

A composite image showing children in active transportation. The top half features two children riding bicycles towards the camera; a girl on the left wears a pink helmet and an orange shirt, while a boy on the right wears a black helmet and a yellow polo shirt. The bottom half shows three children walking away from the camera, carrying backpacks. The background is a bright, sunny outdoor setting with trees and a brick building.

School Active Transportation Survey

A perspective
from champions

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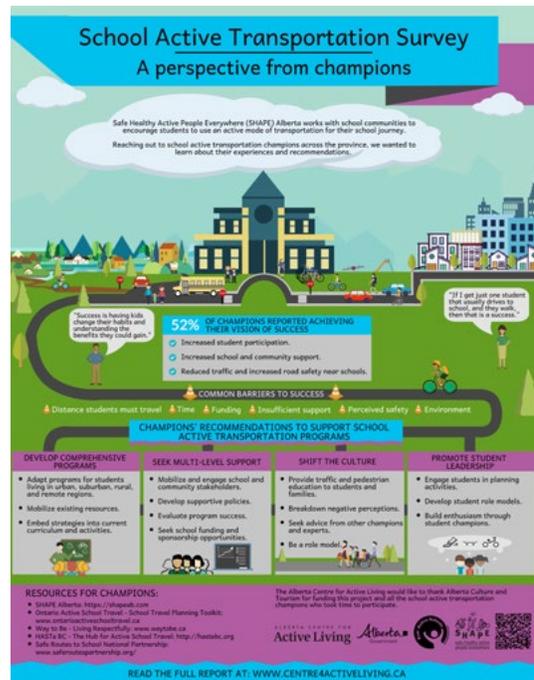


Infographic

An infographic based on this report is available on the Alberta Centre for Active Living website.

It is available in letter size (8.5x11" / 22x28 cm) and poster size (25x34" / 64x85 cm).

Visit and download at: www.centre4activeliving.ca/news/2018/04/school-active-transportation/



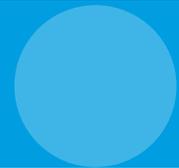


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Introduction

Sedentary lifestyle behaviours, combined with increased caloric intake, have contributed to growing concerns around childhood overweight and obesity, which are risk factors for chronic disease.^{1,2} The 2009–11 Canadian Health Measures Survey, using World Health Organization cut-off points for overweight and obesity, found that 32% of 5- to 17-year-olds in Canada are overweight (20%) or obese (12%); an estimated 1.6 million young people.³ In Alberta, 27.7% of children aged 12 to 17 were overweight or obese in 2014.⁴ School physical activity (PA) interventions, such as active transportation (AT; walking, cycling, etc.), provide children with an opportunity to contribute to their daily PA levels, improve fitness, and reduce the risk of developing chronic diseases.⁵ In fact, children who use school AT have higher PA levels, increased self-confidence and independence, and are less likely to be overweight compared to those children who travel by vehicle.⁶⁻¹⁰

In 2001, Safe Healthy Active People Everywhere (SHAPE) Alberta started working directly with school councils and administration to undertake the School Travel Planning (STP) process to develop school travel plans. SHAPE promotes the use of the School Travel Planning Toolkit developed by Ontario Active School Travel (formerly, Active & Safe Routes to School) to identify barriers and facilitators of AT, translate findings into action plans for implementation, and undertake follow-up evaluation for maintenance and sustainability.¹¹ In 2013, the Active Healthy Kids Canada's Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth recommended that schools undertake the STP process to support and increase school AT.^{12,13}

STP is a comprehensive and collaborative approach that has been adopted by schools to develop interventions for tackling multi-level barriers of school AT. STP involves five stages: (1) Program Setup; (2) Data Collection and Problem Identification; (3) Action Planning; (4) Implementation; and (5) Ongoing Monitoring.^{13,14} Overall, STP assists schools with examining the conditions around school communities, conducting interventions and activities to improve safety and accessibility, reducing traffic and air pollution, educating children and families about AT, and providing support to be more active throughout the day.

It is widely recognized that undertaking the STP process increases the number of students using AT to school and has helped to make the journey safer in Canada, the United States, and internationally.¹⁴⁻¹⁸ At the same time, student participants of safe routes to school programs become better at identifying safe and unsafe places in their neighbourhoods, are able to map out safe AT routes, and can influence policy around their schools, including driving laws and parking restrictions.¹⁵ Although each school and community is unique, the STP process provides a sufficient starting point to begin to improve school AT opportunities for children and youth.



Background to the Project

Working in partnership, the Alberta Centre for Active Living, SHAPE Alberta, and Ever Active Schools surveyed school AT champions from across the province to explore and understand their perspectives on planning and implementing school AT initiatives. For this project, a school AT champion was considered an individual who leads school AT initiatives within their school and/or region. The champion could be a teacher, principal, parent, health promoter, or even a local advocate.

An online survey was conducted to ask school AT champions about:

- STP processes undertaken for planning and implementation;
- their knowledge about and types of support received for school AT;
- facilitators and barriers faced with school AT; and
- recommended strategies and future directions for school AT across the province.

The objectives of this project were to:

- understand the barriers and facilitators faced by AT champions when planning for and implementing school AT initiatives;
- synthesize programs and strategies used by AT champions as a means to support current and future AT champions; and
- to inform local and provincial government on best STP practices and strategies to support school communities.

This report summarizes the findings from the Alberta School Active Transportation Champions Survey. The intended audience are SHAPE Alberta, Ever Active Schools, Ministry of Education, school boards and schools, local and provincial governing authorities, and the Health Promotion, Disease and Injury Prevention program of the Population and Public Health division of Alberta Health Services, as well as current and future school AT champions.



Methods

Participants

For this project, participants were school AT champions who have undertaken or were currently undertaking STP initiatives in their school or region. Potential participants were recruited through email networks of SHAPE Alberta, Ever Active Schools, and the Alberta Centre for Active Living.

Survey & Interviews

STP champions completed an online survey. This was followed by key-informant interviews to obtain a better understanding of survey findings. The Alberta Centre for Active Living, SHAPE Alberta, and Ever Active Schools advertised the project by sharing a link to the survey through their respective newsletters, email listservs, and social media networks. Potential participants were also encouraged to share the invitation with their networks. Upon completion of the survey, participants were provided with an opportunity to submit their contact information if they wished to participate in a key-informant interview.

The survey was developed with input from a project advisory group and was formatted for online access using SurveyMonkey. Questions were developed to provide a mixture of quantitative and qualitative data. The survey included questions on: demographics (e.g., location/region, STP role, number of years as a facilitator, number of schools/regions served), the overall STP process (e.g., key steps and activities undertaken), their perspectives on their knowledge of school AT and STP, whether they are equipped to undertake STP, and their level of successful implementation. Participants were also asked to indicate their barriers and facilitators to STP, as well as mention strategies for overcoming barriers or utilizing facilitators to support their STP.

The survey was open between April 17th and May 17th, 2017. All interviews took place between June 12th and July 31st, 2017.



Demographic Information

A total of 172 individuals accessed the survey. A sample of 21 participants was achieved. Participants were champions who had acted or are currently acting as a school AT champion in their school or region of schools.

The majority of individuals who completed the survey were teachers (47.6%), followed by parents and “other” employees at the school (i.e., educational assistants, school health facilitators), and finally, principals and vice-principals. Of all the schools that participants worked with (n=40), most had indicated that they work with schools in a rural context (55%), followed by an urban context (30%), and the lowest percentage work in a suburban context (15%). The majority of participants were located in large city areas, specifically Edmonton (28%) and Calgary (23%). There were no responses from AT champions in Mackenzie (northwest), North East, and Palliser (southeast) regions of the province.

One third of participants had been an AT champion for over five years (33%). Ninety percent of participants have worked as an AT champion with either one or two schools and across grades Kindergarten to 12. The majority of AT champions worked in smaller schools with populations of ≤ 249 students (55%). The majority of AT champions who completed the survey indicated they worked at a public school (70%), followed by a Catholic school (25%), and a private school (5%). Forty-five per cent of champions indicated they have been working at their current location for over 5 years, with the remaining working fewer years.

School Travel Planning Questions

Most participants indicated that they first learned about school AT from Ever Active Schools (67%), followed by Green Communities Canada (9.5%; Figure 1).

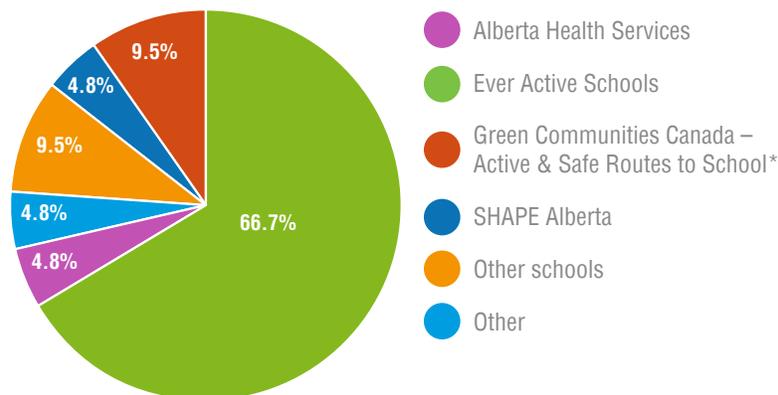


Figure 1. Where participants first learned about school AT (n=21).

**Now known as the School Travel Planning Toolkit by Ontario Active School Travel.*

School Travel Planning involves five processes: (1) Program Setup; (2) Data Collection and Problem Identification; (3) Action Planning; (4) Implementation; and (5) Ongoing Monitoring and Maintenance.^{13,14} Within each, a variety of activities can be undertaken, such as baseline and follow-up parent surveys or school walkabouts to assess built environment and driver-pedestrian behaviour.

Beginning with setup, many had indicated that they had formed a stakeholder committee to support and oversee the process. Stakeholder committees often consisted of teachers, the principal and/or vice principal, parents, parent councils, school administration, community traffic safety committee, and students.

In terms of planning, implementation, and evaluation, the majority of AT work conducted by champions so far has been formative, mostly through baseline assessments and some implementation. Very few AT champions indicated having completed follow-up evaluations or re-assessments at this time (Figure 2). Many indicated that they are either in the planning stages or have just recently implemented AT programs at their schools. Other activities indicated by participants included:

- working in consultation with school administration during new location transition period; and
- contacting city council for crosswalk safety improvements outside of school boundaries.

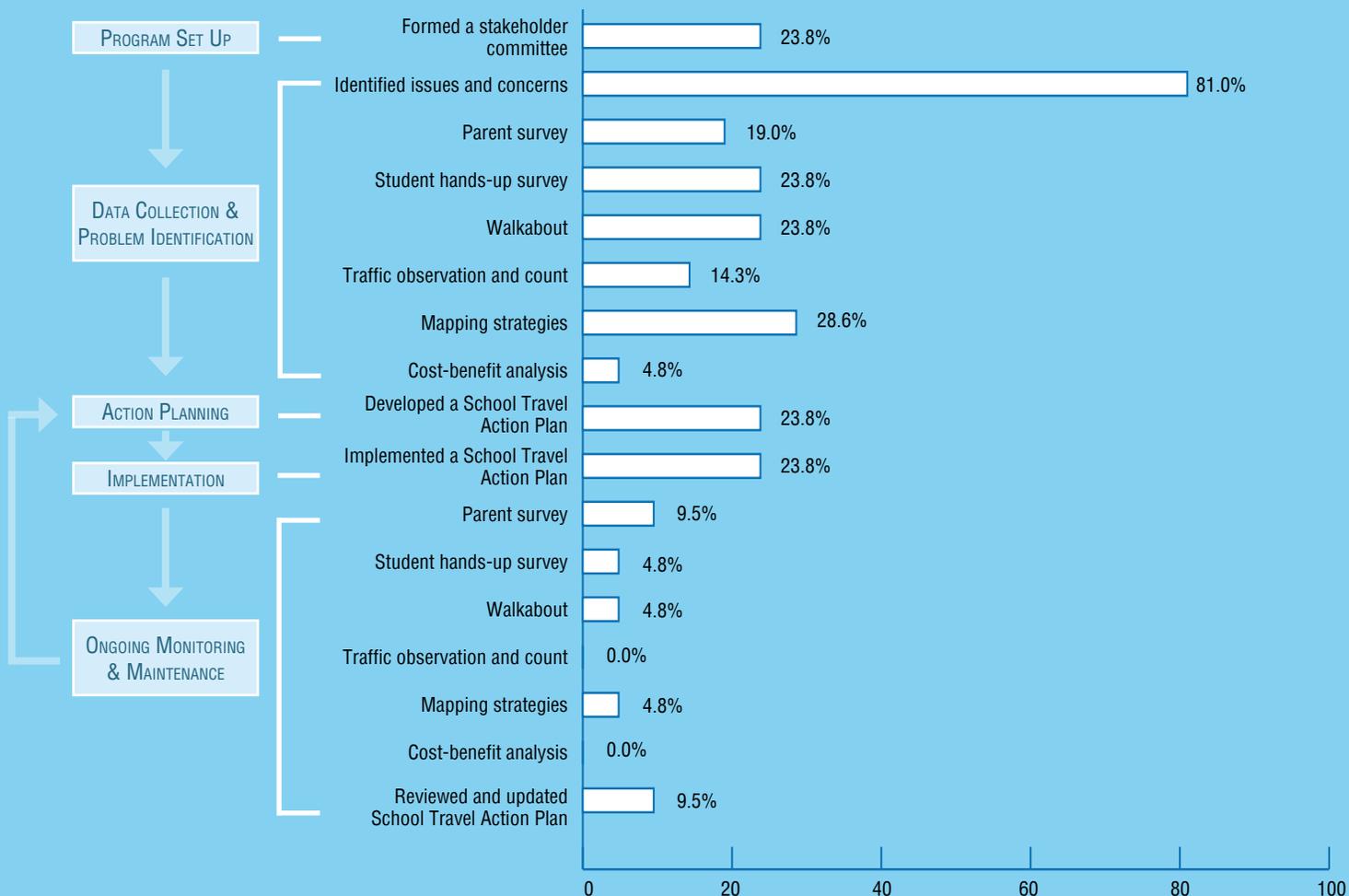


Figure 2. School Travel Planning activities undertaken to support planning, implementation, and evaluation (n=21).

To better support school AT champions, a series of questions were asked to understand their level of knowledge regarding factors that can influence school AT. Most AT champions indicated they are knowledgeable of the built environment (e.g., distance, urban design) and policy/organizational factors (e.g., school structure/siting, characteristics) that can influence school AT. Champions were moderately knowledgeable of individual (e.g., age, gender, disability), psychological (e.g., attitudes, norms, beliefs), and interpersonal factors (e.g., parent perceptions, habits, values; Figure 3).

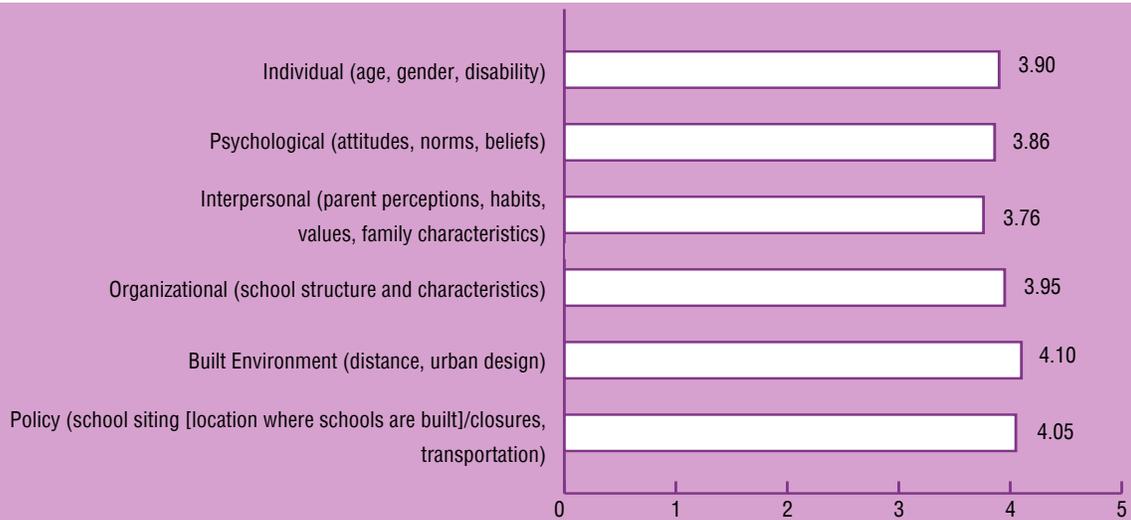


Figure 3. Level of agreement that the champion is knowledgeable of social-ecological factors that can influence school AT (n=21).

Participants also indicated that they are moderately equipped with human and physical resources, but that they have limited funding to support school AT (Figure 4).

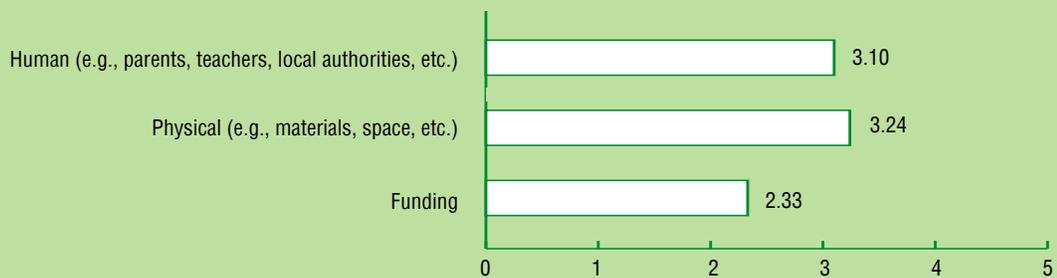


Figure 4. Level of agreement that the AT champion is well-equipped with resources when undertaking school AT programming in schools (n=21).

When asked to define success, three main themes were identified from champions. These themes are outlined below, accompanied by sub-themes and supporting quotes.

| How AT Champions Define Success | |
|--|---|
| 1. Student Behaviour | |
| Sub-theme | Sample quote |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased student participation in events | <p>"An increase of 10% in students using AT to get to school. Implementation of a consistent Walking Bus."</p> <p>"I feel that when our total number of participants in SHAPE's events equals the previous year or increases each year, it is a success. When students run up to tell me that they walked or biked to school, that is a success. If students show me they wore a shirt with "Wheels" on it, that is success."</p> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Healthy and active students | <p>"A school that is active and supportive."</p> <p>"Kids being more active."</p> <p>"Having more active and healthy students."</p> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> High adherence and maintenance of activity | <p>"Having kids change their habits and understanding the benefits they could gain personally, and how it can affect the rest of the world. Having kids adhere to the project and have them take part in building the project."</p> <p>"Numbers of students participating in the program and their perception of well being."</p> |
| 2. Increased Support | |
| Sub-theme | Sample quote |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> School community enthusiasm for programs | <p>"Amazing people and volunteers who find time even when no time or priorities are given to these initiatives."</p> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parental buy-in | <p>"If you could get busy parents on-board or open to hearing the benefits, then you are off and running. Sadly they are caught up in a fast-paced lifestyle where time and convenience trump health and safety."</p> |
| 3. Changes in community environment | |
| Sub-theme | Sample quote |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduced vehicle traffic at/around school | <p>"Reduced vehicle traffic at schools."</p> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Safe roadways | <p>"Increased student activity and safety."</p> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> More walking/cycling around schools | <p>"If all classes are using AT to get to field trips and it is not questioned. If we can walk, we will walk."</p> |

However, AT champions were split on whether the AT programs implemented at their schools met their definition of success (Figure 5). Most stated they have seen some improvements in student behaviour, but that they would like to receive more support and enthusiasm from parents and school staff.

“I feel that I promote the special SHAPE events to the best of my ability and time. And if I get just one student that usually drives to school and they walk on Walk to School Day or Wheel to School Day, then that is a success. I would appreciate more consistent staff support, but feel that the students want to participate and they remember to do so.”

Champions also indicated frustration with individuals who are verbally supportive of new programs, but who are unwilling to provide physical or practical support.

“Very frustrating when no one wants to help. They all agree it’s a great idea, but expect others to make it happen for their kids. Also sad when they ‘don’t want my child walking that far.’ They just don’t get it.”

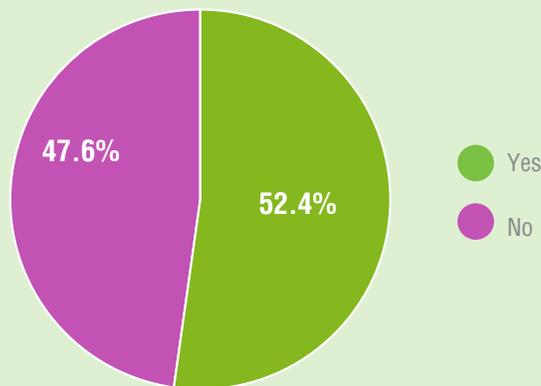


Figure 5. Active transportation programming has met your definition of success (n=21).

Despite AT programs not necessarily being as successful as participants would like, most of the champions (76%) indicated that their schools have sustained AT programming, with most ranging from one to five years.

Some champions identified issues with sustaining programs, including environmental factors in rural areas (e.g., road safety, wildlife, having to travel far distances), lack of time, and limited buy-in from parents. Many champions indicated that although the schools are providing AT programming, the message may not be reinforced at home.

Factors that AT champions believe would contribute to success include:

- support from parents, teachers, and champions;
- student buy-in and enthusiasm for engaging in programs/activities;
- funding;
- collaboration with community organizations; and
- marketing and promotion of programs.

What we learned from champions about school active transportation success and strategies

When asked about initiatives or programs that have been implemented at champions' schools, three main types emerged:

1. Special events/one-off activity days

- SHAPE special event day
- Winter Walk Day
- Bike Day with community league
- Healthy Active Schools Symposium (HASS) events
- Tournaments with other schools

2. Initiatives to increase daily activity

- Walking to after-school activities
- Indoor recess support
- Weekly walks
- Walking classrooms
- Bike clubs

3. Educational programs

- Teaching students about pedestrian and bike safety
- Neighbourhood walks to familiarize students with safe pathways

Champions also provided various strategies that could help sustain AT in their schools including:

- structured planning and programming;
- time to effectively plan and implement programs;
- support, volunteers, and passionate champions;
- role-modelling AT for students;
- incentives (e.g., prizes for participation); and
- collaboration — within and among schools.

Barriers which champions have experienced when trying to implement new initiatives include:

- insufficient support;
- distance children live from schools;
- time;
- environment (e.g., weather, wildlife);
- teacher turn-over (i.e., loss of champions);
- funding;
- parental perceptions of safety; and
- legal implications.

Champions were asked several questions about how AT initiatives can be improved, what they would do differently, and what would facilitate success in the future. The feedback from these questions resulted in the following themes:

1. Change policy at municipal/provincial levels

- Create safer walking/cycling paths
- Improve quality and maintenance of roadways
- Increase funding for initiatives
- Change regulations
- Provide resources for rural areas

2. Increase promotional and educational materials

- Obtain more information from organizations such as SHAPE and Alberta Transportation
- Create more publicity to spread ideas (e.g., success stories)
- Provide safety information to reduce parental concerns
- Create and provide promotional materials and supports (e.g., posters, short videos, guest speakers)
- Provide materials to support positive social norms and beliefs about active transportation (e.g., a car is not necessary for all trips)

3. Recruit more volunteers

- Increase numbers of volunteers/champions
- Engage community in programs
- Provide incentives

Overall, AT champions indicated they would like a more holistic approach to program development and implementation, with more collaboration among all systemic levels (e.g., individual, interpersonal, institutional/organizational, community, policy).

Increased funding and volunteer support would greatly help with implementation and long-term maintenance of programs. Champions would like to share responsibility with others (e.g., parents, community members, municipal/provincial government) to establish and reinforce AT programs for greater sustainability. The lack of buy-in from parents/guardians often made it difficult for champions to follow through with development and implementation. Champions experienced difficulties with initiating programs when the responsibility was limited to an individual school and its staff, especially in a school with high staff turnover.

Finally, champions also acknowledged that there are certain barriers that are unpredictable and potentially insurmountable, such as wildlife in rural areas, longer distances between schools and students' homes, and extreme weather conditions.



What we learned through discussions with champions

Out of seven individuals who agreed to be contacted for an interview, three agreed to participate. The interviews were conducted via telephone during the months of June and July 2017. The first participant was a parent who leads AT initiatives at their child's school in an urban context; the second was a physical education teacher and athletic director and who has been promoting AT in different schools for over 15 years in a rural context; and the third participant was a health promotion facilitator working with many schools across mixed suburban and rural contexts. All three participants indicated they had primarily worked as AT champions in elementary schools, with some experience in middle and high schools.

Five main themes arose from the interviews:

1. Defining and Achieving Success & Sustainability;
2. Comprehensiveness of School AT;
3. Seeking Multi-level Support;
4. Shifting the Culture; and
5. Student Leadership.

Participants' perspectives of their unique experiences and insights to support current and future school AT are provided throughout.

1. Defining and Achieving Success and Sustainability

Much was expressed regarding how to lead successful AT initiatives. The champions discussed finding passionate leaders from among the most influential individuals at the school to help implement initiatives and generate buy-in. For example, the principal can play a significant role in terms of successful initiatives.

You definitely need staff involvement, and I did learn that if your principal is not on your side, then you're not going to succeed. So the most important person in my opinion is the principal. And that makes or breaks your program. So if the principal is not on board, you will have minimal success.

Moreover, having stakeholders who are passionate about the initiative is invaluable for moving forward.

So I led with the belief that if someone cared passionately about something, they would lead it. So we did all kinds of things that people were interested in versus the need,...because you need to build that community engagement piece first, in my opinion.

Another aspect of achieving success with school AT is to be patient, flexible, and willing to adapt plans and ideas based on the type of resources available at the time. As experienced by one participant, "...so I guess not being married to it, with (1) it being implemented; and (2) what it's going to look like. It may morph into something that you didn't expect and that's okay."

AT champions also expressed that they would appreciate more education prior to initiating their planning and implementation at schools. Specifically, they would like more support at the onset and would like to acquire a foundation of knowledge about steps that are more likely to lead to success.

...having someone who actually could come out, like whether it's on the Ever Active team or SHAPE team or whomever. An actual body of knowledge, who can come and assess where the group is at and help them...I just think we need to do that earlier in the process, rather than wasting, you know, wasting volunteers' time.

Champions strongly recommended recruiting individuals who are also passionate about working together as a group, so it is not just one person leading the charge. In doing so, patience was recommended because it can be difficult to find time to gather everyone and not make it seem like additional work in their day.

So look at the alignment versus the competition and the whole. I mean, we're just used to siloed activities, right?! And I've learned through collaboration, it's actually harder to do collaboration. I mean it sounds great on paper, but it actually takes way more time and energy when it's never happened before. And I never expected that. I thought collaboration would be, "Oh great, you know this is going to decrease my workload." When in fact at the onset, it increases your workload until the model is in place and people get more used to collaborating. Which is kind of disappointing then, that working in silos is much easier.

In addition to recruitment, finding the time to bring individuals together to work on school AT was challenging.

[It] is very tough to get people to meet and discuss what they want to happen. Obviously we already talked about it, but principal buy-in...it did take me a year and half to truly get principal buy-in. So that was a barrier. Staff is a barrier...they're all on a spectrum of their own wellness and have their own ideas, and they already have so much on their plate. So just talking about something else...often [their] first impressions are negative, so that's a barrier.

Finding people who can commit in the long-term is important for sustaining successful programs. One participant suggested that having parents in a head leadership role rather than staff, depending on staff turn-over rates at the school.



2. Comprehensiveness of School AT

Interviews revealed a broad definition and interpretation of AT, depending on the location of schools and resources available. Using AT to get to and from school requires some adaptation to accommodate rural contexts where children live at greater distances from their school. The following two quotes highlight some of these issues and challenges in terms of automobile dependency and not having the infrastructure to facilitate more active modes of transportation:

It's easy in the town...but the AT bit gets challenging as it moves out of towns. Then a lot of the work that I do on reserve and in rural or remote areas, it's actually fairly auto-dependent. As well, the reserves I work in are fairly spread out — you know, gravel roads, dust, seasonal, everything. All those factors and stuff, so it's pretty tricky. Well, just because it's a big community; I'm in the second biggest community in my service area, and it's very spread out on four different reserves. And the AT bit is very challenging, like they've got highways running through; they cross in the middle. You know, working with the municipal district is tricky because they've dealt everything around the highways coming through. So they're not setup for pedestrians.

(Community) would almost be the only rural area that I work in. And then it almost turns into all rural or remote actually in some of the northern communities...These kids, if they're old enough and their family has [an off-highway vehicle], they do pull up to school in an off-highway vehicle. And whether they can legally or not, they do, and no one is going to do anything about it. The fact that they're at school and have gone to school is actually the most important thing. But there's some of them that live right there by their school, and I know some of them do ride over.

Participants discussed different ways to mitigate the challenges presented in rural contexts. Specifically, AT was embedded in a way to increase activity during school hours through initiatives such as “Don’t Walk in the Hallways,” promoted by Ever Active Schools to support active and fun ways to move through hallways (<https://everactive.org/product/dwith/>). Special event days were also used to support AT, such as the Terry Fox Run and Winter Walk Day. A strong recommendation for success in implementing these types of school day initiatives included embedding them into the school’s culture and curriculum:

If there were initiatives that fit into curriculum,...that would be supported more than ones that didn't fit into curriculum. But also, you know like, if there's resources that have actual age appropriate lesson plans...which would decrease the work for the teacher, that was more supported.

Building upon current activities and the culture of the school was also recommended:

There's lots of great stuff happening in schools. And I think if you build on whatever is happening in culture that already exists, that's an easier approach. Because you already got buy-in to the initial thing.

AT was also discussed as being a part of a larger school health and wellness agenda. They talked about AT being implemented concurrently with other health or wellness programs, such as healthy snacks at school, and education or information sessions regarding different wellness issues, such as stress, anxiety or bullying. AT may be better received and achieved if it is embedded in a school’s comprehensive health program.

3. Seeking Multi-level Support

Participants discussed the challenges of getting AT initiatives started in their schools. Aligning with the first STP process, champions discussed recruiting stakeholders to generate increased support from within and outside the school community.

So really I think that's what it comes down to: is building connections, which takes years. And then leveraging them when you need. But also being aware of what your partners have, being aware of what your partners and stakeholders need, and trying to move their stuff forward as well.

Government involvement was mentioned several times in terms of who has the power and the financial resources to create change. This could be through educating the public on the importance of chronic disease prevention or through changes to the immediate infrastructure and environment. As quoted by two participants:

Real hard work by different partners on a provincial level have helped to bring the issues forward and educate the public. Also, municipal governments supporting health of their community. A new provincial government, NDP, who has an ideology of prevention and supporting prevention, I'd say more so than the past government. So that has increased awareness.

You have to meet with council, and they'll look at what you can do as a community to improve the built environment to increase AT. And you know they're always working on sidewalks and trails. And overall (community) is pretty good especially compared to most of the other communities I work in. It just gets trickier and trickier as you get into the rural and the rural and remote areas where off-highway vehicles are more common, and honestly, more practical as far as a means of transportation where there's no asphalt and no pavement and greater distances.

One participant acknowledged the challenges and frustration experienced when attempting to address infrastructure and policy issues. Diffusion of responsibility at higher levels can thwart attempts to improve communities or make them more amenable to AT:

Silly policy at school like, "Oh well, the crosswalk that your Walking School Bus uses is not on school property, so we don't care about that. That's not our problem." That's a big one, just like, bureaucracy. I mean we've spent almost a year trying to get our crosswalk safer for kids.

Just as challenging, support for AT initiatives often involved generating funds and budgeting for events. All the participants discussed the importance of including AT in the school's budget, as part of the larger health and wellness program.

If I had to pick one thing, that's like probably most important for sustainability, [it] is ensuring that the health and wellness is a line item on a school council budget, because it just validates the importance, and leads to sustainability of it occurring, when your group of parents who are running it leaves.

Another participant highlighted funding in terms of fundraising when the budget is limited.

The barrier is financial. And you know, when something does come in, do we have budgets? Can we scrape and find it? Do we have to reach out to our parent council again to fundraise money for it? It's that frustrating piece in the educational world right now that the government is cutting funding and expecting us to do more.

One participant discussed the need to be flexible when budgeting for initiatives or events by proposing a variety of implementation plans dependent on budget amounts. As quoted, “Probably having different suggestions or different budget amounts. So, what we could do with \$0? What we could do with \$100? What we could do with \$1,000? So just kind of having different plans for different funding.”

Although participants discussed AT in terms of planning, preparation, and implementation, limited work had been done to conduct follow-up evaluations to assess AT initiative progress. Yet, overall evaluation was viewed as valuable to support accountability and sustainability.

You can have policy, but if there's no accountability at the school level or district level, the policy isn't going to get you much other than I guess bringing attention to the issue. But to actually have the actions, there has to be accountability to the districts and schools. And I guess with accountability, comes measurement. You need the measurement of what's actually happening in schools, and are they progressing? The data, we need the data.

Overall, champions advocated for more support, particularly financial, from various levels of government — the most proximal being the school board and the most distal being provincial or federal government. Champions also strongly recommended establishing partnerships with key influencers at the school (e.g., the principal) and within the immediate community (e.g., municipal council).



4. Shifting the Culture

Participants discussed the challenges of changing social norms, particularly parents' beliefs regarding driving their children to school. As one participant mentioned, many parents are in the habit of transporting their children to school as part of their daily routine.

So culture was one where kids got dropped off even though they lived two to three blocks away. So that was the biggest barrier to begin with. [It] was just, "Well, what's the point?" So I guess that is education to the community, for one — preconceived notions. So I did do a preliminary study of just why people were driving their kids to school, and it was based on fear of strangers, fear of traffic. So we know fear of traffic is one. But fear of strangers isn't, as it's unlikely to happen to your kid...The other one was convenience. It was the normal culture; the majority of culture believe that it's okay right now.

Social stigma associated with AT also emerged. More specifically, there was a belief that if you are walking to school, it is because you do not own a car and you have to, as opposed to choosing a more active and healthy alternative.

There's a lot of people that drive a block at a time in (community), and it's because they have a vehicle. They have lots of vehicles and lots of cash. They have whatever, and so most of the walkers are visual minorities, like lower income. Majority of walkers in (community) are definitely lower income bracket, and...they're walking [because] they need to, and that's probably sad in a way, I guess. So because then when kids see people that are walking, then they know they are lower income, and [the kids] know they're not walking! And they don't see people like me and my co-workers walking enough. They tend to associate AT and walking and cycling and stuff in a different manner.

These pervasive beliefs can create resistance to the efforts AT champions try to achieve through their initiatives. One participant suggested having more support and training, perhaps from a health psychologist, to learn different strategies to deal with resistance and to shape the culture towards a more healthy consciousness.

You're this champion who's trying to do the right thing, and you have this huge push back from all these stakeholders because your opinion is a minority opinion in culture right now. So that would have been a huge help for me to have almost like a one-on-one hour session with someone who has experience in initiating and culture change and just some strategies on what to do.

Another way of tackling the issue of beliefs is to increase education opportunities for parents, particularly in reference to the long-term health of their children. One participant acknowledged that there is more data available for parents today regarding childhood obesity and sedentary behaviour. However, not all parents have the same level of access to such information. With this in mind, having more direct lecture-style or small group discussions with parents was considered one way to mitigate the issues around access to health information.

With the statistics and research coming out of childhood obesity and screen-time and those sort of things, parents are becoming more interested in how to deal, how to have healthier kids.

With greater education on school AT, comes the need for role-modelling the behaviour to increase its profile. As highlighted by one participant:

I think it's good to start with the easy stuff and just kind of elevate the profile because, you know in my experience, the role-modeling was so important. And if I had to guess what was the most important factor, it was probably just kids seeing other kids walk to school and ride their bikes. And eventually over 3 years, it changed the culture of getting dropped off. It actually became less cool to do that. It was more cool to walk to school with your friends or yourself, and also it has helped parents [to] stop doing it.

Finally, champions discussed the need to consider the varying levels of staff wellness and being patient with those who could potentially help implement and role-model AT initiatives. Participants acknowledged that “the school culture has to be there to accept it and want it in the first place” and that people cannot be forced to lead an initiative they are not comfortable or supportive in delivering. It was deemed important for AT champions to give volunteers the time and space to become comfortable with AT initiatives. It was also important for volunteers to make their own suggestions for activities that they would be interested in supporting at the school.

...realizing that staff are on a spectrum of normal population; that some are very healthy and some aren't. And it's going to be a different time frame for different staff members of adoption. Adoption is partially dependent on their own personal wellness [and] ensuring it wasn't an add-on to staff's time. That was huge. So again, what I did was pick initiatives that staff wanted to do. I didn't force them to do anything because that would be an add-on.

To summarize, in order to shift the culture to one where healthy active behaviours are viewed positively, there is a need for more education and more modelling of behaviour by staff, parents, and the general population.



5. Student Leadership

Student-led initiatives were consistently discussed throughout interviews and were viewed as the most successful and sustainable. Working with students to find out which initiatives resonate with them and involving them in the planning and implementation process was considered a key strategy, as adult-led initiatives often lost traction. To support student-led initiatives, one champion highlighted their process as:

Taking it to the staff meetings, we would share that information of the pieces that our students have encouraged and asked for. And we've done some research, and as a school, we would like to support them in this venture as they try to implement it. It's never teacher-driven [then passed] to student because that never works. It goes for a little while and then it fizzles because the kids are being told what to do rather than owning what to do. So we always go through the process of informing the teachers, letting them know their role in the initiative. Be it as observation. Or be it reminding and supporting that initiative; the, "Hey don't forget, we're doing this today on the way." But it's really our older students who drive and remind and create that energy within the building.

Teaching children how to mentor and model to younger children in the school was also another strategy.

And within each of those little school animals and cultures, there are leadership opportunities. So you know it all comes down to energizing and increasing the excitement and understanding of the kids. No matter if it's grade 3s teaching Kindergartens, or grade 8s teaching grades 4s and 5s, or grade 12s doing the whole spectrum.



Conclusion

It is recommended that children and youth (5-17 years old) should accumulate at least 60 minutes per day of moderate-to-vigorous PA.¹⁹ School AT provides an opportunity for children and youth to contribute to their daily PA levels.⁵ Various school AT programs and initiatives, such as SHAPE Alberta and Ever Active Schools, as well as other organizations across the country such as Ontario Active School Travel and HASTe British Columbia, exist to advocate and support schools on their AT development journey.

This report highlights school AT champions' experiences when planning and implementing their school AT initiatives. By reaching across the province, this evaluation helped to identify some barriers and facilitators faced by school AT champions, as well as key strategies to implement initiatives. Findings were similar to those found in literature, including: collaboration with multi-level stakeholders; involvement from principals, teachers, and students; limited time; lack of funding; and policies.^{18,20} This project identified ways to improve AT initiative planning and implementation for champions, including the need for promotional and educational materials and support, strategies to support and improve stakeholder recruitment and engagement, and the need for policy alignment to support AT at the municipal and provincial levels.

To summarize, there is a need for a broader perspective of how school AT is defined. This will help facilitate adoption and successful implementation in areas of Alberta where non-motorized modes of transportation to and from schools are dominant. The main challenges participants discussed include:

- lack of financial support (i.e., difficulties implementing initiatives on a small or non-existent budget);
- culture and perceptions of school AT (e.g., negative or indifferent attitudes/beliefs of parents, staff, children);
- lack of enthusiasm for initiatives;
- distances students must travel in various contexts (i.e., urban, suburban, rural, and remote);
- resistance and lack of collaboration among stakeholders;
- need to embed AT strategies into culture and curriculum;
- limited measurement and accountability; and
- policy misalignment.



In contrast, participants provided quite a few examples of successful initiatives and were able to make suggestions for successfully implementing AT in schools. The following is a list of recommendations for improving and sustaining AT support within Alberta schools:

- acquire strong leadership — passionate adults to provide supervision; enthusiastic students to engage in activities;
- increase education for AT champions — more one-on-one support from AT specialists during preparation and planning phases;
- offer health information sessions for staff and parents to increase their knowledge and encourage their buy-in;
- provide promotional and educational materials for students, teachers, and parents;
- increase opportunities to liaise with various levels of government and generate stakeholders;
- change policy at the municipal and provincial levels in terms of built infrastructure, funding, regulations, and rural resource support;
- provide support and incentives to recruit and maintain volunteer stakeholders;
- make AT a part of the school budget; finding better ways to generate monetary support.

Overall, this project contributes to a provincial knowledge gap by synthesizing and sharing strategies, best practices, and needs of school AT champions across the province. Knowledge gained will assist SHAPE Alberta and Ever Active Schools in their pursuit to support school AT champions. Finally, findings can be used to inform local and provincial governing bodies to support school AT across the province.



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