

State Safe Routes to School Laws as a Public Health Policy Approach to Mitigating the Childhood Obesity Epidemic

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October 27, 2008

Presented at the American Public Health Association Annual Meeting

San Diego, California



Purpose

- To describe formal Federal and state policy efforts to reduce childhood obesity by encouraging walking and bicycling to school
- To present preliminary findings from a study of state safe routes to school (SRTS) laws effective as of January 1, 2007
- To illustrate scope and variation in state approaches to encouraging walking and bicycling to school

Presenter Disclosures

Kerri McGowan Lowrey, J.D., M.P.H.

The following personal financial relationships with commercial interests relevant to this presentation existed during the past 12 months:

No relationships to disclose.

Presentation Roadmap

- Background
- Federal Law
- Data Sources and Methods
- Findings
 - Safe Routes to School Laws
 - Other SRTS-Related Laws
- Conclusions
- Next Steps

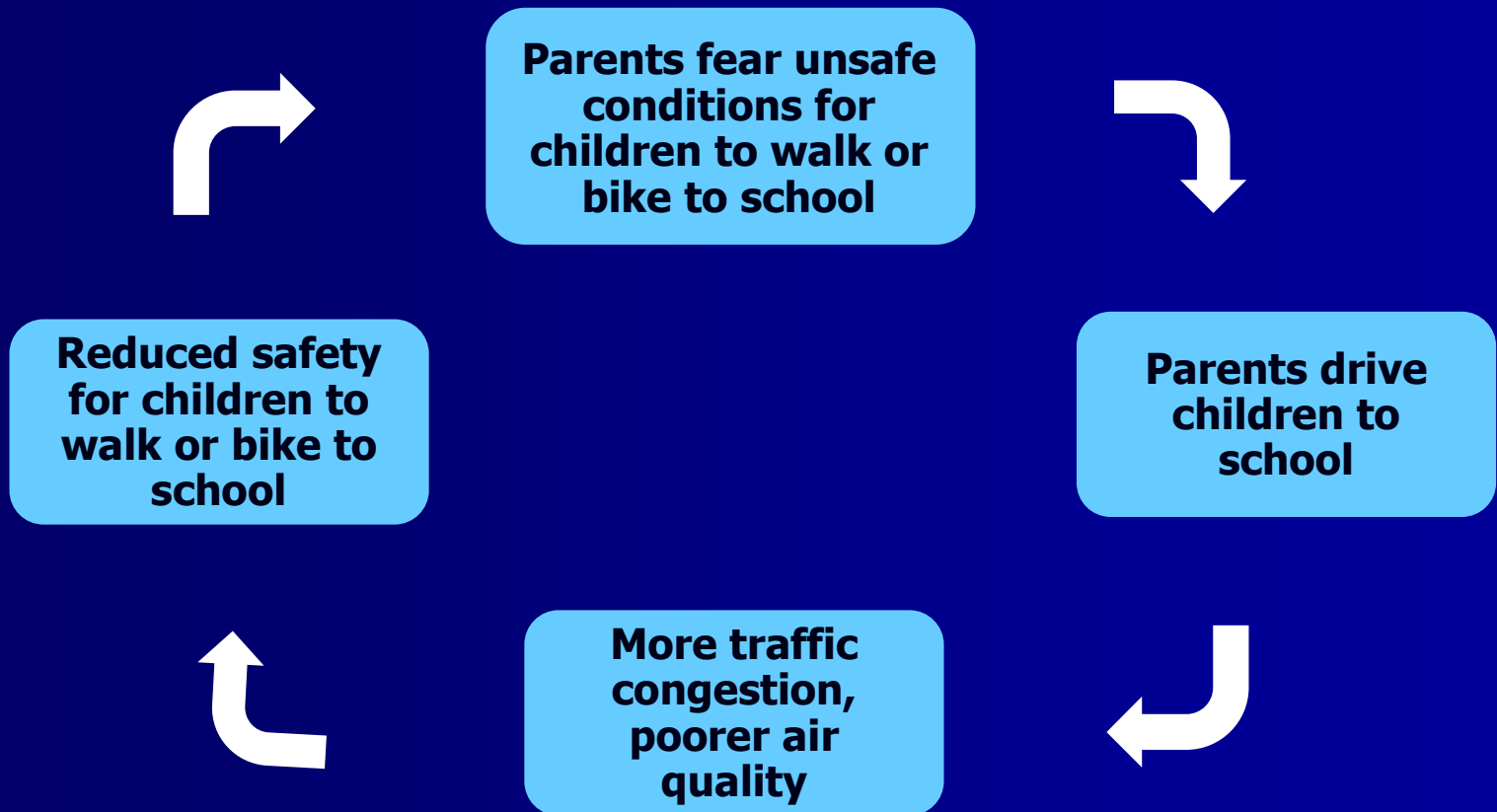


Photo source: www.fitnesscure.com

Background

- Correlation between rising childhood obesity rates and decline of regular physical activity
- Decline in walking and bicycling to school
 - 1969: 50% of students walked or bicycled to school
 - 2001: Less than 15% of students walked or bicycled to school
- Decline associated with many factors, including:
 - School construction on less expensive land far from metropolitan centers
 - Parents' fear for children's safety
 - Lack of adequate sidewalks, bicycle routes, pedestrian safety controls near schools

Cycle of behaviors/conditions that perpetuates reduction in walking and bicycling to school



Federal SRTS Law

- *Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU),* Public Law 109-59
- Congress approved \$612M through 2009 for a SRTS program as part of the Federal transportation bill
 - Adopted July 29, 2005
 - Funding provided to the departments of transportation in all states using formula based on school enrollment
 - Each state to receive minimum of \$1M per fiscal year for program implementation
 - State DOTs may make grants to state, local, and regional agencies, including nonprofit organizations
 - Primary and secondary schools (i.e., K-8)

Federal SRTS Law: Eligible Activities

- **Infrastructure:** Planning, design, and construction of projects to substantially improve the ability of students to walk and bicycle to school
 - Sidewalk improvements
 - Traffic calming
 - Speed reduction improvements
 - Street crossings
 - On-street bicycle facilities
 - Off-street bicycle and pedestrian facilities
 - Secure bicycle parking
 - Traffic diversion improvements in vicinity of schools



Photo source: <http://planning.city.cleveland.oh.us>

Federal SRTS Law: Eligible Activities

- **Non-infrastructure:** Activities to encourage walking and bicycling to school (10-30% of allocated funds per fiscal year)
 - Public awareness campaigns
 - Outreach to community leaders
 - Traffic education/enforcement in the vicinity of schools
 - Student sessions on bicycle and pedestrian safety, health, and environment
 - Trainings, volunteers, and managers of SRTS programs



Photo source: <http://www.ci.santa-ana.ca.us/cda/GrantsforBlocksProjects.asp>

Federal SRTS Law

- The **purposes** of the program, as stated in the bill, are to:
 - Enable and encourage children, including those with disabilities, to walk and bicycle to school;
 - Make bicycling and walking to school a **safer and more appealing** transportation alternative, thereby encouraging a healthy and active lifestyle from an early age; and
 - Facilitate the **planning, development, and implementation** of projects and activities that will improve safety and reduce traffic, fuel consumption, and air pollution in the vicinity of schools.
- Delaware (2002) and Texas (2001)
 - Implemented state SRTS laws before enactment of the Federal law

Data Sources and Methods

▪ Data Sources

- Lexis-Nexis legislative research
- Formal policy: state statutes and administrative regulations effective as of January 1, 2007
- Consultant: Diane Lambert, M.P.H., National Center for Safe Routes to School

▪ Methods

- Developed qualitative classification instrument based on laws and consultant advice
- Coded policies for relevant elements
- Employed double-coding QA process

Types of SRTS Policies Analyzed

- 1. SRTS program laws** – laws establishing/setting criteria for state SRTS programs
 - Use the term *Safe Routes to School*
 - Use Federal SRTS funds
 - Address infrastructure and non-infrastructure
- 2. SRTS-related laws** – provisions that impact student safety walking/bicycling to school, but are not SRTS programs



Photo source:
www.saferoutespartnership.org

SRTS Variables Analyzed

- Adherence to Federal law
- Required vs. encouraged
- Specific application and vetting criteria



Application criteria:

- Must take into account children's safety
- Must demonstrate stakeholder/community involvement
- Administrative criteria

Vetting criteria:

- Potential to reduce injury
- Potential to increase walking/bicycling
- Identification of current barriers to walkability
- Demonstrated applicant need
- Geographical distribution

SRTS Variables Analyzed

- Eligibility/ineligibility criteria
- Administrative body
- Additional state funding and funding caps
- Program evaluation
- Other SRTS-related policies—
engineering, education,
enforcement, encouragement



Findings: Overall

- As of January 1, 2007, 10 states had implemented a SRTS program law

	Federally Based SRTS Program	Other State SRTS Program
Required	California, Colorado, Illinois, New York, Oregon, Texas	Florida
Voluntary	Delaware	New Mexico, South Carolina

- 33 states had other SRTS-related provisions
 - Data not mutually exclusive; 9 states have both SRTS program laws and other relevant law

Findings: State SRTS Program Laws

- **Consistent vetting criteria** across state SRTS laws
 - 6 of 10 states with SRTS program laws require vetting criteria to include potential to:
 - Reduce injury
 - Encourage walking or bicycling to school
 - Identify hazards and barriers to walking or bicycling to school
 - Identify current and potential routes to school
 - Demonstrate stakeholder support or involvement
 - California, Colorado, Delaware, Illinois, Oregon, and Texas

Findings: State SRTS Program Laws

- **Wide variation** in method of administration, application process, and detail re: application criteria and project eligibility
 - More detail in laws that address infrastructure project eligibility (expected given the Federal law's prioritization of infrastructure projects)
- **Evaluation:** 5 of 10 states with SRTS laws include an evaluation requirement
 - California, Delaware, Illinois, New Mexico, and Texas

Findings: State SRTS Program Laws

- Data represent formal (i.e., codified) policy
 - Some states have implemented SRTS programs using the Federal funds through administrative authority (*e.g.*, Iowa, Wisconsin)
 - In many cases, programs are very comprehensive
 - Formal policy favorable
 - Harder to change (requires legislative repeal)
 - State legislatures can “customize” Federal program to local needs as permitted by Federal law

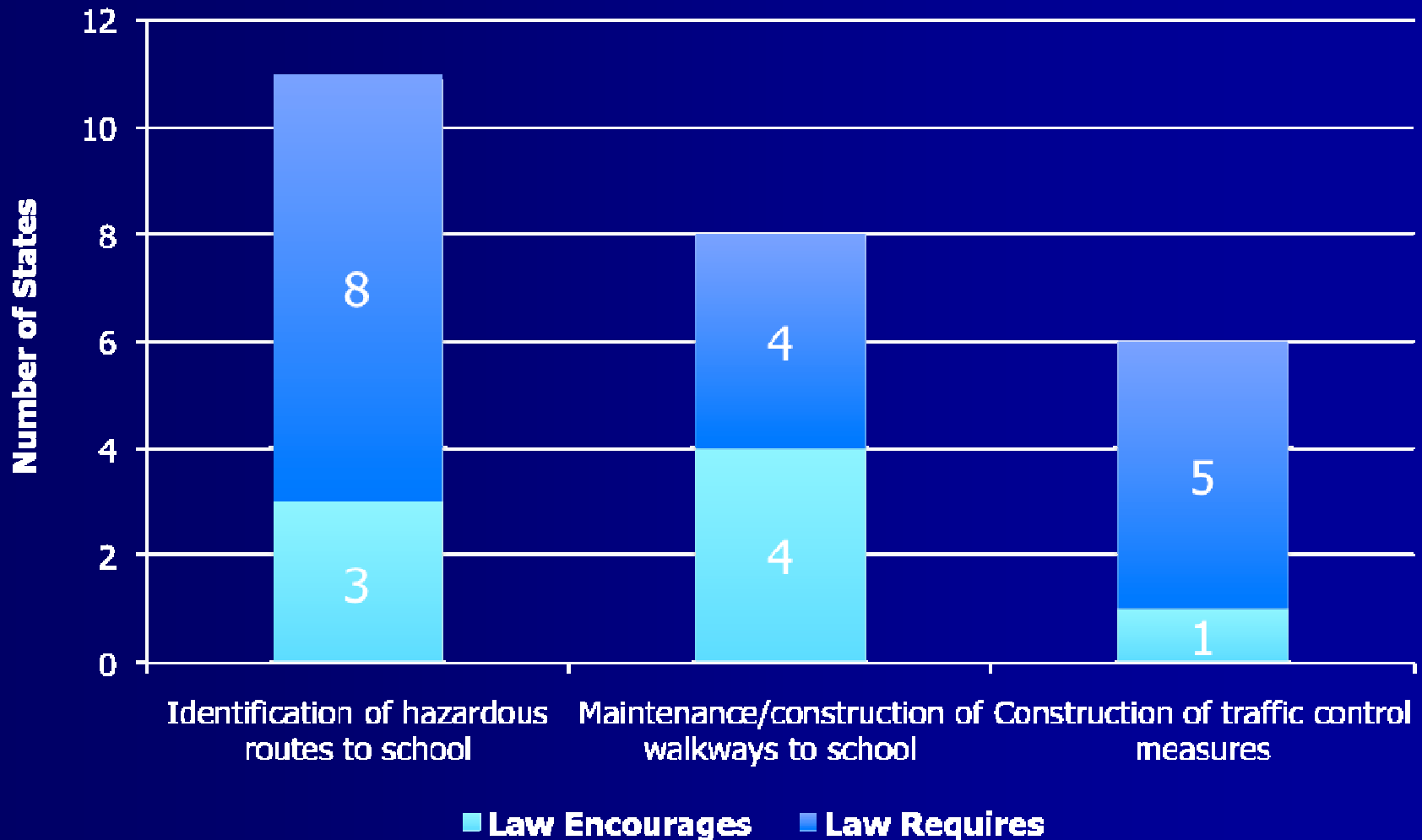


Findings: Other SRTS-Related Laws

- **34 states** have *any* law addressing SRTS—either through a SRTS program law, SRTS-related law, or both
- Arizona, D.C., New York, South Carolina, Texas, and Washington have the most other SRTS-related policy approaches (i.e., non-program)
- **Encouragement:** South Carolina established a Walk/Bike with Your Child to School Day; New Hampshire has a voluntary equivalent

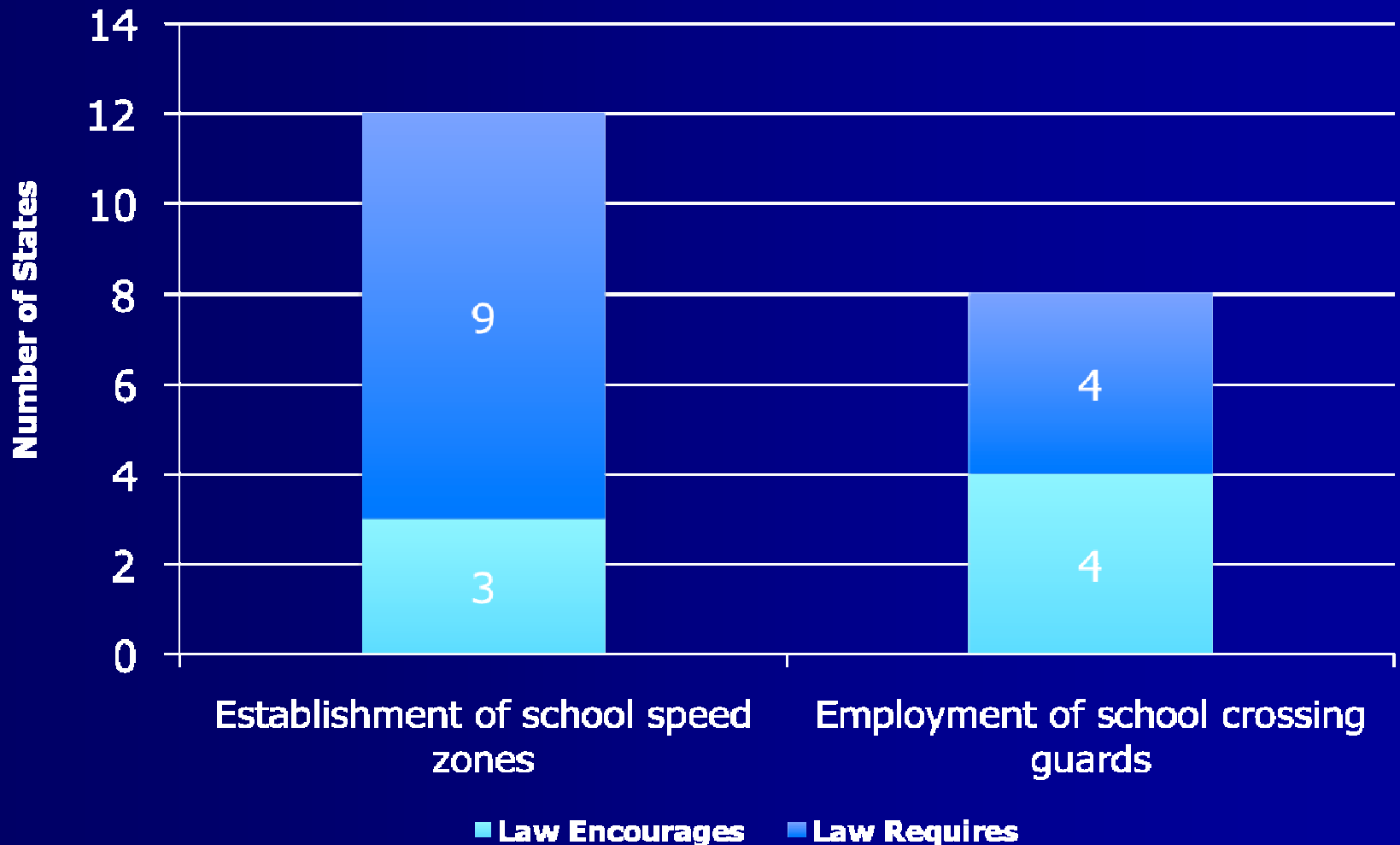
Other SRTS-Related Laws: Engineering

(As of January 1, 2007)



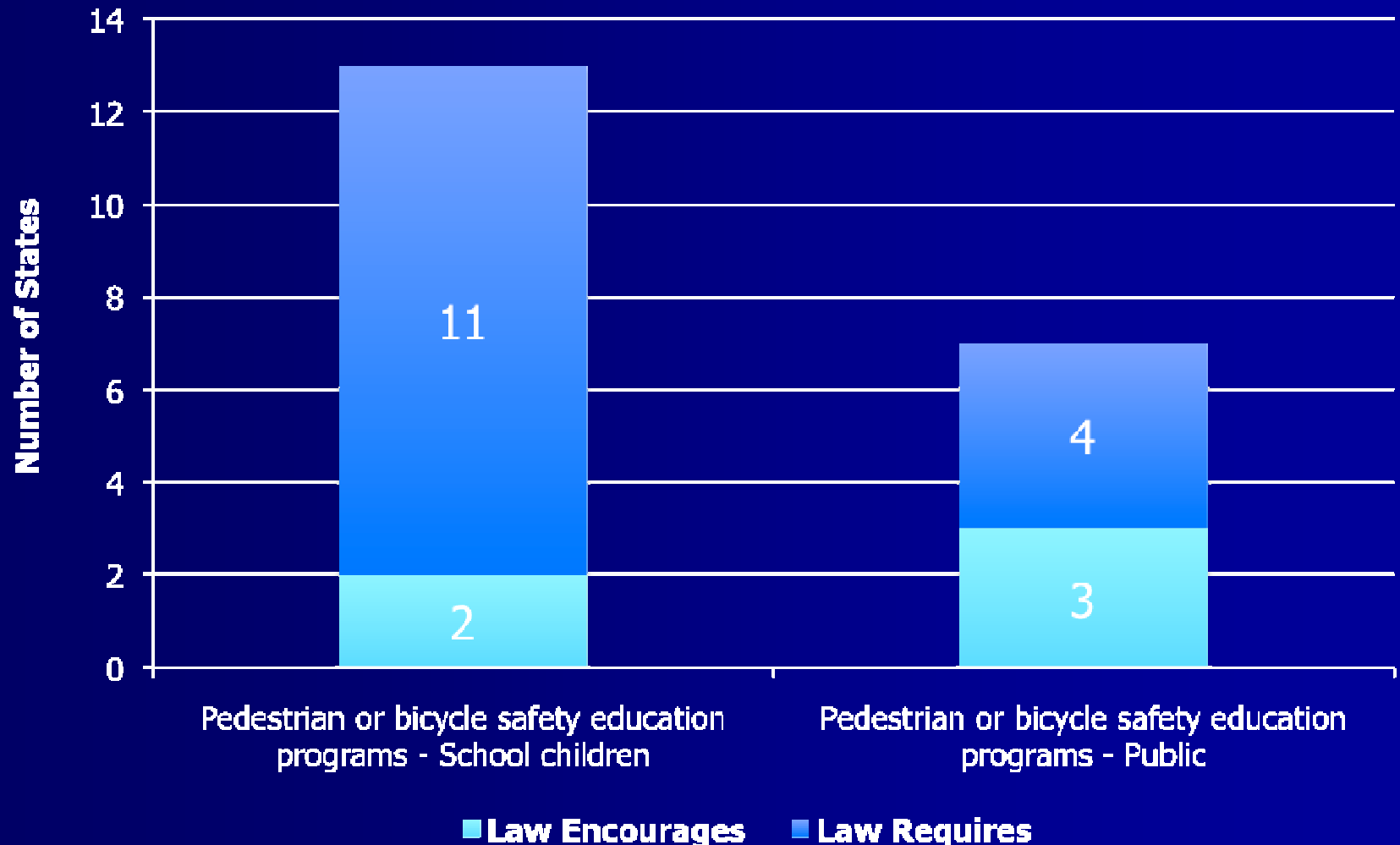
Other Relevant Laws: Enforcement

(As of January 1, 2007)



Other Relevant Laws: Education

(As of January 1, 2007)



Majority of states with non-formal safe routes policy approaches *do not* have formal SRTS programs

Other SRTS-Related Laws	Formal Federal or other SRTS Program*	
	No (n=41)	Yes (n=10)
School siting (specifically mentioning walkability) (n=8)	5 (62.5%)	3 (37.5%)
Identifying hazardous routes to school (n=11)	7 (63.6%)	4 (36.4%)
Maintain/construct sidewalks near schools (n=8)	3 (37.5%)	5 (62.5%)
Constructing traffic control measures (n=6)	5 (83.3%)	1 (16.7%)
Pedestrian/bicycle safety education for <u>students</u> (n=13)	10 (76.9%)	3 (23.1%)
Pedestrian/bicycle safety education for the <u>public</u> (n=7)	3 (42.9%)	4 (57.1%)
Establishing school speed zones (n=12)	9 (75%)	3 (25%)
Employment of school crossing guards (n=8)	5 (62.5%)	3 (37.5%)
Establishes a Walk to School Day or some other awareness effort for walking to school (n=2)	1 (50%)	1 (50%)
State/local funding for SRTS-related projects (n=3)	2 (66.6%)	1 (33.3%)

*Includes both required and voluntary programs

Conclusions

- Wide variation in SRTS policy approaches
- States with SRTS program laws have fewer SRTS-related policy approaches
- States without SRTS program laws tend to employ a greater number of alternative SRTS policy approaches



Conclusions

- Consultant identified important factors that were not found (or rarely found) in state laws:
 - Plan submission as part of application—1 state requires (Delaware), 1 encourages (Oregon)
 - 2 states include provision of additional state \$ for SRTS projects (South Carolina and Texas)
 - No state efforts to alleviate reimbursable nature of Federal SRTS program
 - No long-term funding/support (i.e., ≥ 10 years)
 - No pre- or post-application education
 - No consultant support

Next Steps

- Retrospective legal research (laws effective as of January 1, 2005 and 2006) and prospective legal research (laws effective as of January 1, 2008)
 - Describe the evolution of SRTS and other SRTS-related laws since 2005 passage of SAFETEA-LU
 - Compare results to state childhood obesity rates and other state childhood obesity prevention policies

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