

Number Crunch

Safe Routes=Healthier Kids

BY RAY KEENER

Bicycles offer a solution to childhood obesity according to statistics uncovered by Kate Scheider, research and statistics coordinator for the Bikes Belong Coalition.

Scheider collected 20 compelling bicycle statistics for board members to peruse at their December 2008 meeting, available at www.bikesbelong.org/statistics.

Here are two eye-opening facts:

- Adolescents who bike or walk to school watch less TV and are less likely to smoke than their peers who are driven to school. They also get more overall physical activity.
- Youth who commute to school by motorized transport gain an average of 2-3 pounds per year more than those who actively commute to school.

We spoke to Deb Hubsmith, Safe Routes to School National Partnership director, as she was on her way to meet with the office of Sen. Dianne Feinstein in Washington.

“These numbers are from international studies,” Hubsmith said. “To really convince Congress to allocate more funds to Safe Routes, we need similar U.S. studies.”

What’s the goal in Washington?

“We’re looking for a five-fold increase in funding for Safe Routes to School in the next transportation bill, which would be \$600 million a year. We think we can do that if we broaden the discussion to include public health issues.”

What can we in the industry do to help?

“We’re working on resources for retailers to get their customers to contact Congress. We have a toolkit now at www.saferoutespartnership.org that tells people how to meet with elected officials and engage local media. Members of Congress need to know there’s broad-based support for Safe Routes to School and bike programs. So attend the National Bike Summit in March and tell them in person!”