In February 2021, at the time of the publication of this final version of the Safe Routes to School (SRTS) plan, the La Crosse School District is slowly returning to in-person learning. Vaccines offer hope for ending the COIVD-19 pandemic and there are signs of normal life returning. The pandemic has served as a reckoning for many of our practices and systems and sparked renewed interest in bicycling, walking and being outside. Our hope is that this plan will provide guidance for that renewed interest in walking and bicycling to school and strengthen our foundational neighborhood schools. These schools, their supporting neighborhoods and the infrastructure improvements around them are the focus of this plan.

Nationally, walking and bicycling to school has declined dramatically, from 50% of K-8th grade students in the 1960s to 11% in 2017. Concurrent with this decline is a new trend, an increase in the number of pedestrian and bicycle crashes with cars. Safe Routes to School programs seek to reverse the decline of walking and bicycling and increase safety through a set of strategies known as the five “Es” — Education, Encouragement, Enforcement, Engineering, and Evaluation. Recently SRTS programs have added a sixth E, Equity, recognizing that low-income residents are more likely to walk to school and are disproportionately exposed to traffic and personal safety challenges. The high priority schools in La Crosse are: Northside Elementary/Coulee Montesorri, Hamilton Elementary, Hintgen Elementary, Logan Middle School and Spence Elementary.

Infrastructure treatments in this plan are designed to reduce the speed of motor vehicles by using engineering solutions known as traffic calming. The risk of a pedestrian being seriously injured or killed when hit by a motor vehicle increases dramatically as vehicle speeds increase from 20 to 40 miles per hour. A pedestrian hit by a motor vehicle moving at 20 miles per hour has a 13% likelihood of fatality or severe injury. A pedestrian hit by a motor vehicle moving at 40 miles per hour has a 73% likelihood of fatality or severe injury.

After developing the individual school neighborhood plans, connections were made to create a network of “low-stress” bicycle routes in La Crosse. The proposed low-stress bicycle network would consist of paths, separated bike lanes, neighborhood greenways, and quiet streets all connected to provide bicycling routes that can be used by upper-elementary, middle school, and high school students, as well as adults who prefer low-stress bicycle routes. For more details on each school’s SRTS plan go to https://www.cityoflacrosse.org/your-government/departments/planning-economic-development/safe-routes-to-school.

In summary, the programs, policies and infrastructure outlined in this plan will serve to enhance our neighborhood schools. When we provide safe places for our children to bicycle, walk and be active and healthy we improve the quality of life for all residents of the City of La Crosse.