



### **Goals and objectives:**

*To develop a unified, comprehensive plan involving collaborative partners to encourage students to walk or ride a bike to school in a safe environment.*

The following steps and activities took place during school year 2006-07.

### **Capacity Building**

#### **1. Stakeholders**

The Putney Health Action Coordinating Team (PHACT), with support from the WSESU Health Coordinator, was identified as the working group responsible for the development of a school travel plan. Collaborative partners included:

- School- School health committee members including the administrator, teachers, school nurse and parents
- Community- Community organizations including the Putney Energy Committee, local fitness advocates and public health representatives
- Town government- Law enforcement, town select board and local planner

Since their inception as a pilot project in 2000, the PHACT team has paved the way for the region and the state in establishing the infrastructure necessary to address issues related to student health and well-being. Some activities conducted by PHACT are bike safety presentations, Walk to School Days, hiking with the School Forest Committee, Girls on the Run and a Walk and Talk counseling group. Putney Central School was recognized by the Vermont Department of Education Mount Mansfield Gold award in 2007 for “policies and practices that reflect a high priority on healthy outcomes for children.” According to Amelia Stone, principal, “It’s important to look at the whole child and address education beyond the classroom walls.”

Recognizing the success at Putney, WSESU implemented the Centers for Disease Control Coordinated School Health Program and formed site-based to strategically promote healthy behaviors, model and encourage life-long physical fitness, encourage healthful nutrition, and connect schools, parents and the community.

#### **2. Demographic Data**

The rural town of Putney is 8 miles north of Brattleboro with a population of 2634 residents according to 2000 U.S. Census data. As with many other regions of Vermont, the population has increased 42% from 1980 – 2000, with a median age of 36 years old. The town has a few small businesses in the center of town, and is the home for numerous artists, writers and other craftspeople. Putney Mountain is well known for hawk-watching and numerous trails and other destination points make this town a vibrant community attractive to tourists.

One mile north from the center of town on Westminster Road is Putney Central School with an enrollment of 227 students in grades K – 8. Homes line both sides of the street from

town to school, quickly becoming more rural. The Mable Gray Pathway begins as a sidewalk in town, changing to asphalt and ending across the street from school about 50 feet before the crosswalk. This narrow pathway serves walkers and bikers going in both directions.

Global Information Systems technology was used to gather data on student households in relation to the location of school. In general, most student households have two children, are located outside a 2 diameter circumference from school property and are clustered northwest of campus ([Attachment 1](#)).

### **3. Traffic Study**

In collaboration with the Windham Regional Commission, traffic studies were conducted in the week of September 25, 2006. Although the speed in the vicinity of Putney Central School is 25 MPH, the mean speed of traffic was 34 MPH. Most speeding occurred in the morning with 35% of the cars traveling 36 – 45 MPH and 13% traveling in excess of 40 MPH. The heaviest flow of traffic occurred between 6:00 – 8:00 am and 3:00 – 5:00 pm.

### **4. Student Travel Surveys**

Using the Safe Routes to School Student Arrival and Departure Tally Sheet, classroom teachers queried student in September, 2006 and May, 2007. Both surveys indicated the great majority of students arrive at school in their parent's car or by bus, with very few walking or riding a bike ([Attachment 2](#)).

### **5. Parent Survey**

Using the Safe Routes to School Parent Survey about Walking and Biking to School, forty-nine parents completed the survey during parent conferences, November, 2006. Responses indicate distance from school (69%) and safety (65%) were key deterrents for not walking and biking to school. Significant safety concerns noted were speed of auto traffic, amount of auto traffic, general safety and the presence or condition of sidewalks. Additional comments included the need for more visible signage, the lack of clear crosswalk markings and a dangerous flow and speed of traffic in the vicinity of school ([Attachment 3](#)).

### **6. Community Meeting**

To raise awareness about the issue of obesity, to gather input about the barriers to walking and biking to school and to build capacity for the Safe Routes to School program priorities, PHACT hosted a community meeting in March, 2007 ([Attachment 4](#)). About forty people enthusiastic and engaged participants attended, including school board representatives, law enforcement officials, community members and school staff. The evening began with an overview of the program by VTrans representative, Jon Kaplan. Following Jon was WSESU Health Coordinator Pamela Corbett, presenting data on obesity trends and Safe Routes to School activities including student and parent surveys and traffic studies and Matt Mann of the Windham Regional Commission on the physical plant.

After considering possible solutions to address barriers, participants brainstormed solutions to the particular issues facing the Putney school community. These outcomes of this meeting served as the foundation for future discussions related to removing barriers to walking and biking to school.

### **7. Parent Meeting**

PHACT members met with a smaller group of involved parents, seeking their insights and answers to a specific question: "Why do so many Putney families drive their child (ren) to school?" Virtually all parents felt expressed the desire feel involved, and accomplish this by taking their child to school, walking them to their classroom and socializing with teachers and families on the way.

To address Safe Routes to School program priorities while accommodating parent wishes, Walk to School Days will be expanded to include families. Using this strategy, traffic will be curtailed, physical activity will be increased while still creating the desired social structure for parents.

The Safe Routes to School message was enhanced by parents on the Putney Energy Committee. These avid bicyclists are purchasing equipment and bikes for community use to encourage physical exercise. Bike racks will be placed strategically around town. The only requirement for use is to return the bike in the same condition and to a designated rack.

## **8. Select Board Presentation**

The school administrator, WSESU Health Coordinator and the local planning representative met with the town manager and select board to seek their input on infrastructure changes that would impact town property. The town representatives offered their full support, and presented their complementary project on sidewalk enhancement which would ultimately create a safe sidewalk from school through town to the library.

## **9. Pilot Project- Rerouting Traffic**

Safe Routes to School activities made apparent that current traffic flow patterns on school property posed a safety risk, with a possible solution to switch bus and vehicle drop off areas. To test this, a pilot project was conducted the last two weeks of school with overwhelming success. School board members, local law enforcement officials, families and teachers embraced this change as a safer way to move traffic in and around school property. As a result, this change will become permanent, and influence priorities delineated in the infrastructure grant application.

### **Walking to School Days**

Five walk to school days were conducted at Putney Central for the school year 20006-07. In the fall, a Town Walk with 113 students was lead from the center of Putney one mile up the hill to school. Later in the fall students and some staff and families did a Country Walk through the orchard westward to school.

Three more walks were conducted in the spring, two from town and one through the orchard. The town walk was the largest, with 131 students participating.