

California Safe Routes to School Program Low-Income Schools and Communities Study June 2010

Prepared by the Safe Routes to School Technical Assistance Resource Center, a joint project of the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) and the University of California, San Francisco (UCSF)

Executive Summary

California's two Safe Routes to School programs, State (SR2S) and federal (SRTS), work to increase opportunities for safe, everyday physical activity for children and adolescents. This is accomplished by funding projects that remove barriers, such as unsafe infrastructure or lack of education and encouragement programs that prevent children from walking and biking safely to and from school. Children and adolescents from low-income families are at highest risk of obesity, physical inactivity, and injury, the risk factors that are at the heart of the Safe Routes to School Program.

In February 2010, Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger directed the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) and the Safe Routes to School Technical Assistance Resource Center (TARC), a joint project of the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) and University of California – San Francisco (UCSF), to study the socio-economic status (SES) of SR2S and SRTS grantees and research ways to increase low-income schools and communities' access to the SR2S and SRTS programs. In response to the Governor's directive, TARC analyzed the SES of current and past SR2S and SRTS grant recipients. To determine SES of the schools impacted by the grants, TARC utilized free and reduced price meal (FRPM) student eligibility data and defined a low-income school as one in which 75 percent or more students were eligible for FRPM. This also helps to align other programmatic efforts of CDPH, Caltrans, and the California Department of Education (CDE).

TARC's analysis found that low-income schools with 75 percent or more of students eligible for FRPM receive more SR2S and SRTS grants than schools in middle or high income categories with less than 75 percent of students eligible for FRPM, as shown in Figures 1-6 of this report. For federal SRTS infrastructure grants, the difference in favor of low-income schools is greater. And, while the data TARC analyzed does not conclusively explain *why* the poorest schools get more grants, analysis indicates that it is not because they submit more applications. TARC also studied what other states and programs have done to increase participation of low-income schools. While several different strategies have been employed by other states; none have been in place long enough to evaluate for their effectiveness. The most promising strategies for increasing participation may be providing continuous support for Caltrans Districts since they are responsible for prioritizing local applications, and maintaining funding to CDPH/UCSF

for TARC, which will provide ongoing targeted outreach and technical assistance to low-income schools and communities.

Caltrans has already implemented several steps to increase the participation of low-income schools in the Safe Routes to School programs. However, children in these schools, their families, and their communities will continue to suffer a disproportionate burden of disease and injury. Addressing these inequities remains a public health imperative, and one that is voiced universally by advocates across the state. Toward that end, TARC recommends setting a goal to increase the number of low-income schools that participate in the SR2S and SRTS programs by at least five percent. This goal is modest but provides a clear and positive statement of intent. The goal can be met through a collaborative Caltrans-TARC effort that includes enhanced community involvement, additional technical assistance and training, and continued emphasis on environmental justice. TARC is confident that these steps will continue to improve the reach of SR2S and SRTS programs into low-income schools and communities and ensure the most at-risk children will benefit from these valuable programs.

Background

California has two Safe Routes to School grant programs, State (SR2S) and federal (SRTS), both administered by Caltrans. These programs work together to fund projects that remove barriers preventing children from walking and biking safely to and from school. These barriers can include insufficient or unsafe infrastructure and/or a lack of education and encouragement programs to address parental concerns about safety and promote walking and biking. Research has shown that effective interventions should include both improvements to the built environment and educational campaigns.¹

Communities at all socio-economic status (SES) levels experience aging infrastructure and other barriers that prevent children and adolescents from walking and biking to school safely. However, low-income communities continue to suffer disproportionately higher rates of obesity and pedestrian/bicycle injury than their higher-income counterparts.^{2, 3} For example, low-income teenagers are three times more obese than their wealthier peers, and more than 30 percent of low-income children are overweight. The four largest groups at risk for childhood obesity – Pacific Islanders, Latinos, American Indians, and African Americans – are all minority communities. Reasons for this include poor conditions for walking and bicycling in low-income neighborhoods such

¹ Kerr, J, et al. Active commuting to school: associations with environment and parental concerns. *Medical Science and Sports Exercise*. 2006

² Healthy People 2010; and PolicyLink, Prevention Institute, and Convergence Partnership Transportation Prescription, 2009.

<http://www.policylink.org/site/apps/nlnet/content2.aspx?c=IkIXLbMNJrE&b=5136581&ct=7290885>

³ Latest Trends in Child Pedestrian Safety: A Five-Year Review. *Safe Kids Worldwide*, October 2007. Available at: <http://www.safekids.org/assets/docs/ourwork/research/pedestrian-safety-research.pdf>. Accessed: June 29, 2010.

as insufficient sidewalks, unsafe crossings, and speeding cars, etc. This is very often compounded by a dearth of safe parks and playgrounds.⁴

In addition, children from low income families spend more time as pedestrians than other children.⁵ They are also more likely to suffer pedestrian injuries.⁶ Residents of low-income communities may also have perceived or real fears regarding violence and crime, thus keeping kids indoors.⁷ Despite this, since low-income youth are more likely to live near the schools they attend, they are more likely to walk and bike to school than higher-income youth.⁸ Therefore, it is important that walking and biking to and from school and other neighborhood destinations be an easy, safe, and positive option for children and adolescents in low-income communities.

Safe Routes to School projects benefit low-income communities in many ways which may include improving parent perceptions of walking and bicycling, increasing safe crossing behavior, improving driver behavior, and reducing noise and air pollution near the school.⁹ In addition, one study of low-income communities found that most were able to leverage their Safe Routes to School grants to secure additional funding for further improvements near their school. However, studies suggest that low-income communities with less capacity to plan projects and write proposals may be at a disadvantage for funding and that these benefits cited above can only occur if funds are distributed equitably.¹⁰

California's Strategic Growth Council (SGC), which is comprised of Governor appointed secretaries from five agencies including the Business, Transportation and Housing Agency, Health and Human Services Agency, and others, places great importance on providing benefits for economically and socially disadvantaged communities. In fact, SGC has recommended that to adequately address social and economic inequities, policies and programs that address mobility need to target the highest proportion of investment and benefits in economically and socially disadvantaged communities.¹¹

⁴ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, National Healthcare Disparities Report, AHRQ Pub. No. 08-0041; Washington, D.C.; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, 2007

⁵ Wazana A, Krueger P, Raina P, et al. A review of risk factors for child pedestrian injuries: are they modifiable? *Injury Prevention* 1997; 3: 295-304

⁶ Alison Macpherson, MSc, Ian Roberts, MD, PhD, and I. Barry Pless, CM, MD, Children's exposure to traffic and pedestrian injuries, *American Journal of Public Health*, December 1998, Vol. 88, No. 12

⁷ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, National Healthcare Disparities Report, AHRQ Pub. No. 08-0041; Washington, D.C.; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, 2007

⁸ McDonald, NC, PhD; Critical Factors for active transportation to school among low-income and minority students; Evidence from the 2001 National Household Travel Survey, *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* 2008; 34(4).

⁹ McMillan, PhD, MPH, T PPH Partners; Safe routes to school, local school project: A health evaluation at 10 low-income schools, February 2010. Available at:

http://www.saferoutespartnership.org/media/file/Helath_Evaluation_Feb_2010.pdf. Accessed June 29, 2010.

¹⁰ McDonald, NC, PhD; Critical factors for active transportation to school among low-income and minority students; Evidence from the 2001 National Household Travel Survey, *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* 2008; 34(4).

¹¹ SGC Consensus Statement on Federal Transportation Policy, Providing Efficient Mobility for the 21st Century.

The SR2S and SRTS grant programs are designed to address these issues head-on. For the state SR2S program, a city or county partners with one or more schools to submit a grant application to increase safe walking and bicycling. Additionally, non-profits, local public health departments, school districts, and other community agencies can also submit federal SRTS applications if partnered with a city, county, Metropolitan Planning Organization, or Regional Transportation Planning Agency. Grant applications can impact one school or many schools, depending on the nature of the project. Federal non-infrastructure projects, for example, will often impact all schools in a district, city, or county, whereas infrastructure projects tend to impact one to two schools in most cases. Of note, state SR2S grant awards require a 10 percent match while no match is required for federal SRTS grant awards.

There is a high demand for SR2S and SRTS grant funds and historically Caltrans has received many more applications than it can fund.¹² For example, in the last State SR2S funding cycle, Cycle 8, just 23 percent of applications were funded. In the last federal SRTS cycle, Cycle 2, only 29 percent of applications were funded. Despite this, the combined SR2S and SRTS programs have reached many California schools. In fact, since 2005, 9.9 percent of California's almost 10,000 schools have been awarded a state SR2S infrastructure grant. In the last two federal funding cycles, 4.4 percent of all California schools have received funding for infrastructure projects and 22 percent have received funding for non-infrastructure projects.

On February 24, 2010, Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger issued a directive for Caltrans to take action to help ensure California's SR2S and SRTS grants target low-income schools and communities. As part of this directive, the Safe Routes to School Technical Assistance Resource Center (TARC), housed in CDPH and conducted jointly with UCSF, and supported by a federal SRTS grant through Caltrans, was tasked to: a) Determine the SES of current and past Safe Routes to School programs participants and the appropriate level of participation among low-income schools and communities; and b) Complete a review of funding practices in other California programs and other states' SRTS programs that have been effective in securing high participation levels from low-SES schools and communities.

Methods

In response to the Governor's directive, TARC analyzed the SES of current and past SR2S and SRTS grant recipients since 2005. This included Cycles 6 – 8 of the State SR2S program and Cycles 1 – 2 of the federal SRTS program. SR2S Cycles 1 – 5 were not analyzed due to time constraints. Since SES can vary across a community and not be representative of a specific school, it was important to look at the SES of the specific schools impacted rather than look at community-wide census data. Therefore, TARC

¹² Historically, demand for these grants has greatly exceeded available federal and state funds. With the increasing focus on expanding active transportation (promoted in AB32, SB375, and Strategic Growth Council Consensus Policy for Federal Transportation Reauthorization), the demand will only increase. Providing guidance or recommendations to address this dilemma goes beyond the scope of this study.

utilized FRPM student eligibility data to determine the income level of schools.¹³ FRPM is a federally assisted meal program provided by the National School Lunch Program. To be eligible for FRPM, a student must be from a household with an income at or below 130 percent of the poverty threshold for free lunch, or between 130 percent and 185 percent of the poverty level for reduced-price lunch.

To establish a definition of low-income schools utilizing FRPM, TARC consulted Caltrans' low-income project workgroup¹⁴ and CDE's nutrition program staff, reviewed federal statute and U.S. Department of Education literature, and conducted a web search. Based on this review, two very important resources were found that clearly and consistently support the definition of a low-income school:

1. Title I – In 1965, Title I was enacted as part of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act with the goal of closing the achievement gap between low-income students and their higher income counterparts. When Title I was reauthorized under the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, it required districts to allocate Title I funds to those schools with the highest concentrations of low-income students. Section 1113 (Part 5) of Title I states that the percentage of students eligible for the FRPM Program provides a proxy measure for the number of low-income students within a school. In addition, according to Title I Section 1113, if there are not enough funds to serve all eligible schools, a local educational agency (e.g. school district) may give priority to schools in which 75 percent or more students are eligible for FRPM. Districts may extend Title I benefits to schools lower than 75 percent, yet not below the district average percentage of free/reduced price meals.
2. The Condition of Education – This 2009 report, released by the National Center for Education Statistics, contains indicators to evaluate the condition of elementary and secondary education. Indicator 25 looks at the poverty concentration in public schools and defines high-poverty schools as public schools where more that 75 percent of the student are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch.

Once the low-income cut-off was established, TARC reviewed Caltrans' SR2S and SRTS Approved Project Lists to determine which schools were impacted by the grants in the cycles being analyzed (SR2S Cycles 6 – 8 and SRTS Cycle 1 – 2). TARC identified as many schools as possible from these lists but numerous projects were missing school information. Therefore, TARC reviewed hard copies of approved applications to gather missing school data. Finally, when schools were not identifiable by the application, TARC contacted the applicant agency directly to identify schools the applicant would be working with for that particular grant. These school data were then overlaid with CDE's 2008 FRPM eligibility database, which was the most recent

¹³ Eligibility data for FRPM is reported annually to the California Department of Education (CDE) by all public California elementary and secondary schools.

¹⁴Workgroup Members include staff from: PolicyLink, Safe Routes to School National Partnership, California Rural Legal Assistance, Assembly member Manuel Perez's Office, CDPH, and Caltrans

complete FRPM data set available. Finally, a web search was conducted for schools not found in the FRPM database to verify the accuracy of the school name listed in the application, to check if the school listed was an actual school in that county, and to see if the school was currently open. After this research, if schools were still not found in the 2008 database, they were excluded from the analysis. In all, 3107 schools that received one or more SR2S/SRTS grants were included in the database and a total of 60 schools listed in the grant applications were excluded. In addition, 65 private schools, which do not submit FRPM data to CDE, were also excluded from the analysis.

There are three types of Safe Routes to School grants available: state SR2S infrastructure grants; federal SRTS infrastructure grants; and SRTS non-infrastructure grants. These grants are very different, so TARC analyzed them separately. TARC looked at each grant type according to whether students at the school were from families with low, middle, or high incomes.

First TARC analyzed how many grants went to schools in each income category. However, this does not account for the fact that some schools received more than one grant. For example, a school may get two or even three state SR2S infrastructure grants. For this reason, TARC also analyzed the rate of grants received by schools and looked at whether low-income schools were more, less, or equally as successful as compared to schools in other income categories in receiving grants. To do this, TARC tabulated the number of grants received by schools at each income level and calculated the grant rate for schools in each income category. The number of grants awarded in comparison with the total number of California schools is very small, so the rates for low, medium, and high income schools are very small. Therefore, for convenience, TARC multiplied the percentages (for example, 0.104) by a constant of 1000 to yield a whole number like **104**.¹⁵

TARC also analyzed state SR2S Cycle 8 unfunded candidate projects to determine if schools in one income category were more successful in getting funding because they submitted more grant applications. Once again, TARC identified as many schools as possible from Caltrans' Candidate Project and Approved Project lists and, if schools were not identifiable, contacted Caltrans District offices to gather the school data from applicant files. Finally, TARC conducted a web search to verify school names. Data were then overlaid with CDE's 2008 FRPM eligibility database. Out of a total of 466 projects in this Cycle (funded and unfunded), school data were collected for all but three unfunded candidate projects.

Finally, TARC completed a review of funding practices in other California programs and other states' federally funded SRTS programs to determine what strategies were used to encourage participation of low-income schools and communities. TARC's assessment included a review of the results from a national survey of state SRTS Coordinators conducted by the Safe Routes to School National Partnership to identify

¹⁵ This does not change the meaning of the data; it only changes the rates into whole numbers and is a very common practice among epidemiologists, biostatisticians, and other public health professionals.

common approaches for serving low-income communities.¹⁶ In addition, TARC conducted a general review of other states' SRTS program funding practices by reviewing each state department of transportation SRTS website and each state's SRTS application for specific questions about income. Numerous state SRTS program directors were also contacted directly and asked about their programmatic content funding strategies.

One limitation of this study was that TARC only analyzed the number of grants received by schools and not the dollar amount that went to each school. However, since the most expensive fix is not necessarily the best fix to increase safe walking and bicycling, TARC determined it was more important to consider the total number of grants. Moreover, because the funding ceiling for infrastructure grants was very different than those for non-infrastructure grants, comparisons are very difficult. In addition, TARC did not analyze the nature of the grants awarded. For example, grants to conduct major infrastructure changes to an intersection were weighted the same as those posting additional signage. Finally, it is important to note that some non-infrastructure grants could be described in the application as impacting all schools in a district, city or county. TARC has no way to determine in this analysis if all schools in a district, for example, were equally impacted by the grant.

Results

Task 1: Determine SES of current and past SR2S/SRTS grant recipients and the appropriate level of participation among low-income schools and communities.

What is a "Low-income" School?

For this study, TARC defined a "low-income school" as one in which 75 percent or more students are eligible for FRPM. This cutoff is consistent with that used by both Title I and *The Conditions of Education* statistics.

Because low-income schools represented about 33 percent of California schools, TARC then created three approximately equal categories (low-, middle-, or high-income) according to the number of students eligible for FRPM.¹⁷ This was done to simplify comparisons between income groups. Eligibility for a FRPM is based on family income, so schools with a high percent of eligible students are "low-income schools" compared to those with fewer eligible students.

School Income Category	Number of Schools by Category in 2008 (%)	Students Eligible for FRPM (%)
Low-Income	3310 (33.64%)	75 to 100% of students eligible for FRPM
Middle-Income	3232 (32.84%)	41 to 74% of students eligible for

¹⁶ Implementing Safe Routes to School in Low-Income Schools and Communities, Safe Routes to School National Partnership, 2010

¹⁷ Each category equaled approximately 33 percent but does not include an equal number of schools because, for example, all schools with 40 percent FRPM eligibility needed to be included in only one income category.

		FRPM
High-Income	3297 (33.51%)	0 to 40% of students eligible for FRPM

How Were SR2S and SRTS Grants Distributed Since 2005?

Our analysis showed that, for SR2S grants, 35 percent of grants went to low-income schools, 32 percent to middle-income, and 33 percent to high-income schools. (Fig. 1)

Figure 1

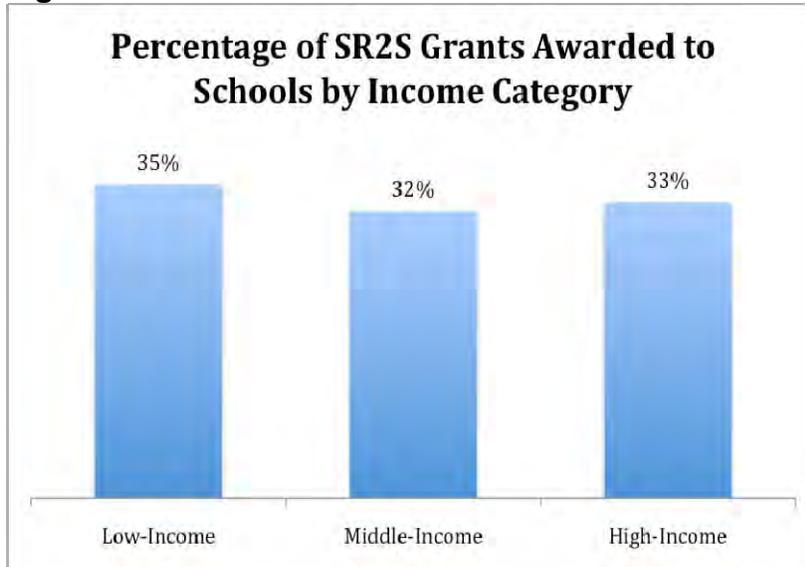
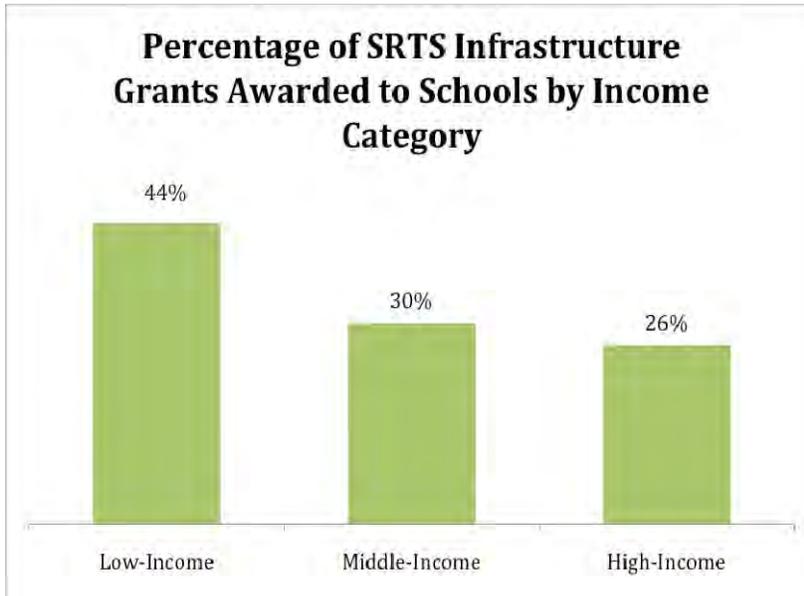


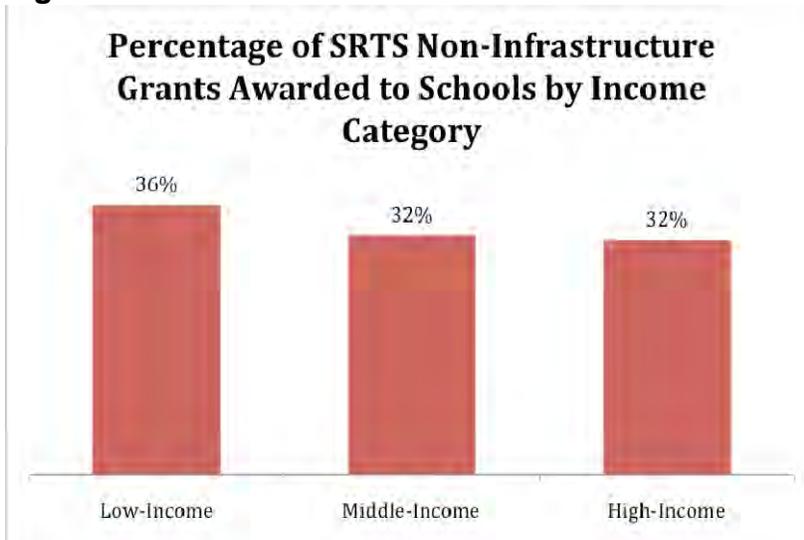
Figure 2 shows that low-income schools received 44 percent of all federal infrastructure grants compared to 30 and 26 percent of middle- or high-income schools, respectively.

Figure 2



Finally, Figure 3 shows low-income schools received 36 percent of all federal non-infrastructure grants in the cycles analyzed compared to 32 percent for middle- and high-income schools.

Figure 3



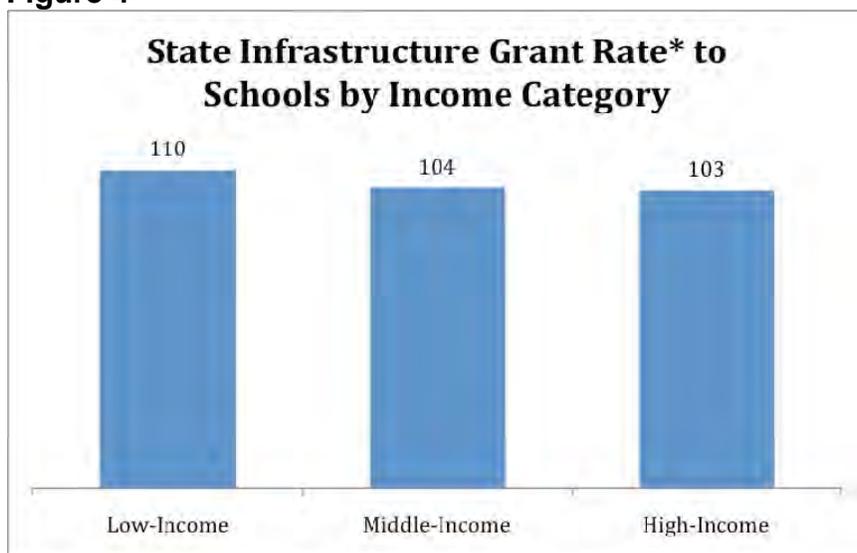
While these graphs show how grants were distributed among the three income categories of California schools, they do not account for the fact that some schools were awarded two or even three grants. This is addressed in the next section.

Do Low-income Schools Receive Fewer Safe Routes to School Grants than Middle or High-income Schools?

TARC next determined whether low-income schools were equally, more, or less successful as compared to schools in other income categories in receiving SR2S and SRTS grants. Because schools could receive more than one grant, it was necessary to look at the rate at which grants were received by schools in each income category.

Figure 4 shows that the state SR2S infrastructure grant rate in the lowest income FRPM group is higher than in the middle and upper income schools. Since the number of schools in California is very large, these differences are “statistically significant”, but for practical purposes, the differences are quite small. Still, when TARC compared the three categories, the lower the income, the more SR2S/SRTS program grants were received.

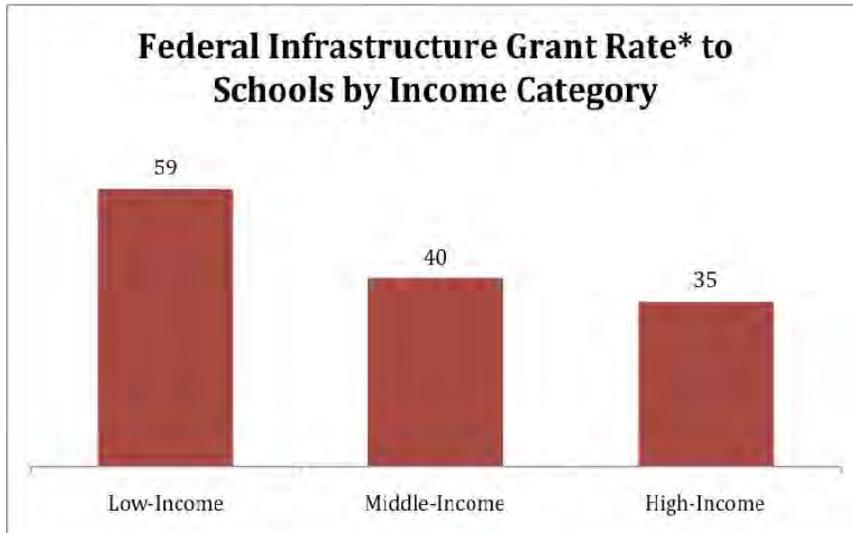
Figure 4



*Rate: For each income category, Rate = number of grants obtained / number of school x 1000

Figure 5 shows similar results, but the differences are larger. Lowest income schools receiving federal SRTS infrastructure grants fared much better than schools in middle- or high-income schools.

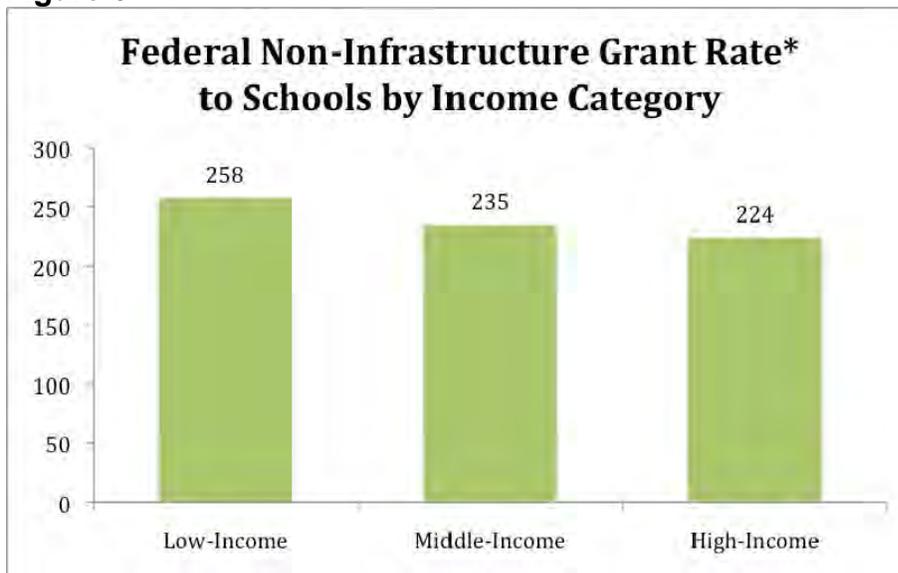
Figure 5



*Rate: For each income category, Rate = number of grants obtained / number of school x 1000

Figure 6 shows results for federal SRTS non-infrastructure grants. As in Figure 4, differences are small, but again lowest income schools fared somewhat better.

Figure 6



*Rate: For each income category, Rate = number of grants obtained / number of school x 1000

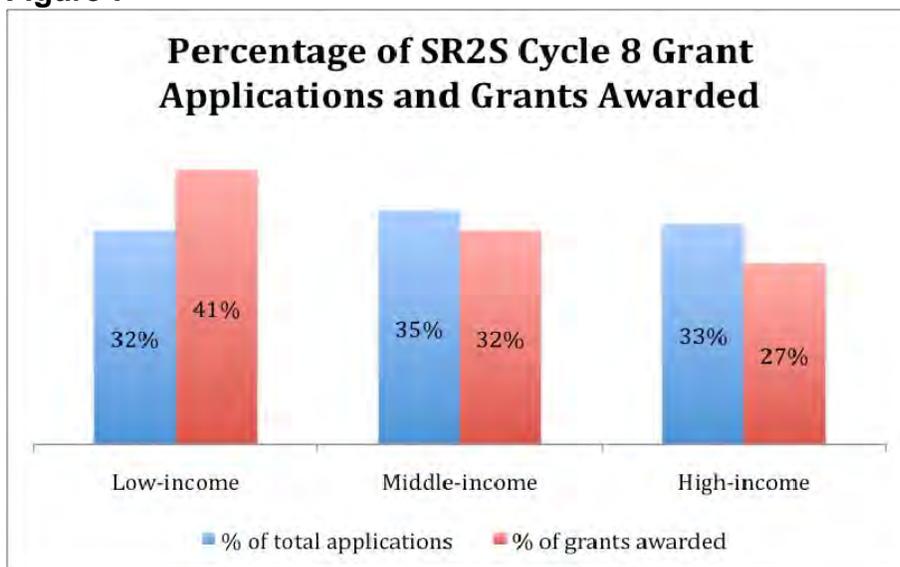
Why Are Low-income Schools Successful in Receiving SR2S and SRTS Grants?

After TARC determined that low-income schools were receiving more grants than middle- or high-income schools, it was important to explore why. TARC analyzed state

SR2S Cycle 8 to determine if the reason low-income schools in this Cycle were more successful was because they submitted more applications. In this Cycle, that did not prove to be the case. TARC was unable to explore additional Cycles for this analysis due to time constraints and lack of data.

As shown in Figure 7, low-income schools received more grants in SR2S Cycle 8 than schools in other income categories even though they submitted about the same number of applications.

Figure 7



What is an Appropriate Level of Participation of Low-income Schools in the SR2S and SRTS Programs?

Although, low-income schools are being funded at a level that is higher than for middle- and high-income schools, the children in this group of schools, their families, and their communities continue to suffer a disproportionate burden of disease and injury. Addressing health inequities such as increased pedestrian injury and obesity rates, as well as poor air quality, remains a public health imperative, and one that is voiced universally by advocates across California. TARC recommends setting a goal of increasing the number of low-income schools that participate in SR2S and SRTS grant programs by at least five percent in future funding cycles. This goal is modest but provides a clear and positive statement of intent to improve the lives of these high-risk children.

Caltrans has already taken numerous steps to encourage the participation of low-income communities in the SR2S and SRTS programs. Some key activities Caltrans has implemented that have contributed to our results include:

- Added FRPM eligibility data from schools in Cycle 9 application requirements;
- Included environmental justice strategies in SR2S program guidelines;
- Provided statewide training to Caltrans District Local Assistance Engineers (DLAEs) and District Review Committees on SR2S/SRTS principles and programs;
- Trained local agencies on SR2S/SRTS principles and programs through DLAEs; and
- Directed DLAEs to meet with unsuccessful applicants to review applications and provide recommendations for future applications.

To meet the five percent target goal, TARC recommends that Caltrans continue the excellent steps it has already begun and place a special focus on providing training and technical assistance to low-income communities. Thus, TARC's targeted technical assistance will be a key mechanism to increase the participation of low-income schools. TARC recommends the following steps be implemented collaboratively by TARC and Caltrans:

Recommended Caltrans Efforts:

1. Ensure Caltrans District Application Review Committee members are trained in SR2S/SRTS principles and objectives, including environmental justice principles, and that each committee has members with experience in the area of health, engineering, education, disadvantaged communities, and law enforcement to reinforce these principles;
2. Ensure that grant applications include information on school income status (FRPM eligibility or a comparable measure for private schools) and on the

number of students within walking and bicycling distance to school to help guide TARC in targeting its outreach and technical assistance efforts; and

3. Ensure SR2S and SRTS grant recipients prepare and submit before and after surveys to capture project outcomes and prepare a final report describing lessons learned, and, through TARC, analyze the data to evaluate whether project goals have been obtained.

To Improve Caltrans' Outreach to Disadvantaged Schools, TARC Will:

1. Create or adapt and publicize resources and website content addressing the specific needs of California's low-income communities and schools to improve participation in the SR2S and SRTS programs;
2. Conduct a special outreach campaign to ensure that low-income communities are aware of Safe Routes to School opportunities and available technical assistance;
3. Provide technical assistance to currently-funded projects on the federal aid process to increase the number of low-income communities that are able to successfully complete projects and be competitive for future funding;
4. Conduct a needs assessment in low-income communities to identify barriers to applying for and successfully completing SR2S and SRTS projects and utilizes this information to provide targeted technical assistance to low-income schools and communities; and
5. Conduct a collaborative (TARC and Caltrans) survey to determine what strategies are being employed at the local and District levels to increase participation of low-income communities.

Task 2: Complete a review of funding practices in other programs that have been effective in securing high participation levels from low-income schools and communities.

In its review of practices in other states, TARC identified three options that could provide special consideration to low-income schools and communities: 1) provide ongoing funding for targeted technical assistance and training; 2) award bonus points based on the percentage of students eligible for the FRPM program; and 3) award bonus points based on the percentage of students living within two miles of the school.

Options from Other States	State DOTs Implementing Similar Strategies <i>Note: No state has yet been able to evaluate the effectiveness of these strategies.</i>
1) Maintain a targeted technical	Delaware, New Mexico, Oregon, South Carolina, and Wisconsin

assistance function	
2) Award bonus points for the percentage of students eligible for FRPM	New Hampshire, Oregon, South Carolina, Vermont, Washington, and Wisconsin.
3) Award bonus points for the percentage of students living within two miles of school	Several states, including Oklahoma, ask applicants to include the percentage of students living within two miles of school as part of student demographic information and an indication of need.

While these options are based on existing strategies utilized in other states, evaluation of their effectiveness has yet to be conducted since the federal SRTS program has not been in existence long enough to realize long-term results. In addition, as multiple schools can be included in one grant application, there are inherent practical difficulties in implementing a bonus point system in a state as large as California.

Summary

TARC’s analysis found that low-income schools with 75 percent or more of students eligible for FRPM received more SR2S and SRTS grants than schools in the middle or high income categories with less than 75 percent of students eligible for FRPM. These differences are small, although slightly bigger for the federal SRTS infrastructure program in which 44 percent of the grants went to low-income schools. For all three types of grants, the results are similar. While the data does not explain *why* the poorest schools received more grants, preliminary analysis indicates that it is not because they submit significantly more applications.

Several other states have also implemented steps to increase participation among low-income schools in the SRTS program, but no state has yet evaluated the merits or effectiveness of their strategies because the federal projects are still being implemented. The most promising approaches may be providing ongoing operational support to the 12 Caltrans Districts since they are responsible for prioritizing local SR2S and SRTS applications, and providing ongoing funding to CDPH/UCSF’s TARC to help build the capacity of and support low-income communities. TARC recommends continued evaluation of California’s SR2S and SRTS programs and technical assistance efforts, as well as those in other states, to determine strategies that increase successful outcomes for low-income communities.

Caltrans has already taken numerous steps to reach low-income schools and communities in the SR2S and SRTS programs. For example, they have included FRPM eligibility as a criterion in the latest SR2S Cycle 9 application and incorporated

environmental justice strategies into their SR2S program guidelines. In addition, the application rubrics, district review committee training, and guidance that the Caltrans SRTS program Coordinator has provided Districts for selection of projects have been important for the fair distribution of grant awards.

TARC's work includes building the capacity of and supporting low-income communities, as well as communities of all income categories, in their efforts to obtain and successfully complete SR2S and SRTS projects. TARC's evaluation will assess applicant performance, funding obligation rates, increase in walking and bicycling, and changes in crashes and injuries at target sites.

To address inequities in the burden of illness and injury by improving access of low-income communities to SR2S and SRTS grants, TARC recommends setting a goal to increase the number of low-income schools that participate in these programs by at least five percent in future funding cycles. TARC's targeted technical assistance will be a key mechanism in reaching this goal. Addressing increased low-income communities' participation is reflected in current legislation (Assembly Bill 2147, Perez) which, if enacted, may also increase the distribution of projects to lower SES schools. In addition to the positive steps that have already been taken, TARC also recommends that Caltrans require involvement of low-income and other community advocates during local review processes. TARC is confident that these steps will continue to improve the reach of SR2S and SRTS programs into low-income schools and communities and ensure that the most at-risk children benefit from these valuable programs.