

Cities strive for safer pathways



By Jamie Lynn Chevillet/Journal & Courier

Students leaving Happy Hollow Elementary School cross North Salisbury Street in West Lafayette. School zone beacons, along with crossing guards, help keep children safe as they walk to and from school.

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to make sure your kids are safe.”

The recent installation of several new safety features around schools — including school zone and crosswalk beacons around Cumberland and Happy Hollow Elementary — is part of a larger, rounded approach to encouraging more children to walk to school, city officials said.

That approach is now outlined in the city's Safe Routes to School master plan, a wide-ranging document released last week.

Paid for with part of a \$71,500 federal grant, the plan outlines specific ways the community can foster a culture that promotes walking to school, said Dave Buck, the city's engineer.

“The whole safe routes to school program is about safety, but it's also about the health benefits and the activity benefits of the kids getting out there and walking to school,” Buck said.

When she walks her kindergarten daughter to class at Cumberland Elementary School, Susannah DeVault notices that crosswalks, beacons and vigilant crossing guards help keep the area safe.

“Walking to school, I think it's important. It's good exercise, and it's healthy,” said the West Lafayette resident and mother of three. But “as a parent, you want

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"It's a much more holistic review of everything we can do as an entire community."

The master plan is the result of several months of meetings between city officials, consultants, police, teachers and parents who discussed ways West Lafayette's pathways could be made safer for children, Buck said.

Included in the plan are ways to educate children and parents about the benefits of walking or biking to school, traffic enforcement strategies for making school zones safer and strategies to make walking and biking enjoyable and easy.

For example, the plan suggests implementing curriculum-based education for children. That could include outlining environmental benefits of

walking in elementary science classes and incorporating distance calculation in math classes.

The plan also calls for distributing materials to parents. Allaying parents' concerns about abductions and other dangers while walking is a big goal of Safe Routes to School, officials said.

Sally Miller, principal at Happy Hollow, said the school plans to hand out maps of walking routes in the fall.

That's also when the school will incorporate strategies suggested by the students to encourage walking and biking, she said.

In Lafayette, city officials plan to use a \$100,000 federal grant this summer to build sidewalks on 26th Street between Cason and Union streets near Lafayette Christian School and Sunnyside Middle School, city Engineer Jenny Miller said Tuesday.

The city will identify

For more info

West Lafayette's Safe Routes to School master plan document can be found at www.jconline.com/assets/PDF/BY150682125.PDF or on the city's Web site, www.westlafayette.in.gov

more Safe Routes to School projects once its trail and greenways master plan is complete this year, Jenny Miller said.

Sally Miller said the Safe Routes to School plan is an example of how community groups can come together and achieve benefits for all.

"It's just a win-win for everybody," she said.

West Lafayette city and school officials said they'll begin some preliminary surveying this spring and begin implementing major strategies in the fall.