



Principal Gary Mazzola accepts the Massachusetts Safe Routes to School award for "Rookie of the Year" from Executive Office of Transportation representative James Cope.

State honors Olmsted Safe Routes program

By Katherine McInerney

Tue Nov 18, 2008, 06:55 PM EST

Easton -

The F.L. Olmsted has been named Rookie of the Year for its participation in the Massachusetts Safe Routes To School (SRTS) initiative, which encourages kids to walk or bike to school instead of driving.

Principal Gary Mazzola was one of five schools honored by the state Executive Office of Transportation at a banquet earlier this month in Marlborough. He accepted a plaque on behalf of the Olmsted student body.

“These schools’ efforts represent leading achievements in the Commonwealth’s efforts to enhance safe, active access to schools statewide,” said MassRIDES Project Manager Kay Carson.

With its community partner, Activate Easton, Olmsted kicked off the SRTS program on International Walk to School Day held around the world Oct. 8. On that day, 530 Olmsted students walked a one-mile route from Parkview School to their Olmsted classrooms. A video of the event, made by the Easton Journal, was showed at the EOT banquet.

SRTS promotes healthy lifestyles for kids and their parents by encouraging them to walk or bike to school rather than drive. It also provides incentives for towns to reevaluate their infrastructures — from roadways to sidewalks and traffic lights. Towns that are active in SRTS are first in line for state aid designated for infrastructure improvements.

“When kids are energized with their mindset and their bodies, I really believe that they perform better in school,” Mazzola said. Plus, they’re healthier, the air is cleaner, the morning traffic is less congested, and more parents are getting involved in the school community, he said.

Since October, Olmsted students, parents and teachers have done a great job carrying out the wellness objective, Mazzola said. Walking school buses leave from various locations, where parents drop their kids off to walk the rest of the way with a group of students and parent volunteers. Walking recesses have also been a hit among students who are energized about getting healthy and helping the environment.

“The kids wouldn’t be all that interested if they didn’t feel (the program) had a value to themselves as individuals,” Mazzola said.

Obesity is the number one problem among kids, he added. Students are encouraged to bike or skateboard to school as well — anything to get them active and ready to learn.

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