



Township of Belleville *New Jersey*

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Belleville Awarded Nearly \$1 Million in State Grants to Make Roads Near Schools Safer

BELLEVILLE, NJ – JULY 19, 2024 – Almost \$1 million in state grants will help Belleville make local roads even safer to walk, bike or travel by other wheeled devices.

State transportation officials announced Thursday, July 18 that Belleville has been awarded \$962,000 through the state's Safe Routes to School Program (SRTS).

Belleville achieved seven gold-level SRTS recognition awards for its efforts to create safer pedestrian and bike access from local roads to Belleville Schools 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9 and 10. In addition, Belleville Middle School is being recognized for again earning a gold-level recognition award.

Gold is the state program's highest ranking among the four levels, signifying a school or municipality's progress toward implementing and sustaining SRTS programs.

"Our team has been working on pedestrian safety and walkability, and our determination has paid off," said Belleville Mayor Michael Melham. "Thank you to the NJDOT Safe Routes to School Program, for your generous grant to repair sidewalks, restripe crosswalks, upgrade ADA-compliant curbing, add school zone and safety signage, and build out areas of raised crosswalks, bump outs and curb extensions around our schools and neighborhoods – all for a safer, walkable community."

Under Melham's leadership, Belleville turned the issue of safe and secure streets around its schools into a community-wide project, with members of the Belleville Police Department collecting vital traffic data and school children creating highly visible street murals at well-traveled intersections.

Being able to more safely walk to school and back home each day dovetails with Melham's goal of keeping Belleville fit and on the move. And with more students, parents and teachers leaving their cars in the garage each morning and afternoon, and using walkways, creates a cleaner and greener Belleville.

Each year, schools and municipalities across New Jersey are nominated for recognition in this program based upon their SRTS accomplishments. Recognition is valid for three years. Schools and municipalities that have earned state SRTS recognition and are also enrolled in the Sustainable Jersey certification program can earn points for both programs.

Since 2022, Belleville has received three grants to implement and support the SRTS program. The first for \$11,500, the second for \$10,000, and the third for \$962,000. Federal funds were authorized

for the third grant on July 10, which allows work to begin on ADA-compliant curb ramps and sidewalks, curb extensions, high visibility crosswalks, and enhanced school zone signage around every Belleville elementary school, Belleville Middle School and Belleville High School.

Communities that participate in the SRTS programs often benefit from less traffic congestion, better air quality, fewer traffic conflicts near schools, and most importantly, safer, healthier and more active children, according to the New Jersey Safe Routes Resource Center.

“The death of Avyaan Gupta in Parsippany earlier this month is a tragedy, and during my time as commissioner, I am committed to working with local officials to make the improvements needed to ensure that New Jersey’s roads are safe for our children,” Commissioner Fran O’Connor said. “The New Jersey Safe Routes to School Program is just one way NJDOT can support communities in their efforts to provide safe access for children walking and biking to school, with \$21.1 million available in federal grants.”

"For over a decade, EZ Ride has been administering the Safe Routes to School Program in Bergen, Essex, Monmouth, Passaic, and Union counties, thanks to NJDOT's support," said EZ Ride President & CEO Krishna Murthy.

Murthy added: "In the past year alone, we've collaborated with more than 250 organizations, including 179 schools and 73 municipalities. We've organized more than 650 events, ranging from safety presentations and bike classes to poster contests and safety audits, reaching 46,000 students. Notably, 75 percent of our awardees come from underserved communities. At EZ Ride, pedestrian and cyclist safety is a top priority, and we commend Belleville Township and the School District for their dedication to this cause."

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