

# Walking Toward a Healthy Future

N.C. Chronic Disease and Injury Section 2015

## Summary

In an effort to increase opportunities for physical activity in Robeson County, North Carolina, Active Routes to School assisted Robeson Communities In Schools (CIS) Academy with implementing a quarterly Walking Wednesday program. Students walk a total of 20 – 35 minutes to and from the University of North Carolina at Pembroke (UNCP) for two reasons: to learn about the importance of being physically active and to get information about college.



## Challenge

According to a Robert Wood Johnson Leadership for Healthy Communities Report, children from certain racial and ethnic communities have been disproportionately affected by the childhood obesity epidemic. Studies available suggest this is true for Native American youths as well. Native Americans comprise 39 percent of Robeson County's population, making the childhood obesity risk higher in the county than in other parts of the state.

Robeson County is one of the unhealthiest counties in North Carolina. According to the 2013 State of the County Health report, Robeson ranks 97<sup>th</sup> (out of 100 North Carolina counties) in health outcomes and 95<sup>th</sup> in childhood obesity rates. Obesity is a risk factor for several diseases including heart disease, stroke and diabetes.

## Solution

The North Carolina Division of Public Health (Community and Clinical Connections for Prevention and Health Branch) and the North Carolina Department of Transportation are partnering to offer the Active Routes to School project. The goal of the project is to increase the number of North Carolinians that meet the physical activity recommendations by increasing the number of elementary and middle school students who can safely walk and bike to school. Robeson County is host to the Region 8 Active Routes to School Project Coordinator, Shahnee Haire.

Ms. Haire worked with Communities in Schools (CIS) Academy administration to implement a quarterly Walking Wednesday program. This 20-35 minute walk is offered in addition to regular physical education and all of the students and staff in grades 6 – 8 participate. Every quarter, approximately 130 participants walk from CIS Academy to UNCP. This activity combines education with physical activity. While at UNCP, students learn about college and how they can further their education after high school.

In addition to the Walking Wednesday program, 40 eighth grade students were trained as student patrol officers. The training focused on bike and pedestrian safety rules. These students take what they learn and share it with other students in the school.

## Results

As a result of the implementation of the program, CIS Academy will incorporate quarterly Walking Wednesdays and International Walk to School Day into their health policy handbook. Ms. Haire is also working with two additional schools to assist with after school programs. Red Springs Middle School and Pembroke Middle School students are now learning about bike and pedestrian safety.

## Sustaining Success

To sustain success, the Walking Wednesday program will be incorporated into CIS Academy's health policy handbook. This will ensure the activity continues for years to come. Additionally, other schools are interested in participating in these safety and physical activity programs.

## Get Involved

Ms. Haire suggests reaching out to school administration or staff to ask about a walking program. There are many variations including the walking school bus or walking in the gym if a lack of sidewalks and crosswalks make it unsafe to walk outside.



*"Active Routes to Schools is important to our school because childhood obesity is a problem in our nation."*

**- Billy Haggans, CIS Academy Principal**

## Contact:

### Shahnee Haire

Robeson County Health Department  
460 Country Club Drive,  
Lumberton, NC 28360  
910-671-3200 phone



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