



Fairmount Elementary students walking to school (Source: Christy Smith)

## School Siting, Safe Routes to School Implementation, and Neighborhood Revitalization

*Bristol, Tennessee*

★ Best Practices Case Study

Located in the northeast corner of Tennessee, on the Tennessee/Virginia state line, the city of Bristol is nationally recognized as the official birthplace of country music. Bristol's central location and excellent transportation connections make it the center of a five-state area. State Street in downtown Bristol joins Tennessee and Virginia, and West Virginia, Kentucky, and North Carolina are within easy driving distance along US Highway 421 and Interstate 81. Seventy percent of the U.S. population is located within a day's drive of Bristol.

In 2008 the Bristol School Board decided to demolish and reconstruct Fairmount Elementary School to better suit the needs of the growing community. The decision to keep the elementary school in its current location demonstrates a commitment to neighborhood and community revitalization efforts occurring in the city. During this process, parents and neighborhood residents raised concerns about what would happen to the neighborhood when the larger population

of students and faculty began attending the new school. Specifically, they were worried about the increase in traffic the school would cause, as the Fairmount Neighborhood District is a traditional neighborhood not designed to accommodate large amounts of vehicles. City officials agreed that encouraging parents to walk with their children to school would alleviate some of these traffic concerns. Approximately 85% of the children who would be attending Fairmount live within walking distance, which is defined as a two-mile-or-less radius. However, the neighborhood lacked continuous sidewalks that could provide safe routes to school for these children.

The Bristol Metropolitan Planning Organization partnered with the YMCA's Pioneering Healthy Communities and Coordinated School Health Program as well as Fairmount Elementary, the Bristol Police Department, and the City to apply for, and ultimately receive, a \$250,000 Safe Routes to School grant from the Tennessee Department of Transportation. With the grant funding, Bristol undertook a sidewalk survey to determine where

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## Safe Routes to School National Partnership

Launched in 2005, the Safe Routes to School National Partnership is a fast-growing network of hundreds of organizations, and government agencies working to set goals, share best practices, leverage funding, and advance policy change to implement Safe Routes to School programs. The Partnership seeks to advance safe walking and bicycling to and from schools, to improve the overall health and well-being of America's children, and to foster livable and sustainable communities. Tennessee is one of seven states participating in the Safe Routes to School State Network Project, which is funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and operates in tandem with the Safe Routes to School National Partnership.

According to the Safe Routes to School National Partnership, successful Safe Routes to School projects make remarkable changes in the way students and parents choose to travel to and from school. These projects succeed by including each of the "Five E's" of Safe Routes to School to ensure that their project is a well-rounded, multi-prong, and time-tested approach to getting more students walking and bicycling.

The Five E's of Safe Routes to School include:

**Evaluation**—Monitoring and documenting outcomes, attitudes, and trends through the collection of data before and after the intervention(s).

**Engineering**—Creating operational and physical improvements to the infrastructure surrounding schools that reduce speeds and potential conflicts with motor vehicle traffic, and establish safer and fully accessible crossings, walkways, trails, and bikeways.

**Education**—Teaching children about the broad range of transportation choices, instructing them in important lifelong bicycling and walking safety skills, and launching driver safety campaigns in the vicinity of schools.

**Encouragement**—Using events and activities to promote walking and bicycling and to generate enthusiasm for the program with students, parents, staff, and surrounding community.

**Enforcement**—Partnering with local law enforcement to ensure that traffic laws are obeyed in the vicinity of schools (this includes enforcement of speeds, yielding to pedestrians in crosswalks, and proper walking and bicycling behaviors) and initiating community enforcement such as crossing guard programs and student safety patrols.

Source: Safe Routes to School National Partnership



repairs and connections were needed. The sidewalk sections in disrepair were replaced and new sidewalks were built in places where none had previously existed to create a continuous and safe pedestrian network in the Fairmount Neighborhood District. The grant also provided funding for educational programs to teach students about pedestrian and bicycle safety.

Residents of all ages are using and benefiting from the sidewalks, which are higher quality, better connected, and safer. Bristol's reinvestment in an existing school location has also triggered significant increase in neighborhood revitalization efforts. The excitement about walking has spread to the rest of the community and there are plans to hold year-round walking events for the residents of Bristol.



Neighborhood next to Fairmount Elementary (Source: Christy Smith)

**KEY FACTS:** Bristol, Tennessee

**Population:** 26,702 (2010 Census)

**Project Description:** safe routes to school, connectivity, neighborhood revitalization

**Partners:** Safe Routes to School National Partnership, City of Bristol, Bristol Metropolitan Planning Organization, YMCA, Bristol Police Department