

## SRTS Case Study:

# Des Plaines, Illinois

## Promising Early Results from Encouragement Efforts

### Background:

In early 2007, the City of Des Plaines partnered with Central School and School District 62 on a pilot Safe Routes to School program that could serve as a model for other schools within the City. Central School was selected as the pilot school for a number of reasons, not the least of which were the motivated school principal and parents.

Central School is a traditional elementary school situated within and adjacent to the residential areas it serves. Over half of the students live within a half-mile of the school and nearly 90% live within a mile. However, the walking rate was low and the police department and school constantly struggled with the frustrating and unsafe vehicle traffic jams each morning and afternoon as parents dropped-off and picked-up their children.

Since the launch of the pilot program, the City/School partnership has employed relatively standard measures for encouraging walking, which are detailed below. The major infrastructure improvements around the school are still to be implemented. And yet the results of the preliminary safe routes efforts, as evidenced by a recent travel survey, have been impressive.

### Efforts to Date:

#### Safe Routes School Travel Plan and Grant Application

Over the course of several months the partnership created a plan of action for both encouraging walking and for improving conditions around the school to make for a safer walking environment. The plan identified the collector/arterial streets directly adjacent to the school, combined with cut-through traffic from congested Des Plaines River Road, as main impediments to parents allowing their children to walk to school. A combination of curb extensions, raised crosswalks and striping improvements were envisioned to address the traffic issues around the school. Safe Routes to School grant applications were submitted in 2007 and 2008 in order to fund the improvements. The grant applications were successful and the infrastructure improvements are now designed and scheduled to be constructed in the fall of 2010 and spring of 2011.

Central School



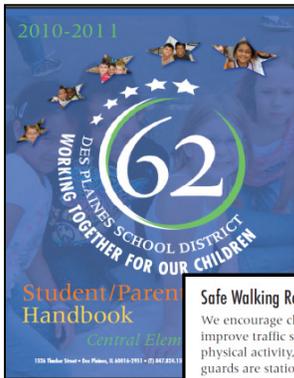
Upcoming Infrastructure Safety Improvements



### Encouragement Efforts

As mentioned above, the former principal and now the current principal, along with the school district and the parents of Central School have been very motivated about the Safe Routes program. Since the initiation of the effort in 2007, the school has been encouraging parents to consider walking/biking through programs, handouts and the Student/Parent Handbook. The school worked with the City in creating a school walking route map designed to focus children onto key routes where there would be safety in numbers and where crossing guards would be stationed to help kids across the more difficult intersections. In addition, the school has celebrated International Walk-To-School Day each year with support from the Police Department and local and state elected officials. During the last Walk-to-School Day on October 7, 2009, approximately 250 students walked to school with their parents, teachers and community leaders.

Student/Parent Handbook

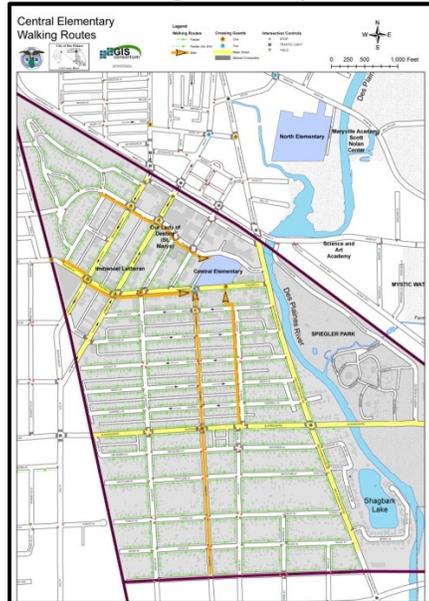


**Safe Walking Routes**  
 We encourage children to walk to school in order to improve traffic safety around our school, to promote physical activity, and to improve air quality. Crossing guards are stationed at the intersections of:

- Lee Street and Thacker
- Center and Thacker (morning and after school only)
- Cora and Thacker
- Cora and Algonquin
- Cora and Ashland
- Graceland and Prairie
- Lee Street and Prairie

Please instruct your child to follow these safe routes and to obey the instructions of the crossing guards.

School Walking Route Map



International Walk to School Day – Central School



### Basic Safety Improvements

In advance of the main grant-funded infrastructure improvements, and to support the encouragement efforts, the City took some preliminary steps to improve safety around the school, including:

*Evaluation of Crossing Guard Placement* – After observation of the student walking patterns and creation of the walking route map, crossing guards were added at two locations to help students safely cross difficult intersections. In addition, a new curb cut and full ladder crosswalk striping were added at one of the new crossing guard locations.

*Alley stop signs* – The neighborhood to the immediate south of Central School consists of a traditional grid pattern with alleys running east-west through the middle of each block. Parents reported that cars from the alleys would often pull out across the sidewalks without stopping. This combined with the limited sight distances at some locations due to garages, bushes, etc. created a potential for crashes. In response to this issue the City installed stop signs, in advance of the sidewalk, at the ends of each alley throughout the neighborhood. The stop signs have proven effective in slowing and stopping vehicles in advance of the sidewalks, thereby creating a safer walking environment.

*Center Street Traffic Calming* – Residents were concerned about vehicle speeds on Center Street, one of the main north-south streets in the neighborhood south of the school. This street is wider than other streets in the neighborhood and serves as a parade route during holiday celebrations. In order to visually narrow the street and thereby impact driver behavior, the City striped parking lanes, reduced curb radii, and crosswalks along the entire nearly one-mile length of Center Street in the Central School area. Resident response to the project has been positive.

*Pedestrian Walk Signals* – In 2010, using a combination of IDOT LED Upgrade Program and EECBG funding, the City replaced the worn pedestrian signals at four key school walk route intersections with new LED countdown pedestrian signals.

Center Street Traffic Calming



Countdown Pedestrian Signals



**Preliminary Results:**

Even though the main infrastructure improvements are still to be installed, results from a recent student travel survey revealed impressive increases in the number of students walking and biking to Central School since the launch of Safe Routes efforts in 2007. Among the highlights of the results are:

- **Average walk rate increased by 16%**

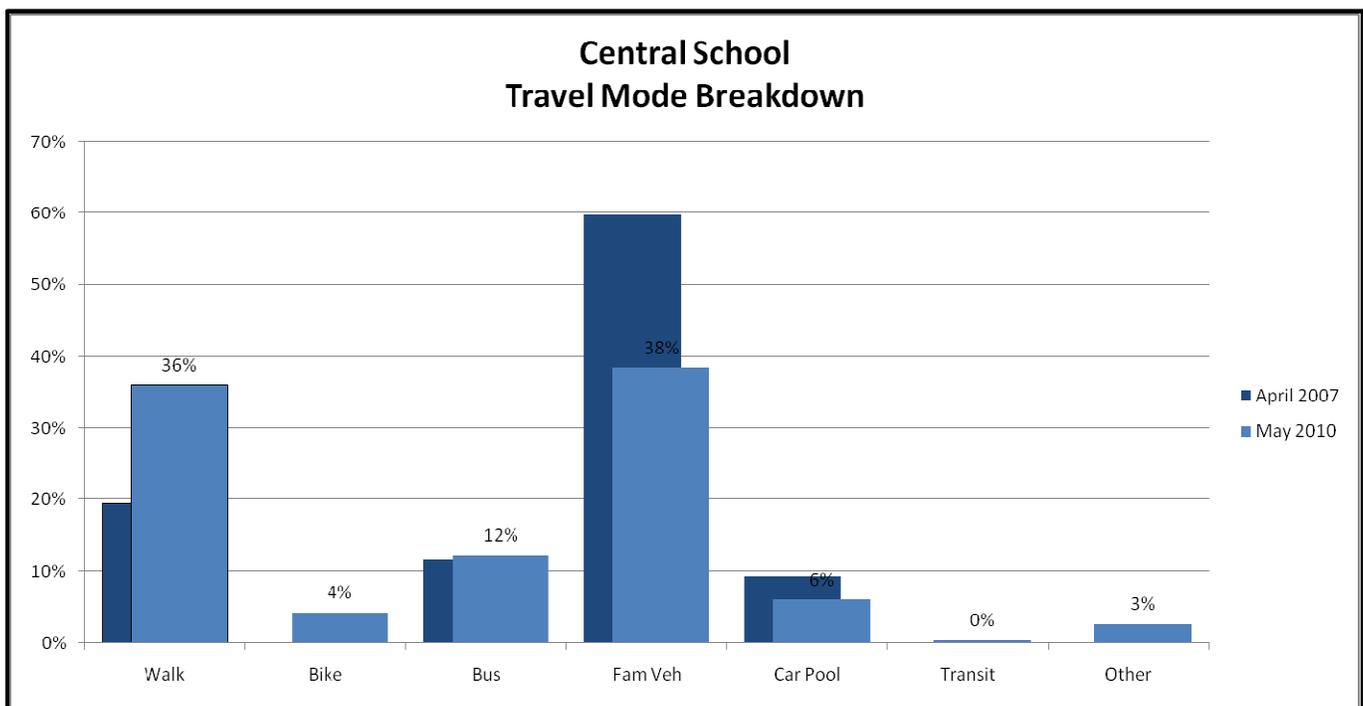
From 20% in 2007 to 36% in 2010. Based upon the current student population of approximately 290 students, this represents an additional 46 students walking to school.

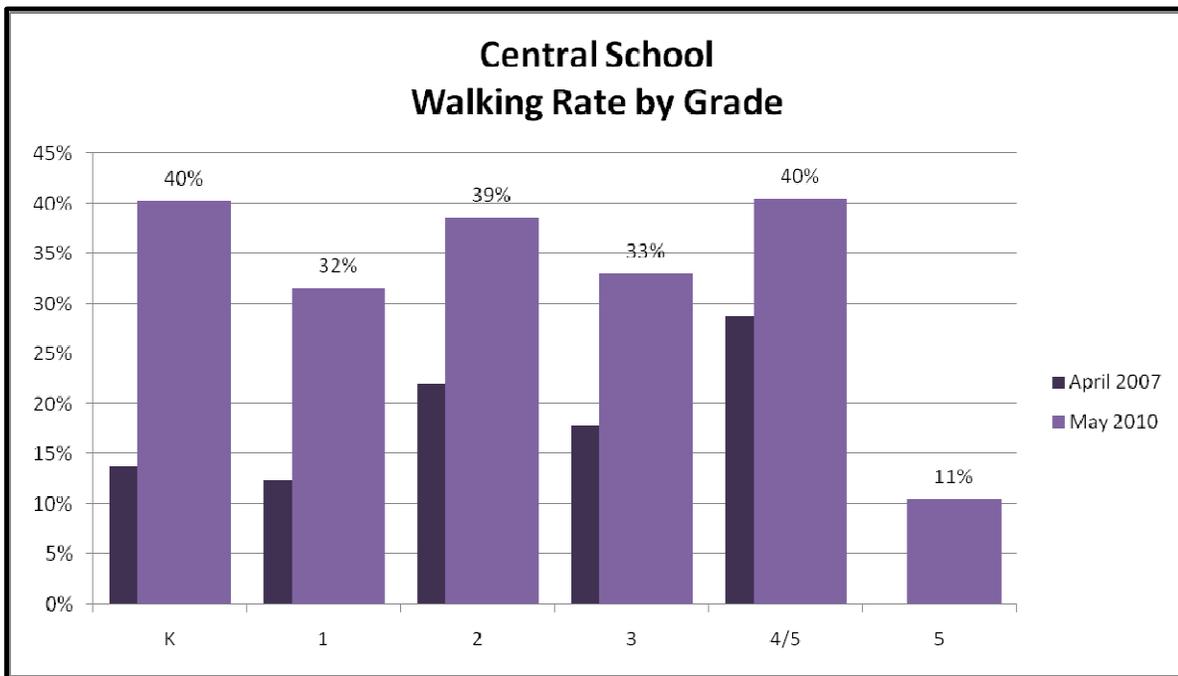
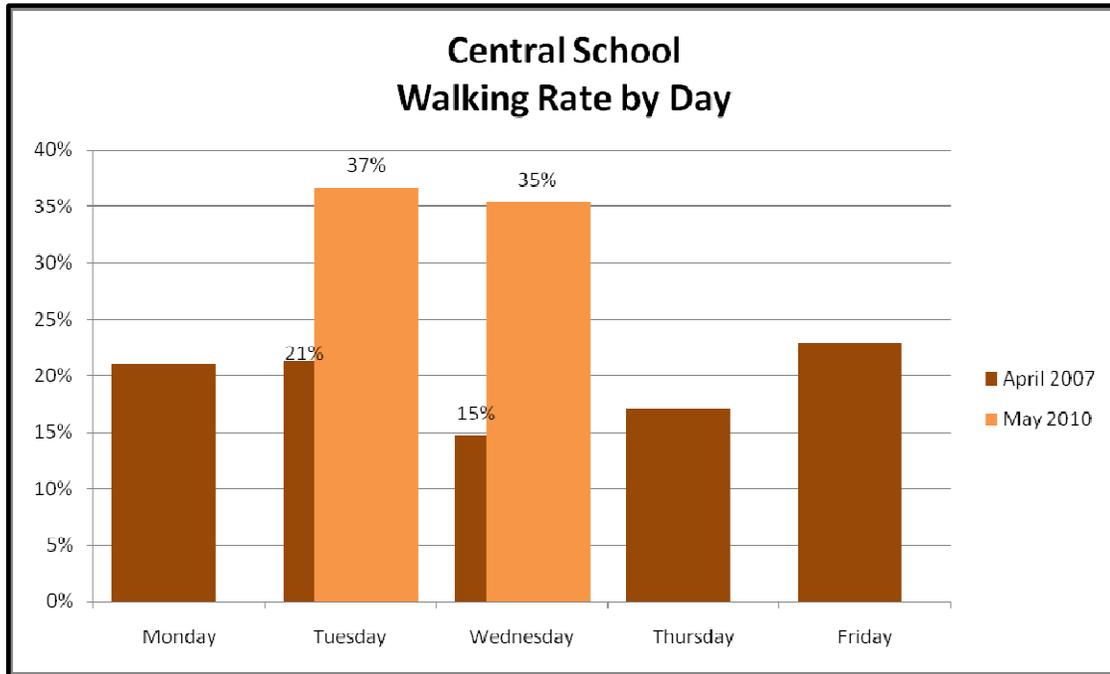
- **Bike rate increased by 4%**

Up from 0% in 2007.

- 72% of parents indicate that they think the school encourages/strongly encourages walking/bicycling to school. The same 72% of parents think that walking/biking to school is fun/very fun for their children and 84% think it is healthy/very healthy.

- Three biggest issues parents cite for not letting their kids walk are traffic-related. This suggests that the upcoming roadway improvements will be appreciated and should help encourage a further increase in walking and biking.





**Contact:**  
Derek Peebles, P.E.  
City of Des Plaines - Engineering  
(847) 391-5390  
[dpeebles@desplaines.org](mailto:dpeebles@desplaines.org)