

Safe Route to School Program Says Farewell to Its Long-Standing Program Coordinator

The Connecticut Safe Routes to School (SRTS) Program has had an amazing leader as its advocate for the past eight years – Ms. Sharon Okoye. When the Connecticut SRTS Program was started in 2006, Sharon was there. So, it is with great reluctance that the Program sees her go. But, Sharon is moving on to a great career opportunity. Sharon earned a promotion to a Transportation Engineer 3 and recently joined the Bureau of Public Transportation to develop an asset management program. GO, SHARON!

Sharon was originally working in the Department's Highway Design Unit as a Transportation Engineer 1 when she came to the Bureau of Policy and Planning in 2001. She started in Location Planning and was quickly upgraded. Then, in 2006, her engineering and planning experience coupled with her high-spirited personality made her the perfect candidate for a Transportation Planner 2 position as the SRTS Coordinator. Since 2006, Sharon has led the Program with a positive and proactive approach.

When Robert Gomez, P.E. of VN Engineers, Inc. was informed that this article was being written, he was unstoppable in his accolades for Sharon. He described her as a wonderful person that was very good at what she did and noted that, although she is a quiet, unassuming person, she is remarkably deep in her knowledge. Bob stated that she brought the perspectives of an engineer as well as a planner, giving the best of both worlds. As he rightly said, this Program was virtually unheard of and unknown and Sharon made it viable. She learned on the go and represented the Department very well.

We agree wholeheartedly with Bob's take on Sharon and her contributions. We are very grateful for Sharon many years of service to the Connecticut's SRTS Program. We are sad to see Sharon leave her Program behind, which even she admits was her "baby", but we also wish her all of the best in her new endeavor! Thank you, Sharon Okoye, for your passion and commitment to this awesome Program.

Just a Few Connecticut SRTS Program Highlights

- In 2006, a pilot program with the regions was initiated. The pilot helped the regional planning organizations perform public outreach and training according to the program model for bicycling and walking to school as well as provide assistance to schools developing SRTS Master Plans.
- From there, with lessons learned, a consultant (Fitzgerald and Halliday Inc.) was brought on board to develop a SRTS Master Plans template for schools to use as well as to perform walk audits and public outreach. In 2009, the State's WalkItBikeIt program was born - www.walkitbikeitct.org. As part of the October Walk to School Day, contests for the most participation in bicycling/walking to school during a school year were held.
- In 2010 and 2011, the SRTS Program collaborated with the Police Officers Standards and Training Council (POSTC) to host School Crossing Guard Training.
- In 2012, VN Engineers, Inc. joined the SRTS Team to provide a resource to schools who want to develop SRTS Master Plans, assist with major program events, attend parent-teacher organization (PTO) meetings, and health fairs. The consultants have been hard at work creating helpful YouTube videos on SRTS Program topics.
- In 2013, Sharon Okoye represented the State as the Program Coordinator at two conferences: the Safe Routes to School National Conference in Sacramento and the National Association of Women Highway Safety Leaders conference in San Diego. She presented Connecticut's Program, showing videos created and was well received for this innovative program component. Sporting the Connecticut SRTS Program T-shirt, new ideas and her enthusiasm, she was an instant hit.
- Since federal fiscal years 2005, approximately \$13 million in federal funds were allocated to Connecticut. This funding has been programmed for funding project awards, statewide activities, and program administration into 2015.
- The program has serviced over 65 schools in 38 communities.

Is Your Child's School Signed Up?

International Walk to School Day – Wednesday, October 8

Sixteen schools across Connecticut have signed up to participate in events.

Canton Intermediate School	Canton
Woodside Elementary School	Cromwell
Edna C Stevens Elementary School	Cromwell
Maria Sanchez Elementary School	Hartford
Bowers Elementary School	Manchester
Fox Run Elementary School	Norwalk
Booth Free Elementary School	Roxbury
Squadron Line School	Simsbury
Latimer Lane School	Simsbury
Skinner Road School	Vernon
E.C. Stevens School	Wallingford
Morley Elementary School	West Hartford
Wolcott Elementary School	West Hartford
Aiken Elementary School	West Hartford
Tootin' Hills Elementary School	West Simsbury
Webb Elementary School	Wethersfield
Emerson-Williams Elementary School	Wethersfield
Hanmer Elementary School	Wethersfield
Highcrest Elementary School	Wethersfield

Want information on how your PTO can get a Safe Routes to School Program established?
Check out the many helpful YouTube videos and Getting Started at www.walkitbikeitct.org.

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