

Path to Success Led by a Local Non-profit

Ecology Action in Santa Cruz County:

Improving community capacity to build comprehensive programs

Ecology Action is a local non-profit dedicated to promoting and providing sustainable transportation services to Santa Cruz County residents and businesses. They have been a point agency for Safe Routes to School efforts throughout the county and credit their success to thinking outside the box, using a variety of funding sources, strong community collaboration, and layering programs. For more information, please see www.ecoact.org



Thinking outside the box

As the point agency for Safe Routes to School in Santa Cruz County, Ecology Action recognizes that no two schools are alike. They have learned to use a variety of tools to solve problems, and to be flexible in applying a tool for a given situation. A solution that works at one school may not work at another. They attempt to be innovative and to “think outside the box” when tackling issues that arise.

Using a variety of funding sources

Ecology Action uses a variety of funding sources in order to promote sustainable transportation options within Santa Cruz County. This includes donations from individuals and businesses, as well as grants from local community foundations, private non-profit agencies, public agencies, and from state and federal Safe Routes to School monies. Ecology Action continuously seeks new funding and leverages existing funding to make their walk and bike promotion programs strong.

Strong collaboration

In 1995, Ecology Action launched their Santa Cruz County Bike to School Day program and in 2009 they began promoting Walk to School Day. These programs have grown to reach over 5,000 students at 41 schools each year. Ecology Action provides various resources for Bike or Walk to School Day events, including: training for new site coordinators, bicycle safety information and resources, promotional materials, and food and/or prize incentives. The strong collaboration between Ecology Action, school administrators, and community volunteers is a winning combination. They have a vision of creating a cadre of volunteers who have been assigned a school site and can be called upon for events and programs.



Layering programs

Ecology Action layers their programs in order to achieve the desired social and behavioral change. For example, they implement the Bike and Walk to School Day events in order to reduce childhood obesity, traffic congestion at school sites, and greenhouse gas emissions. At these same sites, they may offer additional programs to help reach students and families. Bike Smart! is a popular free youth bicycle safety program offered to elementary and secondary schools. The program consists of classroom presentations, interactive bicycle skills obstacle courses (aka “bike rodeos”), community rides (on-road training) and bicycle safety education booths at events.

For more information, please see www.bikesmart.org



Ecology Action has also piloted emerging best practices to increase the amount of walking and biking to school, including conducting walk audits, walking school buses and a school-wide program that uses a solar-powered Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) reader to inspire kids to walk and bike to school.



January 1, 2012

Thank you to Jeanne LePage, Program Specialist at Ecology Action, for her time and contributions to this vignette.