

Sacred Heart University

From the Selected Works of Anna E. Greer

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Professor Works with Community Partners to Combat New Bridgeport Policy



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News Story: April 11, 2018



Professor Anna Greer

Sacred Heart University [Exercise Science](#) Professor and [Master of Public Health](#) Director [Anna Greer](#) is leading a series of workshops and training to promote safety for Bridgeport students who walk to school. Her efforts began in response to a 2017 Bridgeport policy that states all high school youth living within two miles and elementary youth living within a mile and a half of their school would no longer receive bus service.

Many of the students affected by the policy lack the money for a car or public transportation and must walk to school, which Greer says jeopardizes their safety.

Greer's initiatives, conducted in partnership with Make the Road Connecticut (MRCT) and funded by a \$10,000 grant from The Nature Conservancy (TNC), address the fears students experience for their own safety and the safety of their siblings and friends. Youth are concerned that their walks to school lack appropriate pedestrian supports, such as proper sidewalks and adequate tree canopy cover, according to Greer. Furthermore, many students arrive late to school due to travel-related issues, which seriously affects their academic performance.

Youth from MRCT participated in a series of workshops led by Greer and Drew Goldsman, an urban resilience planner at The Nature Conservancy, to study and address these problems. These workshops taught them about streetscape features that enable safe walks to school. They then were trained on how to use a microscale audit of pedestrian streetscapes (MAPS) tool to assess school routes Bridgeport high school students use most often. The MRCT youth, Greer, and her graduate assistant, Ann Knausenberger, then used MAPS to assess those routes.

The MRCT also collected more than 200 questionnaires from students about their experiences traveling to and from school. They are now using data from these assessments to advocate for safer travel to and from school for all Bridgeport students. The MRCT youth kicked off their advocacy campaign, "Walking Towards a Brighter Future" on March 26 with a press conference at the Bridgeport City Hall Annex, announcing their findings.

Alison Martínez Carrasco, MRCT's youth organizer, said, "We are having this press conference to make sure that the Board of Education in Bridgeport takes important measures to change the unfair tardy policies our walkers are facing when they arrive to school. Also, seeing as how unsafe the routes are, we hope that the city makes them more walkable."

Parents have protested this new policy since its inception last year. Proposed by school board member Maria Pereira, the policy cuts \$1.3 million in transportation costs to fund kindergarten paraprofessional positions. Yet the much larger cost is children's safety—a point emphasized by MRCT.

Make the Road Connecticut is a non-profit organization based in Bridgeport that helps immigrants to be active in their communities and to lift themselves out of poverty through legal and support services, civic engagement, transformative education and policy innovation. It has a Youth Power program that brings together 15 to 20 students who either are immigrants themselves or have immigrant family members, with the purpose of being trained as youth leaders in their schools and communities. The Youth Power Committee (YPC) meets weekly to identify and learn about issues of concern, such as this issue of youth safety.

"It has been so amazing to see how the MRCT youth have become leaders in their community, advocating on behalf of all Bridgeport students for a safer walk to school. We are so thankful The Nature Conservancy funded this youth-led project!" Greer said,

For more information on MRCT, visit <https://www.maketheroadct.org/>.

For more information on The Nature Conservancy,

visit <https://www.nature.org/ourinitiatives/regions/northamerica/unitedstates/connecticut/>.