

SCHOOL TRAVEL PLANNING IN TORONTO



SUMMARY OF PROGRAMS: 2017-2020

Prepared by



For



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thank you to all of the project partners across the City of Toronto who have been part of the School Travel Planning Committees at individual schools, and also to those who have supported the School Travel Planning program work in Toronto more broadly. These project partners include:

- Toronto District School Board (TDSB)
- Toronto Catholic District School Board (TCDSB)
- Staff, students and families of participating TDSB and TCDSB schools
- City of Toronto
 - Toronto Public Health
 - Transportation Services
 - School Crossing Guard Program
- Toronto Police Service
- Toronto Transit Commission (TTC)
- City Councillors
- School Trustees
- Toronto Student Transportation Group
- Not-for-profit organizations, including CultureLink

Between 2017-2020, School Travel Planning in Toronto has been delivered by Green Communities Canada. The funding for this work has been provided by the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) and Toronto Catholic District School Board (TCDSB).

Report Title:

School Travel Planning in Toronto. Summary of Programs: 2017-2020

Green Communities Canada, February 2021

Authors: Isooda Niroomand and Laura Zeglen

Mailing Address:

Green Communities Canada

1545 Monaghan Road Peterborough, ON K9J 5N3

Tel: (705) 745.7479

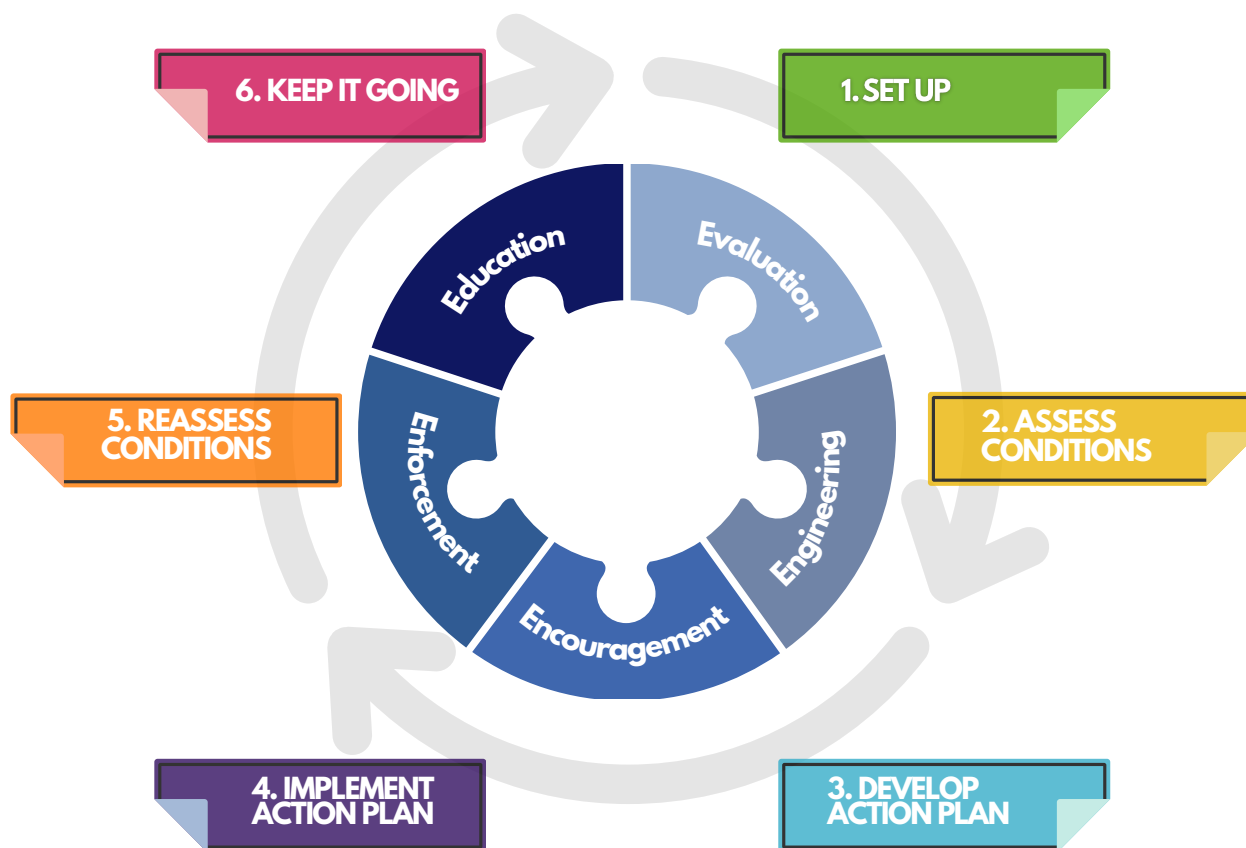
Websites:

greencommunitiescanada.org

ontarioactiveschooltravel.ca



TORONTO SCHOOL TRAVEL PLANNING PROCESS



A School Travel Planning (STP) Facilitator leads the STP process at individual schools, including organizing and leading meetings, conducting a range of data collection activities, and coordinating the process of action planning and implementation. They connect schools with the people who can help them achieve items in their action plan.

VISION

- Students and families at all schools will be able to travel by active, safe and sustainable modes, contributing to creating healthier and safer communities for all.

GOALS

- To increase the rates of walking or wheeling to school for students living within the “walk zone” (i.e. within walking distance of the school, as determined by each school board).
- To increase the rates of taking the school bus for students living within the “bus zone” (i.e. those eligible for transportation by school bus).
- To reduce traffic congestion and safety hazards at the school and along routes to school.

SET UP

School Travel Planning in the TDSB and TCDSB

School Travel Planning (STP) has been implemented in Toronto since 2011 and delivered by Green Communities Canada through partnerships with the TDSB and TCDSB.

TDSB	TCDSB
Name of Program: Traffic Safety Program	Name of Program: School Travel Planning
Number of new schools per year: Up to 15	Number of new schools per year: 8
Length of program: 1 Year, with option of extension into Year 2	Length of program: 3 Years
Total number of participating schools: 43 schools between 2017-2020	Total number of participating schools: 11 schools between 2017-2020

In the TDSB, STP is delivered through the Traffic Safety Program. Up to 15 new schools per year are supported in a one-year program, with the possibility of extended support into a second year. In the TCDSB, the School Travel Planning (STP) program supports up to 8 schools in total per year, with each school participating in the program for three years. In both boards, the goal for each school is to develop a comprehensive action plan and to achieve positive changes in travel behaviours. At the time of this report, discussions are in progress about how to align the two programs.

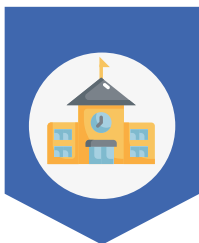
In addition to providing financial support for STP, both school boards have formally demonstrated their commitment to supporting active transportation more fully in schools through Charters: The TDSB Charter for Active, Safe and Sustainable Transportation, and the TCDSB Active Transportation Travel Charter.

>27,000 students

Number of students in Toronto reached and impacted by STP program outcomes, plus their families and surrounding communities.

1.8 FTE investment/Year

The financial investment to achieve these impacts has been 1 Full-time equivalent from the TDSB and a 0.8 FTE from the TCDSB- 1 Facilitator per board.



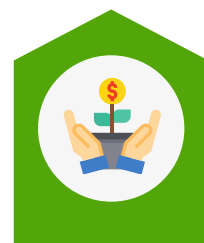
54 Schools

Number of TDSB and TCDSB schools that participated in an STP Program [2017-2020]

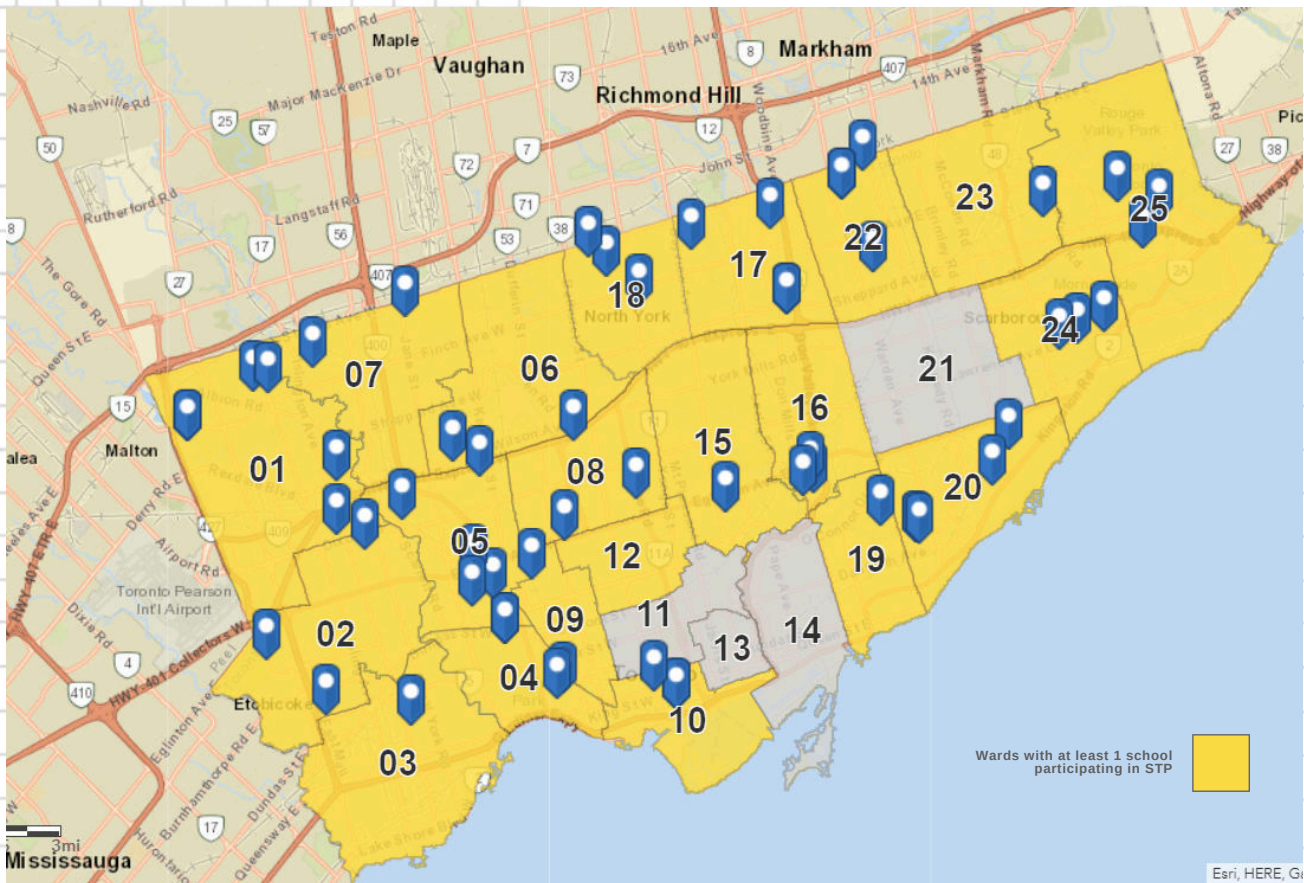


Multiple Partnerships

Each school's STP Committee includes collaboration with a number of partners across the City.



GEOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION OF SCHOOLS PARTICIPATING IN STP PROGRAMS, 2017-2020

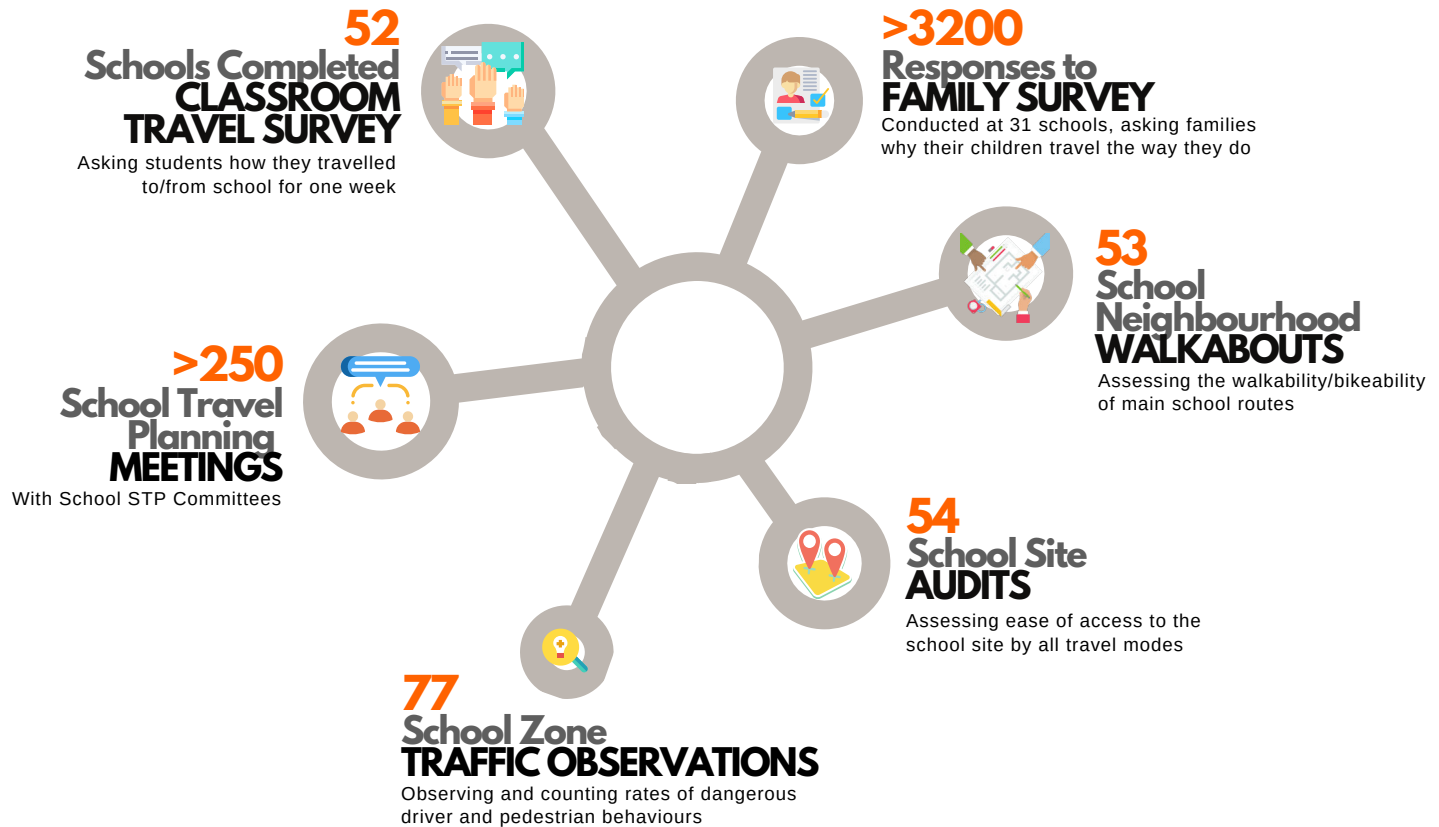


Schools participating in the STP program from both boards in the city of Toronto.
Map prepared by Green Communities Canada

With STP programs running in schools in 21 out of 25 city wards, this program has a broad geographic reach across the City of Toronto.

The TDSB and TCDSB use both quantitative data (e.g. statistics such as the City of Toronto's Vision Zero School Safety Zone prioritization, and indicators of community need) and qualitative data (e.g. known traffic safety concerns at specific school sites) to select schools for their STP programs. The process for school selection is continuously being refined to best address considerations of equity across the city.

ASSESS CONDITIONS



At each school, the Facilitator forms an STP Committee. It generally includes school principals or vice-principals, teachers, parents, and sometimes students. It also includes the school's public health nurse, a representative from Traffic Operations, the City Councillor, school board staff and the school board Trustee. The committee may also include other community stakeholders. This committee meets several times over the course of an STP program, with an average of 5 meetings in the first year of the program while the School Travel Planning Action Plan is being developed.

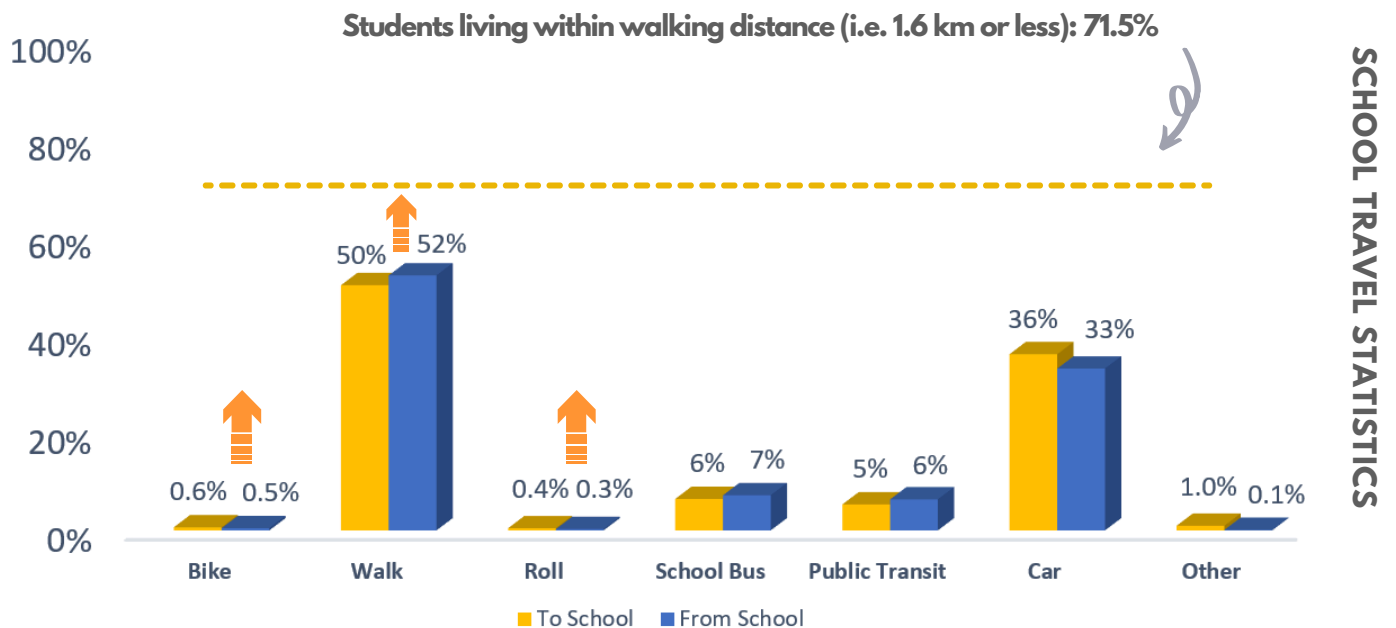
As part of the STP process, a large amount of data is collected. At every school, the STP Facilitator conducts an audit of the school site and the immediate surrounding neighbourhood to review access points to the school site, quality of infrastructure for active transportation, and mapping out the intended traffic flow for school drop-off and pick-up.

Traffic observations are conducted at each school; sometimes, two observations are conducted at a single site to account for differences in before/after school travel periods.

A Walkabout is conducted with members of the school's STP Committee, with a dual purpose to review the findings of the initial site audit and also to invite community members to explain concerns that might not be immediately obvious to someone not familiar with the area.

Schools also have the option of participating in a classroom travel survey to determine students' reported mode share at that school over a full week, as well as a family survey that asks more detailed questions of parents and guardians about why children travel the way they do. All of the data collected is used to inform the School Travel Planning Action Plan.

STUDENT TRAVEL MODES IN TORONTO 2017-2020



Average of All STP Schools: Baseline Data

Note: Of those not within walking distance of the school, many are eligible for transport by school bus.

Across all schools, we found that walking and being driven to school were the two most common modes, with travel by school bus and public transit also comprising a significant proportion of overall mode share. These numbers varied widely across schools. For example, walking rates were as low as 8% at a location in the city suburbs, and as high as 94% at a downtown area school.

Using data from the Toronto Student Transportation Group, we found that for STP program schools, the average percentage of students living within walking distance of their school was found to be 71.5%, which means there is an opportunity gap between those living within walking distance and those who report travelling by active modes.

TRAVEL SAFETY CONCERNS

WHAT WE HEARD: SURVEYS AND MEETINGS

Top concerns:

- Dangerous driver behaviours at drop-off and pick-up on the school street and the school parking lot
- Aging or damaged pedestrian infrastructure
- Speeding and volume of through traffic on school streets and along routes to school
- Busy intersections along walking/cycling routes feel unsafe to cross
- Poor or inconsistent winter maintenance of walking and cycling routes to school

Less common but noteworthy concerns:

- Construction and large truck traffic in the vicinity of school routes
- Concerns about personal safety, including fear of bullying and encountering violence
- Low levels of local TTC service and/or service times not well-aligned with school entry and dismissals. This results in:
 - ➔ Middle school and high school students race to catch the bus to avoid a long wait for the next one, often crossing dangerously through busy parking lots and across streets.
 - ➔ Travel by public transit is not a feasible option to other destinations after the school drop-off, so parents and other caregivers drive their children to school.



WHAT WE SAW: SITE AUDITS, WALKABOUTS AND TRAFFIC OBSERVATIONS

Top concerns:

- Vehicular congestion was observed at nearly 80% of schools during school drop-off and pick-up periods.
- Dangerous driver behaviours observed at 100% of schools. The most common behaviours include:
 - Double parking.
 - Drop off or pick-up on the opposite side of the street where children must cross midblock.
 - Vehicles stopping where it blocks the vision of other motorists and pedestrians.
 - Not following traffic controls, e.g. rolling stops.
 - U-turns in a busy area and/or with compromised sightlines.
- Speeding was also a concern, although it was observed much less often than the concerns outlined above. This is due in part to the traffic congestion often associated with school drop-off and pick-up.
 - Vision Zero School Zone Safety Gateway features may also have played a role in speed reduction, as a number of STP program schools had these installed at the time of observation
- Dangerous pedestrian behaviours were also very common. The most common behaviours, observed at 80% or more of schools, include:
 - Crossing unsafely, i.e. "jaywalking"
 - Crossing between stopped cars

Other noteworthy concerns:

- Not enough safe mid-block crossings in general: Unsafe pedestrian behaviours could be reduced with the addition of crossings that follow desired paths of pedestrians.
- TTC Stop locations near schools but without crossings: This results in students crossing midblock, even when sight lines are compromised.



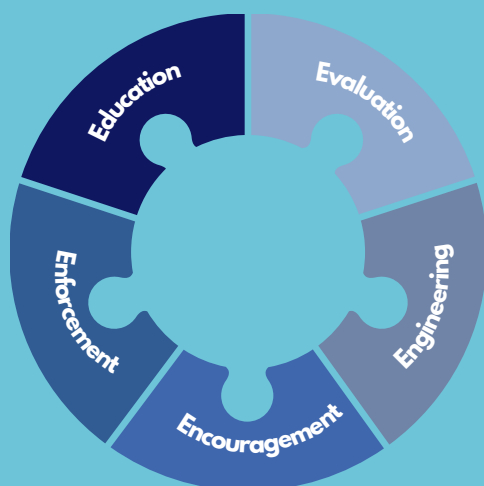
Walkabout in Toronto, Winter 2019. Photo taken for Isooda Niroomand .



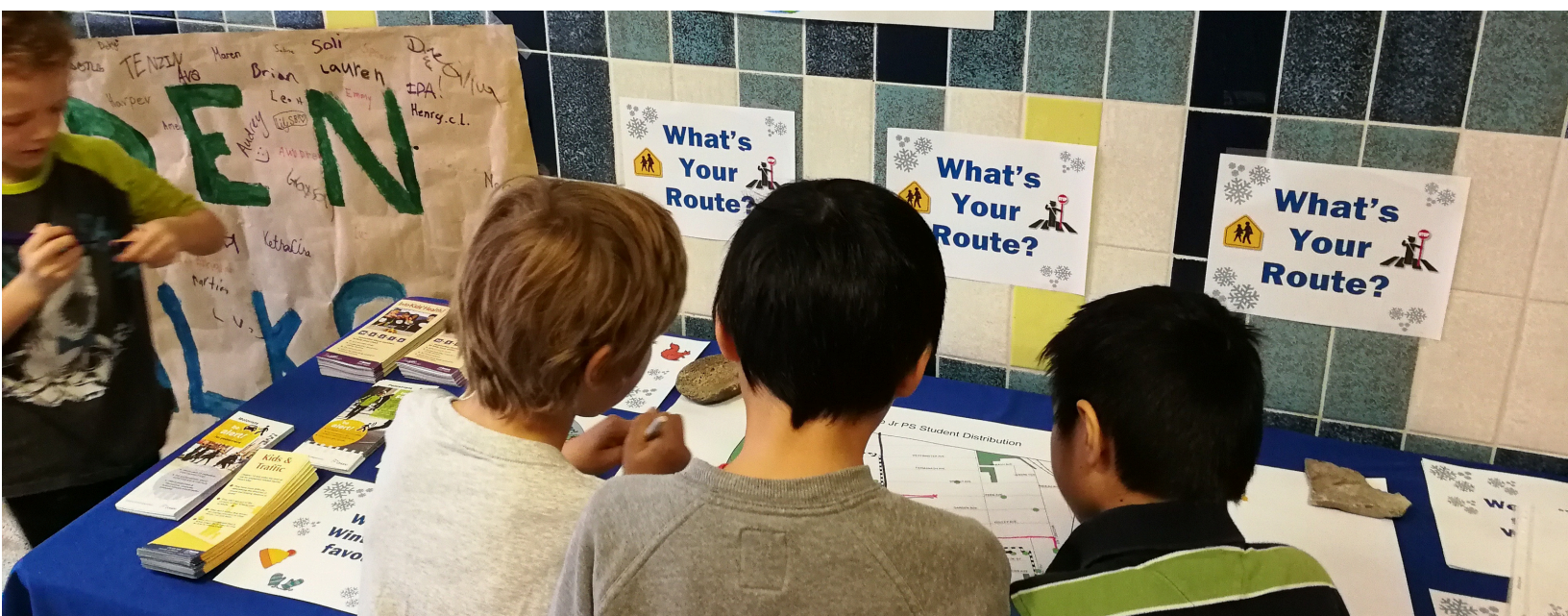
Walkabout in Toronto, Winter 2020. Photo taken for Laura Zeglen.

DEVELOP ACTION PLAN

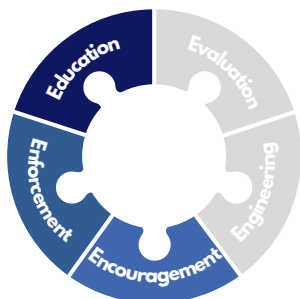
At each school participating in School Travel Planning, a detailed plan of action is developed based on the issues and barriers to active school travel that have been identified specific to that school, and also according to what has been discussed as the best way to reach members of that school community. All action plans contain actions related to the following focus areas:



The Green Communities Canada School Travel Planning model is currently under review, with the aim to more purposefully utilize Engagement and Equity as the lenses through which the program is delivered. Under the new model, Enforcement will become an optional area of emphasis within the action plan, based on feedback from the school community.



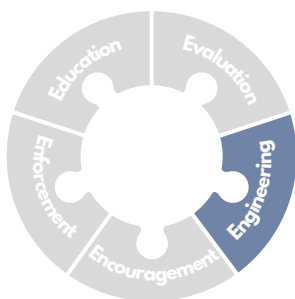
IMPLEMENT ACTION PLAN



>120

Community Events coordinated

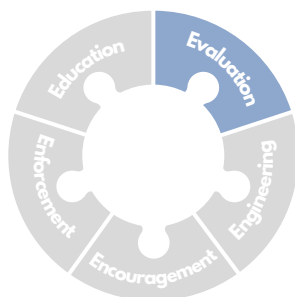
- International Walk to School Day (October), Winter Walk Day (February), Bike to School Week (May/June)
- “Bike Rodeos” led by Culturelink and Toronto Police Service
- “Students Stop Speeders” events with Toronto Police Service



>125

School Zone Safety Improvements

- Parking lot redesigns
- Changes to City bylaws and street signage
- Improved crossings
- Bike racks
- School Crossing Guards



>265

Assessment Activities

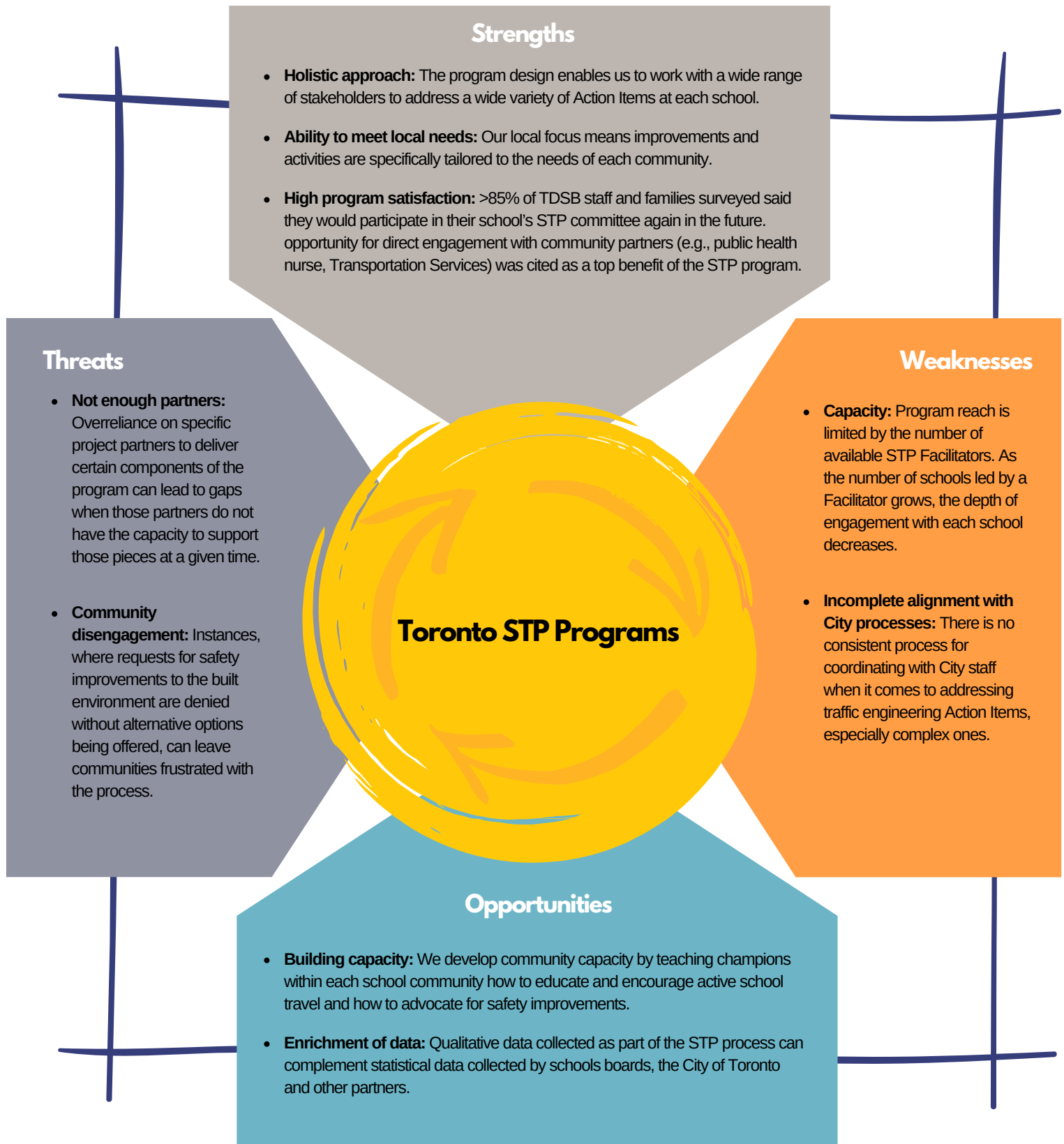
- Family surveys
- Classroom travel surveys
- School neighbourhood walkabouts
- School site audits
- School zone traffic observations



Resources Developed in Partnership

- Communications materials
- Classroom resources
- Materials for City of Toronto Vision Zero projects

REASSESS CONDITIONS





SUSTAINABILITY PLAN FOR SCHOOL TRAVEL PLANNING IN TORONTO

What's already underway:

- **Identifying champions.** “Champions” have been identified at each school to continue with follow-up on ongoing projects, and schools are encouraged to continue with education and encouragement events on an annual basis.
- **Developing community resources.** Green Communities Canada is continuing to develop active school travel resources for schools that can be used beyond the time that schools are participating in STP.
- **Maintaining funding.** Both school boards have extended their funding for STP programs, allowing the programs to continue at their current capacity.
- **Keeping the conversation going.** While Toronto Public Health is redeployed to respond to COVID-19, Green Communities Canada is taking over the Toronto Active and Safe School Travel Hub, to continue to plan for programs in the City that complements and support STP.
- **Continually reflecting and improving upon existing approaches.** Green Communities Canada is currently updating its STP process to prioritize considerations of equity and engagement.

Recommendations to improve sustainability of STP program outcomes:

- **Use data from STP programs to inform policy.** STP programs are an effective way to collect data from communities, including valuable qualitative data to complement quantitative data collected by the City and other stakeholders. There is a huge untapped potential of data and insights collected through the STP process to be used in more targeted and meaningful ways.
- **Align related programs with STP.** The work of STP facilitators requires them to be knowledgeable about many different fields related to active school travel, from how to improve the safety of the built environment to effective community engagement. Thus, they are effective liaisons who can connect the dots between different stakeholders with common goals. Members of groups such as Vision Zero Delivery Partners Network and Toronto Active and Safe School Travel Hub can work together with STP facilitators to identify policy and program gaps in related fields and to minimize overlap between programs.
- **Invest in STP.** Funding for additional STP facilitators will enable more schools to benefit from this work and provide additional valuable data for informing policy. Financial support for education and encouragement initiatives led by other partners, including school-based events like Active School Travel Rodeos or classroom learning activities, should also be an area for future investment.