



# Equity and Engagement in School Travel Planning

Reviewing Our “Five E’s” Framework

**Equity and Engagement in School Travel Planning**  
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## Acknowledgements

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## Green Communities Canada

Green Communities Canada (GCC) has been leading a community-based climate action movement since 1995. Based in Peterborough, ON, GCC works with their members from across the country to advance transformative, equitable, and lasting change.

Just over a decade ago, GCC researched and developed a School Travel Planning (STP) framework for Canada. The framework was tested through a national pilot and implemented in 120 schools across all provinces and territories of Canada from 2010 to 2012. Since then, GCC has delivered STP in Toronto and Ottawa and has supported various pilot projects and feasibility studies in communities across Canada through partnership with regional and provincial stakeholders.

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# Executive Summary

This report provides an overview of the desire and need to implement values of equity and engagement in the School Travel Planning process. It will help practitioners reflect upon and integrate equitable approaches into their School Travel Planning work.

The report is organized into four sections. Section 1 provides an overview of our considerations of equity in School Travel Planning and our reasons to review our "Five E's" framework. Next, Section 2 briefly describes the methods of our review process, which consisted of a literature review and discussions with people who have experience in the field. In Section 3, we present and discuss our findings around two main themes: the use of traditional enforcement, and how to practice engagement. Section 4 reports on our proposed revisions to our framework; notably, we change enforcement from being a customary program component to an optional one, and we add engagement and equity as two new "E's" which serve as guiding values for the other "Five E's" in our framework. Lastly, in Section 5, we provide recommendations for practical ways practitioners can integrate these two new "E's" into their work with their school communities.

Please note that our recommendations and conclusions are not intended to be prescriptive across all schools and communities. Rather, they provide a guide that could be implemented differently across schools. The goal of this report is to help practitioners engage with school communities in a way that is inclusive and supports each school's unique needs and experiences.



# Section 1: Introduction to Equity in School Travel Planning

## Why Review Our Framework?

Spring of 2020 saw ongoing and widely publicized police violence against Black people and communities. Following the killing of George Floyd by a Minneapolis police officer, protests and advocacy efforts were ignited around the world, calling for justice and for the eradication of anti-Black racism and associated police violence.

In recognition of the fraught relationship between law enforcement and historically marginalized communities in America, in June 2020 the American non-profit organization Safe Routes Partnership adjusted the organizational framework of their Safe Routes to School program. Several years prior, the organization modified their “Five E’s” framework by refocusing enforcement to promote community approaches rather than police services, and adding equity as a Sixth E. When this approach no longer seemed sufficient in late spring 2020, the Safe Routes Partnership removed enforcement from the Six E’s and added engagement.<sup>1</sup>

These occurrences became a point of reflection for us at Green Communities Canada (GCC). By considering the social climate and the actions of our American counterparts, we recognized the need to review whether and how our School Travel Planning (STP) framework might perpetuate racism and other forms of systemic oppression. To proceed, GCC staff formed an Equity Working Group to identify how our STP framework could proactively address these issues through our work. This document analyzes the state of equity and engagement in STP and recommends ways it can be further advanced.

Two questions guided the review of our STP framework:

1. Should we remove enforcement from our “Five E’s” framework?
2. How can we make our framework anti-oppressive and more equitable?

## Systemic Oppression and Inequity in STP

In active school travel (AST) interventions, equity is often overlooked.<sup>2</sup> This might not only weaken the initiative’s effectiveness, but it may also unintentionally increase inequities.<sup>3</sup> As a starting point for our review, we considered ways the STP process might be not only shaped by systems of oppression, but also serve to reinforce these systems and the inequities they create.

Systems of oppression marginalize people in terms of race, class, gender, sexual orientation, etc., and create barriers to participation in society and access to resources. They mediate travel behaviours and contribute to inequities in health and safety; for instance, consider the uneven distribution of roadway infrastructure and disparities in traffic safety risks related to income and race.<sup>4</sup>

Depending on our social identities, we adopt these systems of oppression in different ways. Some of us might hold biased or ignorant views of marginalized social groups. In the case that STP practitioners might hold false assumptions about certain social groups or be ignorant to their lived realities, there might be little chance for genuine relationships with

<sup>1</sup> Isidro, 2020

<sup>2</sup> Medeiros et al., 2021

<sup>3</sup> Frohlich and Potvin, 2008

<sup>4</sup> Rothman et al., 2020

communities or meaningful participation among community members, straining the effectiveness of the STP program.

Below, we expand on the ways that facilitator bias and ignorance can restrict equity in the STP process.

## Bias and False Assumptions

Facilitator bias can hurt the STP process in a number of ways. While facilitators of STP strive to provide children with positive and healthy experiences with AST, they may be biased toward active travel over other forms of travel. This bias may be entangled with the false assumption that AST is safe and/or accessible to all children.

Examples of false assumptions include assuming that:

- All students have access to adequate equipment and suitable all-weather clothing (e.g., for winter or rainy weather);
- Students and their caregivers do not have disabilities, either visible or invisible, that limit their mobility;
- Students commute from the same home address throughout the school week, or that they have a stable address altogether;
- Caregivers are able to accommodate additional time for sustainable school travel;
- AST or travel by school bus is a positive or empowering experience for all children and their caregivers;
- All communities are safe places for students and their caregivers to navigate using AST or the school bus;
- Intergenerational familial influences do not affect AST behaviours, school bus use, or perceptions of AST safety;
- Gendered barriers to AST are not present;
- LGBTQ2S+ students do not face barriers or have concerns around navigating the public sphere.

Ignorance to the realities of marginalized social groups can also lead to the false assumption that the school-level STP committee, and results of data collection, are representative of the voices and lived experiences of the school community as a whole.

Related false assumptions include assuming that:

- A survey or invitation to attend a meeting is widely available to an entire community, and everyone is equally able to respond (e.g., neglecting unequal barriers of time, language, access to technology);
- Adults understand the perspectives of children and youth, without directly involving children and youth in the process;
- Everyone values or supports police involvement in STP;
- It's a good idea to prioritize action items expressed by members of school communities with more social privilege and power, before taking the time to understand whether these items are desired by the community as a whole;
- Everyone who voices their concerns will be genuinely listened to;
- AST means the same thing to everyone, and all families agree that increasing AST rates is a worthwhile goal.

## Ignorance to Existing Inequities

Overall, society inequitably advantages some and marginalizes others. Regardless of good intentions, failure to recognize and address existing inequities through the STP program can inadvertently reinforce these inequities, and further oppress marginalized social groups while reinforcing the status quo of unequal power relations. Consequently, it is essential that facilitators recognize and address the following considerations:

- There are power imbalances and differences in worldviews between ourselves, members of STP committees, and other members of a school community, which may impact who is able and willing to contribute to this work.
- Research demonstrates people of colour and less affluent communities as more likely to live in areas with inadequate active transportation infrastructure.
- For various reasons, some students may be absent from school when student travel surveys are being conducted in classrooms; hence their travel modes and the reasons for their absence

are not counted, perhaps obscuring the survey results.

- There are risks to personal safety beyond traffic-related dangers (e.g., racism, bullying, violence, gang activity, sexual harassment, assault, hate crimes, etc.).
- Police-administered traffic enforcement, and the general involvement of police, might negatively impact the well-being of community members, particularly those who are historically marginalized (e.g., the financial impact of a parking ticket fine; the “school-to-prison-pipeline”<sup>5</sup>; and emotional/psychological harm of interactions with police).



**Figure 1.** Green Communities Canada’s School Travel Planning Framework of “Five E’s.”

## Overview and Shortcomings of Our Existing STP Framework

After assessing the relationship between (in)equity and the STP program, we turned to our “Five E’s” framework to consider potential areas for improvement.

Our framework aims to offer a holistic approach to addressing school travel concerns. This “Five E’s” framework consists of 5 “action areas” – education, encouragement, engineering, enforcement, and evaluation – that comprise an Action Plan for each school. The framework is shown in **Figure 1** on the left.

A shortcoming we’ve noted in this framework is that a school’s Action Plan could theoretically address each of the “Five E’s” without ever engaging with the broader school community. Without meaningful engagement within a school’s community, it can be challenging to achieve program goals and to find solutions that work for everyone in a school community.

Further, in our existing STP framework, goals have been outlined as observable changes in behaviour and the built environment. The main goals of the program are to:

1. Increase the number of students using active and sustainable modes for all or part of their commute to school.
2. Address ongoing transportation and traffic safety problems.

The goal of increasing AST includes four sub-goals, shown in **Figure 2** on the next page. In our STP programs, these goals are not always met within the time frame of one to three years. At schools where these goals are not achieved, does that mean the program has “failed”?

<sup>5</sup> Power-Pac. (2015).



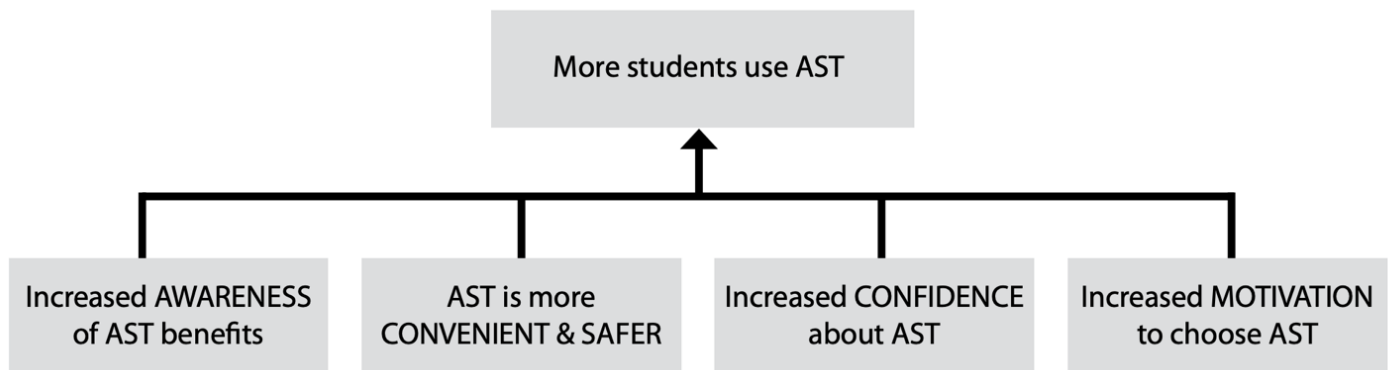
Furthermore, by focusing on predetermined goals to change behaviour and the built environment, the existing framework fails to acknowledge that not all school community members may have agreed with those goals. Pushing forth these specific goals, without explicit efforts to engage with and/or consider the priorities of all school community members, may result in an unsuccessful program or worse, have unintended negative impacts for the school community.

## Stakeholder Power and Involvement

A foundational component of STP is the ability to bring together a broad range of stakeholders to address barriers to AST. However, the current framework fails to recognize differences in power between stakeholder groups, and importantly, how certain stakeholders will be more impacted than others by the outcomes of the STP process.

For instance, the STP facilitator – who acts as the “connector” between regional and school-level STP committees – holds a majority of the power in terms of deciding who gets to be on the committee(s), whose voice is heard, and who gets to connect with other members.

In addition to the power held by the facilitator over the formation of the STP Committee, another notable power dynamic is that some stakeholders, such as school principals, school trustees and city councillors, have undeniable power over other stakeholders, such as parents and students. Although one may argue the STP facilitator should prioritize the involvement of the principal (or vice-principal) – because an engaged and enthusiastic principal is essential for an impactful STP process – it is also important to remember *who* the STP program is designed to support.



**Figure 2.** The main goal of the STP program and its sub-goals. *The Canadian STP Toolkit: Guide for Facilitators.*

## Section 2: Methods

Recall that two questions guided our review of our existing STP framework:

1. Should we remove enforcement from our “Five E’s” framework?
2. How can we make our framework anti-oppressive and more equitable?

To address these questions, we reviewed articles related to police in schools, anti-oppressive practices, and equity. As our review progressed, we learned of additional resources to review, particularly around equitable engagement. Altogether, our working group collectively reviewed various reports, academic journal articles, essays, news articles, organizational statements and policies, blog posts, webinars, and resources for practitioners.

Throughout our review process, we also had discussions with informants who have experience with STP and/or equitable community engagement. These key informants affirmed that we were on the right track with our approach and provided additional resources for consideration. Their contributions are cited throughout this document; to maintain their anonymity, we assigned each informant with a number between 1 and 6. We also presented to and gathered input from members of the AST Canada Working Group at their quarterly meeting.

Key findings from our reviews, discussions with informants, and input from the AST Canada Working Group were organized into summary tables and subsequently distilled into a list of themes, with two overarching categories. We then compared these themes against our STP framework to see where they did not align with the recommendations from our review process.

Additionally, members of our working group participated in relevant professional development sessions including webinars on community



engagement hosted by the Safe Routes Partnership; a 9-week learning experience with the Thrivance Group at The Dignity Institute;<sup>6</sup> and a certificate program in Program Evaluation for Youth Wellbeing.<sup>7</sup> Relevant findings from these convenings have been integrated into our updates to and recommendations for the STP framework.

A caveat to our research and to research in general is that the access to tools and resources to undertake research is itself informed by systems that inequitably confer power and privilege. Our report is limited in that our review panel is not wholly representative of the day-to-day experiences of those who experience this marginalization.

<sup>6</sup> The Dignity Institute is a virtual, 9-week, 40-hour peer learning experience. Participants learn to apply Dignity-Infused Planning and Community Engagement (DICE) principles, sequence, and rhythm to their praxis and advocacy work: <https://thrivancegroup.com/dignity-institute>

<sup>7</sup> Program Evaluation for Youth Wellbeing is a free 10-week online certificate course about the main concepts, approaches, and practices relevant to evaluating youth sector programs and initiatives provided by YouthRex: <https://youthrex.com/opec/>

# Section 3: Findings and Discussion

Our literature review and discussions with key informants provided a starting point to answering our research questions. Our findings fall under two categories: 1), the use of traditional enforcement, and 2), how to practice engagement. These themes are discussed below.

## 1. Use of Traditional Enforcement

In this section we discuss our findings around the role of traditional enforcement in facilitating safe and active travel, the impact of police presence in schools, and alternatives to traditional methods of enforcement.

### a. Effectiveness of traffic enforcement

To begin, receiving a ticket does not appear to be closely correlated with a reduction in subsequent dangerous driving behaviour in individual drivers.<sup>8</sup> Our review also did not find evidence of the effectiveness of enforcing bylaw infractions such as illegal stopping, parking or U-turns.<sup>9</sup> Yet, some research demonstrates that traditional police-administered traffic enforcement can effectively reduce speeding and risk of fatal vehicular crashes when police are actively enforcing those behaviours.<sup>10</sup> The effects of enforcement on reducing unwanted behaviours do not appear to hold up over time, however, without continued traffic enforcement.<sup>11</sup>

Moreover, when it comes to ensuring safe school travel, many believe that enforcement is not

sufficient because it does not address the root of *why* that behaviour is happening in the first place.<sup>12</sup> Instead, frequent violations of some traffic rules (e.g., illegal parking, making U-turns, excessive speed) may be indicative of deficiencies in the design of the built environment. If inadequate infrastructure makes people feel that their needs are not being met, they may choose unsafe and unruly driver behaviours. For this reason, it is important to examine the reasons and root causes that result in the behaviours observed, rather than default to requesting enforcement measures. The E of engineering should be the first and foremost approach.

### b. Police presence in school zones

In Canada, traffic enforcement can be racially biased, especially in the case of traffic stops.<sup>13</sup> Not to mention that such traffic enforcement brings police into contact with racialized communities. In America, numerous police killings of racialized people occurred following routine traffic stops.

The literature available on the impact of police in schools, particularly for Black, Indigenous, and students of colour, is more prevalent in the American context, where School Resource Officers (SRO) are more numerous than they are in Canada.<sup>14</sup> Students of one design planning project cited “police on patrol” and “presence of police stations” as additions they



<sup>8</sup> Lawpoolsri, Li, & Braver, 2007

<sup>9</sup> America Walks, 2020; Key Informant 3, 2020

<sup>10</sup> Rezapour Mashhadi, Saha, & Ksaibati, 2017; Stanojević & Lajunen, 2013; Yannis, Papadimitriou, & Constantinos, 2008

<sup>11</sup> Key Informant 3, 2020; La Vigne, 2007; Williams, 2020

<sup>12</sup> America Walks, 2020; Isidro, 2020; Key Informant 3, 2020

<sup>13</sup> Cecco, 2022; Glowacki, 2019

<sup>14</sup> Balingit, Strauss, & Bellware, 2020; Burke, 2020; Dignity in Schools Campaign, 2016a, 2016b; Kamenetz, 2020; McKenna & White, 2017

would recommend to improve the safety of their neighbourhoods.<sup>15</sup> However, another survey that targeted underrepresented youth found that 15% of students felt unsafe in the presence of police.<sup>16</sup> This is in line with a review done by the Toronto District School Board on their SRO program which found that many students felt surveilled and targeted by SROs, resulting in their intimidation and discomfort at school.<sup>17</sup>



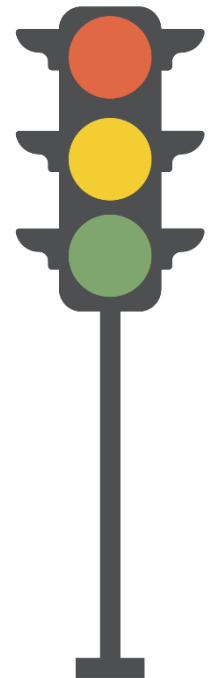
methods of enforcement aim to address and repair the root cause of the transgression, contrary to traditional enforcement, which punishes individuals for their behaviours.

Overall, the decision to include or exclude police in schools should be determined through consultation and engagement with the community, with an emphasis on hearing from traditionally underrepresented individuals. Rather than merely consulting with the school's parent council committee, practitioners should consult with adults and/or leaders who are a part of, or who have a good relationship with, underrepresented communities.

### c. Alternatives to traditional enforcement

Research demonstrates that Automated Speed Enforcement (ASE; i.e., using camera technology) can be used as an effective means of reducing motorist speed violations, crashes, and reducing speed overall.<sup>18</sup> ASE does not require police presence, and therefore, has the potential to result in more equitable enforcement.<sup>19</sup> Yet, ASE is limited in scope; in school traffic scenarios, speed is oftentimes not a main concern, unlike distracted driving, illegal parking, failing to yield, etc.

When police administered enforcement is required, alternative forms, such as Restorative Justice or Transformative Justice, should be considered.<sup>20</sup> In school traffic scenarios, these forms of justice could be utilized in instances that have stemmed from poverty, racial profiling, or over-policing of marginalized communities. These alternative



<sup>15</sup> Blatchford, 2018; Key Informant 4, 2020; Petty, 2020

<sup>16</sup> Boyd, 2020

<sup>17</sup> Toronto District School Board, 2017

<sup>18</sup> Quistberg, Thompson, Curtin, et al., 2019; Decina, Thomas, Srinivasan, et al., 2007; Poole, Johnson & Thomas, 2017

<sup>19</sup> America Walks, 2020; Key Informant 3, 2020

<sup>20</sup> Dignity in Schools Campaign, 2016a, 2016b; Kamenetz, 2020; Key Informant 2, 2020; Key Informant 3, 2020

## 2. How to Practice Engagement

Our review found four main themes associated with how to practice engagement in a way that fosters equitable and meaningful participation: building relationships, reducing barriers to participation, addressing transport inequities, and supporting participation among children and youth. These themes are discussed below.

### a. Building relationships

Our discussions with key informants and our participation in professional development activities brought us to understand that trusting and genuine relationships are foundational to meaningful community engagement. Importantly, relationships should be centered around collaboration versus consultation, and engagement versus outreach. Although outreach has a role to play in community organizing, it is more of a short-term plan; on the other hand, engagement is a long-term process and can create self-defined communities (affinity groups).

Forming relationships early in the STP process is essential for goal setting and later phases in the program. Yet, authentic relationship-building takes time. It involves listening to community members' perspectives, remaining open and receptive to their suggestions, and being flexible to what has been learned. Being attentive to the things that matter to the community can help to demonstrate support and commitment. In addition, to help avoid disappointment and frustration throughout the program, it is paramount that facilitators set realistic

expectations about the scope of STP work, by being transparent from the onset.

Each phase of the STP program should incorporate opportunities to listen to students, families, educators, school staff, and school leaders, and collaborate with community organizations while building ongoing engagement opportunities into the program structure.<sup>21</sup> For instance, when collecting data in and around schools, facilitators should strive to make the research process as collaborative as possible. This requires facilitators to step back and thoughtfully reflect on what they've learned from community members before presenting ideas for solutions.<sup>22</sup>

In terms of effective techniques, having a “grassroots feel” to the work can help engage local community members.<sup>23</sup> For example, community storytelling can be one way to help connect meaningfully with people.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, providing compensation for people's time can be another way to engage with community members.<sup>25</sup> For more examples of how to connect and engage with community members, refer to the Recommendations Across the Five Action-Oriented “Es” table at the end of this report.

Furthermore, cultural competence is essential when engaging with communities of diverse backgrounds.<sup>26</sup> Cultural competence involves understanding and making space for the nuanced ways that community members might wish to make decisions. Whereas one community may value the perspectives and decisions of individuals, another may prefer decisions to be made collectively, through community consensus. Consensus-based decision making is a dynamic process in which all members of a community work together to reach a

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<sup>21</sup> Safe Routes Partnership, 2021a

<sup>22</sup> Key Informant 1, 2020; Key Informant 2, 2020; Key Informant 3, 2020; Key Informant 5, 2020; Key Informant 6, 2020; Mintzer, 2017; Mennesson, Jones, Lieberman, et al., 2020; Riveron, 2020; Safe Routes Partnership, 2018 2020a, 2020b

<sup>23</sup> Key Informant 2, 2020; Key Informant 6, 2020; Safe Routes Partnership, 2020b

<sup>24</sup> Alumni Learning Consortium, 2020; Safe Routes Partnership, 2020b

<sup>25</sup> Key Informant 2, 2020; Key Informant 5, 2020; Key Informant 6, 2020

<sup>26</sup> Durham District School Board, 2021; Fayant, Mathews, Christmas, et al., 2020; First Nations Child & Family Caring Society of Canada, 2019; Key Informant 6, 2020; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013a; Rock, Fletcher, Lyons, et al., 2013; Safe Routes Partnership, 2020b

conclusion that everyone is comfortable with. In contrast to majority voting, decisions are made by considering the perspectives of everyone involved.<sup>27</sup>

Relatedly, research on AST interventions advises practitioners to consider the norms and capacity within the community. This awareness helps to frame the goals of the intervention and tailor solutions to the community's needs.<sup>28</sup> To succeed with this approach, the practitioner is expected to research the community beforehand and must be willing to adapt their approach as the program progresses.

## b. Reducing barriers to participation

Ensuring participation of members of equity-deserving groups will enable the STP process to have a greater long-term impact with potentially greater benefits and the ability to address AST participation equitably, at the wider community level.<sup>29</sup> For instance, outreach initiatives should be implemented within the broader community and strive to be especially inclusive of disadvantaged groups, to help reduce inequities in physical activity participation.<sup>30</sup>

To ensure all students can safely participate in and benefit from AST, actions should be taken to reduce barriers to participation among subgroups of children.<sup>31</sup> These barriers can be layered, especially if we consider the intersectionality of identities; the ways we experience the world are shaped by multiple aspects of ourselves, including our gender identity, race, socioeconomic status, and abilities. Practicing equity means recognizing how the different identities that make up each person shapes how they understand and experience the issues that

are being described,<sup>32</sup> and in turn, how their identities may shape their participation.

Reducing barriers to participation entails making everyone feel welcomed and valued for their contributions. Facilitators can work to hold space for the voices of marginalized community members or help raise their voices throughout the STP process. During the process, it may become apparent that holding open conversations about race, ableism, financial constraints, etc. are necessary. Although these conversations may feel uncomfortable, the discomfort is a necessary part of the process,<sup>33</sup> and the conversations can serve as valuable learning experiences for everyone involved. If these topics are not discussed — and assumptions are made that everyone in the school community has the same experiences and comes from the same “place” — then some community members might feel disregarded and uninterested in participating.



<sup>27</sup> Madden, 2017; Seeds for Change, 2020

<sup>28</sup> Medeiros, Buttazzoni, Coen, et al., 2021

<sup>29</sup> Medeiros et al., 2021

<sup>30</sup> Clark et al., 2018; Vander Ploeg et al., 2014; Medeiros et al., 2021

<sup>31</sup> Medeiros et al., 2021

<sup>32</sup> Pitter, 2020; Rock, Fletcher, Lyons, et al., 2013

<sup>33</sup> Pollock, 2008

When engaging community members, it is important to acknowledge each individual's unique needs by emphasizing equity and inclusivity.<sup>34</sup> Consider providing honorariums or other incentives to acknowledge the time commitment and address potential barriers to participation.<sup>35</sup> Many schools and municipalities have adopted equity frameworks and indexes, which practitioners can employ to better integrate their equity work in STP.

Further, specific initiatives should be implemented within the wider community that target disadvantaged groups.<sup>36</sup> According to physical activity research, tailoring intervention methods to target specific groups has positive results on reducing inequities in physical activity participation.<sup>37</sup>

### c. Addressing transport inequities

Equity is rarely considered explicitly in municipal planning and the needs of children and marginalized community members are often overlooked.<sup>38</sup> In addition, Black, Indigenous, People of Colour (BIPOC), older adults, and people who have low incomes frequently live in areas with limited access to public transit, traffic calming, and active transportation infrastructure.<sup>39</sup>

Historically, BIPOC individuals have faced eviction and loss of their lands for development in favour of white communities,<sup>40</sup> and improvement of transportation infrastructure has led to gentrification.<sup>41</sup> This history is important context to consider when working with individuals in the BIPOC community who may be skeptical of the benefits of

STP and/or fear that its goals might ultimately displace them from their communities.

In addition, the lack of diversity in urban planning worsens inequitable planning practices<sup>42</sup> while developers are typically not held to high standards of equity concerns.<sup>43</sup> Thus, we cannot assume that the infrastructure that benefits privileged members (e.g., slow streets, bike lanes) will automatically also benefit members of marginalized communities. Until marginalized communities feel safe walking, cycling, using transit, and being outside, we must respect their right to drive their cars.<sup>44</sup>

Before implementing an STP program, we advise practitioners to conduct school-specific assessments of existing resources and areas that may need improvement (e.g., cycling infrastructure, sidewalks). For schools that already have high rates of AST, such as those in neighbourhoods of low socioeconomic status, communities may benefit more from practitioners evaluating environmental risks to ensure the safety of AST routes. Most importantly, the goal of increasing rates of AST does not apply to all communities, and AST interventions should not focus merely on increasing rates of AST but also on increasing the quality and safety of AST.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Key Informant 5, 2020; Mintzer, 2017; Mennesson, Jones, Lieberman, et al., 2020; Riveron, 2020; Safe Routes Partnership, 2018, 2020a, 2020b

<sup>35</sup> Key Informant 2, 2020; Key Informant 5, 2020

<sup>36</sup> Medeiros et al., 2021

<sup>37</sup> Clark et al., 2018; Vander Ploeg et al., 2014

<sup>38</sup> City of Toronto, 2018, 2020; City of Toronto Public Health, 2019; Drakeford & Tafari Cannady II, 2020; Making Space, 2020; Pitter, 2020

<sup>39</sup> Amberber & Verlinden, 2020; De Francia, 2019; Drakeford & Tafari Cannady II, 2020; Key Informant 6, 2020; Making Space, 2020; Oxas, n.d.

<sup>40</sup> De Francia, 2019; Oxas, n.d.

<sup>41</sup> Armenta, 2020; Butler, 2020; Key Informant 5, 2020

<sup>42</sup> Ahsan, Belay, Moriah, et al., 2020

<sup>43</sup> Key Informant 4, 2020

<sup>44</sup> Armenta, 2020; Butler, 2020; Thomas, 2020

<sup>45</sup> Medeiros et al., 2021

## d. Supporting participation of children and youth

Lastly, the STP process should incorporate student voices while creating opportunities for their engagement. Listening to students' perspectives and experiences is critical when developing action items and encouraging their involvement.

Unfortunately, student involvement does not always occur. Instead, children and youth are often underrepresented and/or under-engaged in planning that directly impacts them.<sup>46</sup> As described in AST intervention research, engaging children through participatory research, especially those in racialized and/or marginalized communities, is important for understanding how equity factors intersect to influence perceptions and engagement with AST.<sup>47</sup>

Aligning youth engagement efforts with other curricular/extra-curricular activities will often lead to positive outcomes and mitigate time and resource

capacity restrictions.<sup>48</sup> For example, involving students in the design and implementation of data collection tools will allow them to offer their perspectives while also positioning the practitioner to learn more about their peers. Additionally, involving children and youth in community engagement event planning helps the practitioner better understand their vision for the community. Regardless of the type of activity at hand, youth have an important perspective on mobility and can bring creativity to efforts that connect everyone to places beyond STP.<sup>49</sup>

For more insight into supporting youth engagement, check out *Voice Opportunity Power*, a toolkit to involve young people in the making of their neighbourhoods; *Meaningful Youth Engagement Factsheet* to Advance Global Change, developed by YouthREX; and the youth-centered *Active School Travel Toolkit* created by the Town of Ajax.



<sup>46</sup> City of Toronto, 2018, 2020; City of Toronto Public Health, 2019; Key Informant 1, 2020

<sup>47</sup> Medeiros et al., 2021

<sup>48</sup> Key Informant 2, 2020; Key Informant 4, 2020; Key Informant 5, 2020

<sup>49</sup> Safe Routes Partnership, 2021b



# Section 4: Revising Our STP Framework

In this section, we answer our guiding questions based on our research and interview findings and outline the revisions we aspire to make to our framework.

## Answering Our Guiding Questions

### a. Should we remove enforcement from our “Five E’s” framework?

Our review found that traditional police enforcement often unfairly targets populations who are already systemically oppressed and does not address many of the root causes of dangerous behaviours (e.g., poorly designed infrastructure). In addition, receiving a ticket does not appear to be closely correlated with a reduction in dangerous driving behaviour in individual drivers. On the other hand, the use of ASE systems instead of police officers presents a promising opportunity to eliminate biased and prejudicial enforcement practices and has been shown to effectively reduce speeding.

Whereas anti-oppression champions are generally opposed to enforcement, our research highlights the need to engage local communities in the decision-making of program activities. This means that practitioners should consult with a range of school community members before deciding whether to include or exclude enforcement at individual schools.

Thus, enforcement will remain as one of the E’s of our STP framework but will change from being a customary component to an optional one. When enforcement is included, we recommend considering Transformative and Restorative Justice as alternatives to traditional punitive measures of enforcement.

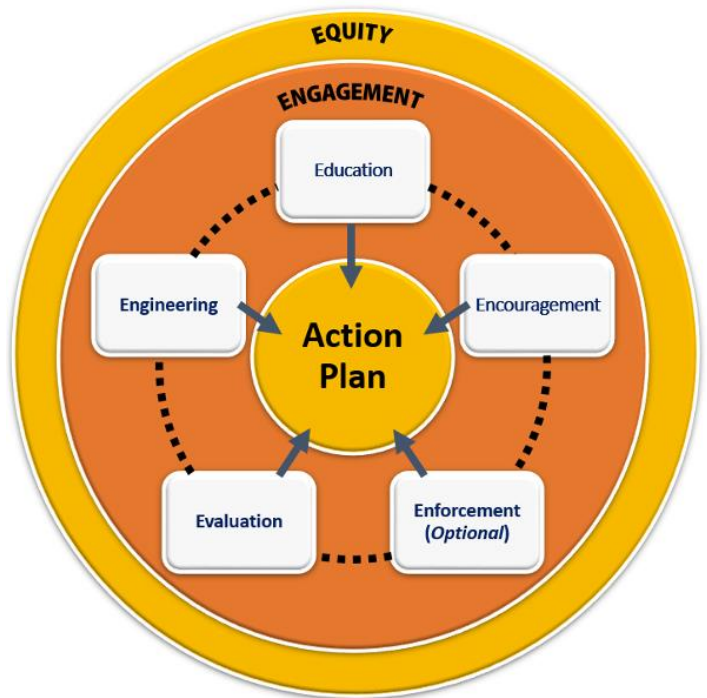
### b. How can we make our framework anti-oppressive and more equitable?

In addition to amending the role of enforcement, we had to address the potential for unjust and harmful outcomes of STP when equity is not considered explicitly. Community engagement emerged as being central to the process of prioritizing equity in STP. Accordingly, we are introducing equity and engagement as two additional E’s, to help guide each phase of the program and throughout the development, implementation, and follow-up of the Action Plan. [Figure 3](#) on the following page illustrates our updated “Seven E’s” framework. The inner lens is engagement, in recognition that community engagement is needed to ensure equity across each action area. The outer lens is equity, through which all aspects of STP, including engagement, must be approached. Based on our research for this report, we have developed the [Equity and Engagement Guidance Checklist](#) as a tool to inform considerations of how to incorporate equitable community engagement and evaluation into the STP process.

These two new lenses can help us form trusting relationships with community members as well as redistribute some of the power held by the facilitator and certain influential stakeholders. In turn, the process can help make space for people from equity-deserving groups whose voices and stories we may not usually hear. Facilitators should consider the nature of the power dynamics at play when evaluating where to focus engagement efforts.

Another way we can revise our STP framework is by re-evaluating how we measure the program’s impact and success. In the preceding framework, the program’s four sub-goals (see Figure 2 on page 4) are quite limiting in that they only define success in ways that relate to AST.

Goals for STP must consider the time required to build authentic relationships with the community. Oftentimes, the STP program goals are not accomplished under the time frame of one to three years, therefore, we re-considered the time frame by which goals are set and assessed. Our new goal-setting model is centered around what can be accomplished in the short-term (i.e., less than a year) versus what is possible in the longer-term. Short-term goals require community collaboration from the get-go, and longer-term goals allow the community’s goals to evolve over time. In cases where short-term goals are not met, the community should play a central role in re-evaluating them moving forward.



**Figure 3.** The new “Seven E’s” STP Framework of Green Communities Canada.

**Short Term Goals.** The progress of these goals is to be assessed at the end of the first year of the STP program. Notable examples of short-term goals include demonstrating that:

- Students and their families, including those from equity-seeking groups, are meaningfully engaged in the STP process and/or program activities;
- There is a school-wide shift toward more positive attitudes regarding active and sustainable forms of school travel.

**Medium-Long Term Goals.** The progress of these goals is to be assessed after and beyond the second year of the STP program. Prominent examples of medium-long term goals include:

1. **Improved safety, comfort, and accessibility of AST, by:**
  - Ensuring adequate infrastructure for active and other sustainable travel modes;
  - Reducing the number and frequency of dangerous driver behaviours at the school and along routes to school.
2. **Increased rates of active and sustainable school travel. In other words:**
  - Increasing walking, wheeling, or other forms of sustainable travel (e.g., public transit) to school for all students living within the “walk zone,” as determined by the school board (this includes travel by personal mobility devices);
  - Increasing the rates of taking the school bus for students living within the “bus zone” (i.e., students who are eligible for transportation by school bus).

# Section 5: How to Apply Equity and Engagement in STP

In this section, we provide recommendations for methods to incorporate equity and engagement in STP work. The recommendations are organized into two tables: the first table highlights recommendations as the school community moves through the six phases of STP, and the second table provides examples of how to integrate the two new “E’s” into each of the “Five E’s” of its Action Plan. These recommendations will help practitioners and the school community design, implement, and adjust the STP program to prioritize equity and engagement at each step.



We recognize that most, if not all, of the facilitators and organizations who deliver STP work – GCC included – have insufficient capacity and resources to comprehensively incorporate our revised framework and recommendations into their STP process.

Instead, these recommendations can serve to demonstrate the urgent need for additional resources and to inform the approaches of existing and new STP programs across Canada.

**Table 1. Recommendations across the Six Phases of the STP Process**

STP Phase	Strategies to incorporate equity and engagement
<p><b>Phase 1a:</b> Set-up at Regional Level</p>	<p><b>Establish regional STP Committee</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recruit members that represent the diversity of participating schools.</li> <li>Provide diversity, equity, and inclusion training for all committee members (including about transportation equity).</li> </ul> <p><b>Hire STP facilitators</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hire facilitators whose racial and cultural backgrounds reflect the diversity of the communities they will be working with.</li> <li>Consider equity during the hiring processes for facilitators and other program staff.</li> <li>Strive for adequate financing that covers the facilitator’s time and that supports participating school communities (e.g., honoraria for participants, funding to cover some AST activities at schools).</li> <li>Provide diversity, equity, and inclusion training for new and continuing facilitators.</li> </ul> <p><b>Build support for AST</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consider transportation equity when reviewing and developing policies, procedures, and practices that support AST.</li> <li>Seek and reflect upon learnings around equity and engagement from STP facilitators.</li> <li>Report measures of equity and equitable engagement when documenting work.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Phase 1b:</b> Set-up at School Level</p>	<p><b>Select potential schools</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Prioritize schools in neighbourhoods with weaker networks of active transportation infrastructure, especially those with higher concentrations of low-income families and a sizeable proportion of racialized/marginalized families.</li> <li>Minimize the number of schools per facilitator to maximize resources per school, as higher needs schools may be more challenging and require more time to engage in STP.</li> </ul> <p><b>Complete School Agreement</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Discuss the program’s equity and engagement goals with school representatives before signing school agreement.</li> </ul> <p><b>Complete School Profile</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Where possible, collect demographic data about the community; this will help the practitioner gauge whether your engagement efforts are reaching a representative and equitable proportion of your school population.</li> </ul> <p><b>Establish School’s STP Committee</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Encourage students to participate on the committee and plan for their involvement.</li> <li>Invite a diversity of participants, particularly:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➢ Individuals with differing mobility needs, such as people who use wheelchairs or people with visual impairment.</li> <li>➢ Students and parents whose homes are dispersed across the school’s neighbourhood and who travel by different</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

## Phase 1b:

### Set-up at School Level

- modes; they may face unique travel challenges that may not be obvious at the school site.
- Girls and parents of girls, as studies have shown that girls are less likely to travel by active modes and tend to have lower levels of independent mobility than boys.
- Non-binary and transgender students.
- Students, parents and caregivers from different cultural backgrounds.

#### Reduce barriers to participation when planning committee meetings

- Ensure meeting times are convenient for as many committee members as possible and prioritize the schedules of students and parents/caregivers.
- The location should be accessible to all committee members (e.g., wheelchair accessible).
- Provide options for childcare at meetings, if needed, so that members with young children can attend.
- Be aware of holidays and holy days celebrated and observed by different faiths and cultures in your school's community.
- Be welcoming and informal; some members may feel intimidated by an overly formal setting.
- Provide honorariums or other incentives for community-based participants, if funding allows (e.g., free meals, childcare, or transit reimbursement).

#### Establish a timeline

- Allow sufficient time to get to know the community through the STP process and participate in other community events to help the community feel supported and valued.
- Be flexible to allow for potential disruptions/delays.
- Remember that taking time to engage with the school community in the early stages of the STP process will support success in later stages as well, especially Phase 6 (Keep it Going).

#### Notify the school community

- Communications about STP activities should go out through various channels so that all families are informed (e.g., paper notices sent home if internet access is a barrier).
- Consider language needs and literacy levels when communicating with families. When translating printed materials is not practical, provide spoken translation at events. In written documents, aim for a grade 5 to 8 reading level.

## Phase 2:

### Assess Conditions

- Use the information from Phase 1b to plan for data collection based on the needs and best ways of engaging with each school community.
- When creating and distributing the Family Survey, consider language and other barriers to participation and find ways to overcome them (i.e., by seeking translation services and exploring of alternative means of distribution).
- If there is low participation or poor engagement with the first attempt(s), conceive alternate approaches to data collection and try again. Do not base the action plan on inadequate baseline information.

<p><b>Phases 3 &amp; 4:</b> Develop and Implement Action Plan</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recognize that a community's basic needs should take precedence before a school can participate in STP. Address existing equity concerns through the creation of specific action items, where applicable.</li> <li>• Throughout the implementation of the action plan, maintain open communication when providing updates to the STP Committee, even for action items that do not directly require their support; being transparent and inclusive supports enhanced community involvement and ownership of the process and its outcomes. Having thorough community involvement will support help in Phase 6 (Keep it Going).</li> </ul>
<p><b>Phase 5:</b> Reassess Conditions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Incorporate the information gained in Phases 1b - 4 to plan the approach to data collection based on the needs/best ways of engaging with each school community.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Phase 6:</b> Keep it Going</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• See recommendations from Phases 1a - Phase 5. If equity and engagement are the primary focuses during the set-up and early stages of the program, the remainder of the program is well positioned for ongoing success.</li> </ul>

**Table 2. Recommendations Across the "Five E's" of the STP Process**

Action Area	Strategies to incorporate equity and engagement
<p><b>Evaluation</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider alternatives to paper-based, or electronic surveys. E.g., collect feedback at community events using visual facilitation methods, such as “dotmocracy,”<sup>50</sup> or consider methods such as arts-based storytelling, or photo-voice.</li> <li>• Involve students in the design and implementation of data collection.</li> <li>• Collect data from students and families that are representative of the demographics within the school catchment area (i.e., across race, gender, ability, neighbourhood).</li> <li>• If using surveys, update survey tools to include demographic questions about race, gender, ability, and other aspects of diversity to determine whether a diverse group has been engaged.</li> <li>• Share evaluation activity results with research participants, and always gain their consent before sharing the results more broadly, if there is the desire to do so.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Education</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure all students have access to the required equipment and resources to participate; otherwise, adapt the activity.</li> <li>• Distribution of materials – focus on visual versus text-heavy materials and keep language accessible to your target audience (e.g., translating materials). Also, consider the primary channels for distribution as this may vary based on the community’s demographics.</li> <li>• Involve students and families when developing messaging that will resonate best with their community.</li> <li>• Focus on qualitative rather than quantitative data: storytelling versus sharing of statistics for meaningful engagement. Invite members of the community to share their stories.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Encouragement</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider if and why families may not choose active transportation while planning for AST encouragement events (e.g., living in more than one household and one is out of the area, or nonvisible disabilities of caregivers/children).</li> <li>• Plan inclusive events for all students and families (e.g., extend a “walk and wheel to school” celebration event to include activities during the school day and include messaging that encourages physical activity throughout the day, not just the school journey).</li> <li>• Involve students and other school community members in the planning and leadership of encouragement events to develop a sense of ownership and learn how to plan similar events in the future.</li> <li>• Offer prizes as incentives and include students when selecting prize options. Seek donations of prizes and/or refreshments from local businesses to help spread awareness about the goals of your work.</li> </ul>

<sup>50</sup> Dotmocracy is a way of cumulative voting that uses dot stickers or markers to help groups make quick, collaborative decisions.

<p><b>Engineering</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prioritize underserved neighbourhoods for improvements.</li> <li>• Involve members of the school community in the process of requesting changes while also providing flexible and less intensive models of involvement. E.g., providing information, links to contacts, or email templates. Share the technical language and key terms to help community members effectively express their concerns to decision-makers.</li> <li>• Include projects that may help engage the community, such as community gardening projects or garbage clean-up events along popular routes to school. These may create more welcoming spaces that lend themselves to AST.</li> </ul> <p><b>Examples of equitable planning in engineering</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Install wayfinding signage along walking routes that educates on local histories, especially of historically marginalized groups including Indigenous communities or immigrant communities. Ensure that these histories do not ignore settler-colonialism and its legacy.</li> <li>• Create graphics to illustrate the community vision for improved routes for AST. Ensure that graphics are proportionally representative of local demographics by engaging with the community or using census data.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Enforcement (Optional)</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider potential consequences of police enforcement on the local community (e.g., seeing police may cause some families great discomfort or to relive experiences of trauma; some families may be adversely financially impacted by the cost of a parking ticket).</li> <li>• Before recommending enforcement, consider “Is this approach necessary? Can other factors be addressed first (e.g., changes to the built environment to limit the dangerous behaviour being enforced)?”</li> <li>• Limit or avoid the need for police involvement by considering how students and other members of the school community can be involved in enforcement activities.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Additional Ideas</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Add “Notes for Equitable Engagement” as a column in the action plan to ensure these considerations are not overlooked.</li> <li>• Be clear before engaging with the community: Why do you want to partner with them?</li> <li>• Be clear about expected time commitments and the scope of what will be achieved.</li> <li>• Consider reciprocity in your engagement: what’s in it for them?</li> <li>• Recognize that some parents/caregivers may not have the capacity or desire to attend meetings and contribute to activities in the action plan and that this does not necessarily mean that they do not care about the program and its goals. In these cases, engage with local organizations who may be able to provide support or speak to the needs of the community.</li> </ul>



## Section 6: Conclusion

The review of our preceding STP framework revealed gaps that may inadvertently exclude people from equity-deserving groups and reinforce their inequities. These gaps stem from facilitator bias and ignorance, a restrictive goal-setting scheme, and the uneven distribution of power between stakeholders. Some people face more barriers to participate than others, and some – notably children and people from racialized communities – might be harmed by the use of traditional enforcement (i.e., police).

To overcome these shortcomings, we observed that considerations of equity must be central to the STP program and process, and we added equity as a sixth “E” to our framework. Further, achieving equity will require community engagement, where the facilitator can form trusting and authentic relationships with community members, and work to identify and reduce barriers to their participation. In turn, we added engagement as a seventh “E”.

In the process, we discarded the restrictive goal-setting scheme and are embracing a model that allows for flexibility and evolution over time. We are also adjusting our framework by specifying that enforcement is optional, where decisions are made only after hearing from a diversity of community members and considering alternatives to traditional enforcement.

To move this work forward, we rounded our report by offering recommendations and examples for ways practitioners can incorporate the new “E’s” into their framework and process in Table 1 and Table 2. Together, we can help meet the needs of every child, family, and community we work with.

# Key Terms

**Anti-Oppression** The work of actively challenging and removing systemic and individually experienced oppression “perpetuated by power inequalities in society.”<sup>51</sup> Anti-oppression goals work beyond simply recognizing inequalities along lines of race, gender, ability, for example, but actively work to change the systems and structures that uphold these inequalities.

**AST** *Active School Travel*, meaning human-powered forms of transportation for the school commute. Walking is the most common form of AST, but AST includes all other non-motorized travel modes including cycling, using skateboards, wheelchairs, and other assistive mobility devices. Some regions use the acronym “ASST,” where the second S can stand for “safe” or “sustainable.” Additionally, some motorized travel modes, including school buses or public transit, are sometimes included under “sustainable” school travel.

**Bias** A prejudice for or against things, people, or groups of people. Biases can be conscious or unconscious and are often accompanied by prejudicial actions. The biases discussed in this document are those derived from dominant prejudices and systems of oppression.

**Engagement** A guiding value of STP programs which ensures that they are tailored to the needs and assets of the communities they serve. Engagement is achieved through “listening to students, families, teachers, and school leaders, and working with existing community organizations”;<sup>52</sup> in other words, by strengthening community relationships and forming new ones.

**Equity** The fair and proportionate distribution of opportunities, resources, and power, to meet the needs of all people regardless of age, ability, gender, or race.

**Oppression** Occurs when a “socially, politically, economically, or culturally dominant group (or groups)” uses their power or privilege to “disempower (take away or reduce power), marginalize, silence or otherwise subordinate one social group or category.”<sup>53</sup>

**STP** *School Travel Planning*, which refers to a community-based model for facilitating safe and active school travel among students. The STP model systematically addresses transportation and traffic safety concerns in schools and other barriers to active travel while incentivizing and strengthening local commitments to active school travel.



<sup>51</sup> Canadian Council for Refugees, 2009

<sup>52</sup> Safe Routes Partnership, 2021a

<sup>53</sup> Canadian Council for Refugees, 2009

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