeRoutesNE.com.

Encouragement strategies: **Getting kids on board**

Healthy habits don't just come out of nowhere. They have to be inspired, instilled, and encouraged by the important adults in a child's life . . . and as a teacher, you fit the bill! That's where encouragement strategies fit in.

Among encouragement strategies, an in-class rewards program is one of the most effective and easy-to-manage tactics. Rewards programs give students the incentives they need to make behavior changes that can keep them healthy for years to come.

How this guide works

This guide discusses the necessary components for a successful rewards program. How you want to implement the program is up to you. There are so many ways to personalize the program to work for your classroom. Consider using themes from your regular curriculum or trends among your students to bring your program to life. Safe Routes Nebraska will provide you the building blocks . . . you construct a program to motivate your students!

The building blocks

What you need to create a successful walking/biking rewards program

Block 1: Equal opportunity

The easiest way to undermine your success is to develop a rewards program that not all students can participate in. Your students will have different obstacles that keep them from walking or biking to school. Some may live too far from school or on the other side of an interstate highway. When you're developing your rewards program, it's crucial to make sure that every student has the ability to participate and achieve success. Here are some ways to make sure your rewards program is open to all students:

- Send a letter to parents identifying good park and walk spots—good places for parents to drop off their children so they can walk the rest of the way to school.
- Let students count any of the walking and biking they do during the day, not just to and from school.
- Include other physical activities such as organized sports, active play at recess, etc., in the rewards program.

Block 2: Measurement method

Determining the means of measuring your students' progress in the program is an important decision that needs to be made early. Be sure to choose a method that works with the type of class you have. Here are some ideas of measurement methods:

- ***Frequency of walks/bike rides to school*** – This measurement method is good for neighborhood schools where most children live within walking distance.
- ***Steps taken*** – If your classroom has funding to purchase pedometers or, better yet, finds a local company willing to donate them, your students can count their steps each day. Simply reset the pedometer after you record a child's steps once a day. This measurement method is excellent for counting overall physical activity, not just what occurs before and after school.

- **Distance** – First, have children determine the distance between home (or the park and walk stop) and school. Each day, record what distance each of your students walked or biked to and from school.

Block 3: Attainable goals

For students to enthusiastically participate in your rewards program, they have to believe that they can attain the goals set for them. Making a consistent effort is all students should need to do to achieve their goals.

There are two directions you can take for setting goals: individual and collective.

Individual goals

When you set goals individually, students will be able to see their position in relation to their classmates'. This healthy competition may encourage students to do even more walking and biking to school. Some realistic individual goals include:

- Walk or bike to school 30 times in the next 60 days
- Walk or bike 30 miles in the next two months
- Take 50,000 steps this week

Collective goals

Setting collective goals can create an atmosphere of shared purpose with students encouraging one another because meeting the goal depends on everyone's actions. Collective effort also allows for loftier, more inspiring goals. Attainable collective goals include:

- Walk or bike around the world this year
- Take 1,000,000 steps this week
- Walk/bike 24 hours this week

Block 4: Tracking system

Once you've decided what the students are working toward, it's time to track their progress. The tracking system you use has to do more than just keep a record of student achievement . . . it has to showcase that achievement in a creative way so that students know where they are in relation to their goals. This will help keep them excited about achieving those goals. Use your creativity to develop a tracking system that will inspire your students to push themselves. Here are some examples:

- **Frequency cards** – If you're counting how many times students walk or bike to school, frequency cards are a great way to keep track. For each walk or bike ride, punch the student's card. Create a bar chart on the bulletin board. Each time a student completes a punch card, staple the card onto the bulletin board to serve as that student's "bar." Each completed card puts the student closer to the goal.
- **Footsteps** – If you're counting steps, let students create construction paper feet. For each increment of steps they complete, they get to tape a foot to the floor leading to the front of the room. Whoever reaches the goal earns a reward.
- **Walk around the world** – If you're measuring distance walked, consider making a group goal for your class to walk/bike around the world. Create a bulletin board showing a map of Earth. Each week, add up how far the students have walked, and add a line segment to show how far around the world the students have walked. This is also a great way to tie into lessons about geography and world history.
- **Foot races** – Give students a paper tennis shoe with their name on it. Create a bulletin board that looks like a race track and move the paper shoe along the track as each student moves toward the goal.

Block 5: Rewards, of course!

The rewards you select for your students will determine to a large extent how actively they participate in the program. If, as is the case for most schools, funds are too tight to allow for expensive reward purchases, consider seeking partners in the private sector to provide rewards that students will enjoy. Your partners will benefit by providing goodwill in the community and by promoting their products to students. Possible rewards include:

Individual rewards

- Free healthy food item at a local restaurant
- Athletic shoes or bike helmet
- Gift certificate to local sporting goods store
- Credit at local music store
- Free admission coupons to a mini-golf place or other active entertainment venue

Group rewards

- Healthy snack party
- Group trip to a local attraction
- Pet for the classroom

Case studies

Please visit the National Safe Routes Web site for case studies on other encouragement strategies.

www.saferoutesinfo.org/guide/case_studies/index.cfm

What is Safe Routes Nebraska?

At Safe Routes Nebraska, we're committed to helping build safe routes to school, so kids can walk and bike more . . . getting the exercise they need for happy, healthy lives.

Here's how we do it:

- Funding projects to make communities more walker/biker-friendly
- Educating teachers, students, parents, and communities on safe walking and biking
- Encouraging kids to walk or bike to and from school—after all, it's fun!

Find out more by visiting www.SafeRoutesNE.com.