



Safe streets lead to more walking and biking to school

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More students walk or bike to school when surroundings streets, sidewalks and crosswalks are safe and attractive, according to a Tulane University study published in the *Journal of School Health* this month.

“Our study found a clear connection between features in the environment, such as sidewalk conditions and traffic speeds, and the rates of biking and walking to school in Louisiana,” said Jeanette Gustat, clinical associate professor of Epidemiology at the Tulane School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine and investigator at the Tulane Prevention Research Center.

Tulane researchers evaluated the road and sidewalk conditions around five Louisiana schools in Lockport, Walker, Bossier City, Vinton and Franklin in 2009 and gathered information from parent and teacher surveys. The study found that the highest rates of walking and biking were in communities with better facilities for pedestrians, such as safer, complete and connected streets, sidewalks and crosswalks in good condition. Other factors that led to higher rates of walking and biking included living within one-half mile from school, school encouragement and students asking parents for permission to walk or bike to school. Additionally, the study found that more students walked than biked to school with more students walking home than to school.

“The prevalence of overweight and obesity in Louisiana children is high at 35 percent, and many do not meet the recommended 60 minutes of daily physical activity,” Gustat said. “When streets and neighborhoods are built to support active transportation, children can establish healthy behaviors that will last into their adult years.”

The [study](#), led by the [Tulane Prevention Research Center](#), was conducted to assess Louisiana’s first Safe Routes to School grants as a baseline evaluation of walking and biking conditions. Safe Routes to School is a national transportation program that encourages school-aged children to walk and bike to school through programming and changes to street conditions around schools.