How has the NE Iowa SRTS program tailored its activities to the rural character of the area?

* Historically, SRTS programs have been developed for urban settings so we have an exciting opportunity in NE IA.
* Our rural setting challenges us to adapt our SRTS efforts not to just one school, but to the unique needs of each of our 20 school districts and 6 private schools.
* Some schools are located within walkable communities; other schools are located along major highways in the middle of a cornfield, miles away from the nearest community.
* Additionally, it is inevitable that many students will have to ride in a vehicle for at least a portion of their morning commute just to get within walking or biking distance of their school. To help categorize our schools, we use four general school profile types:
  1. Single K-12 Building in Single Town
  2. Isolated Single K-12 Building
  3. Multiple Buildings in Single Town
  4. Multiple Buildings in Multiple Towns
* These four profiles help us to determine which programs and activities generally work best for each setting, which helps to streamline our efforts.
* However, even with these 4 school profiles, we still need to have a strong understanding of each school and take an individualized approach because each has unique characteristics influencing its SRTS program.
  + For our schools in walkable communities, we focus on Walking School Buses.
    - We Define Walking School Buses as a group of students walking to school with one or more responsible supervisors. I like to use the phrase “It’s just like riding the bus…minus the bus”.
    - The Walking School Bus concept works best with younger students since older students are typically allowed to make the trip to school on their own with friends…much “cooler” than walking with mom or dad.
    - We discuss 3 different variations of Walking School Buses
      1. The first variation is your typical Walking School Bus, where students walk to school with one or more supervisors.
      2. The second variation is a Bicycle Train, which is just like the typical Walking School Bus, except the group is biking rather than walking.
      3. The third variation is called a “Remote Drop-off Location”. This option is ideal for sprawling, rural settings, which is common for many school districts in Northeast Iowa. Students who live too far from the school to walk or bike the whole way can be dropped off at a certain location to join a Walking School Bus for the remaining trip to school.
    - We really take a “hands-off” approach to organizing Walking School Buses. We act as the catalyst by starting the commotion and spreading the message, but we don’t actually lead the buses. Instead, we find those school and community champions who are willing and ready to take ownership over the Walking School Bus and tailor it to their individual needs. This helps make the Walking School Buses more sustainable while allowing us to reach more schools and communities.
    - We currently have about 10 Walking School Buses up and running around the region, and we aim to triple that number in the future.
  + For our schools which are hard to reach by foot due to isolation, we realize that sometimes it is just not safe or practical to walk or bike.
  + However, we also realize just how imperative physical activity is for healthy growth and development so we do not let the issue of isolation stand in our way.
  + Instead, we help schools promote physical activity throughout the school day.
  + One example of how we do that include Mileage Clubs:
    - A Mileage Club is where students can earn rewards by walking a certain number of miles around the track or gym. They can take place before school, during gym class, during recess or in after-school programs. In our region, we hand out little mini feet keychains, and kids just go crazy over trying to earn as many as they can.
  + Other examples include:
    - Active Lessons, which are typical school lessons with activity incorporated into them. A popular one is a Story in Motion, where students act our portions of a story.
    - Some schools incorporate school-wide activity breaks throughout the day where everyone drops what they are doing to do the Chicken Dance or push-ups and sit-ups.
    - One school allows students to come in before school starts to perform circuit exercises in the classroom.
    - We even have a teacher who uses exercise balls as chairs in her classroom.
* We encourage our schools to participate in SRTS in a way which fits for them.
  + Maybe it’s starting up a neighborhood Walking School Buses, or maybe it’s starting a monthly Remote Drop-off Location for all students riding the buses.
  + Maybe it’s celebrating the walk to school on International Walk to School Day, or maybe it’s celebrating the walk around school at noon on International Walk to School Day.
* Just because our schools are not in urban settings does not mean SRTS won’t work; rather, our schools get the opportunity to be creative in paving the way for developing a rural, regional SRTS model, which we hope will ultimately lay the foundation for bringing the benefits of SRTS to rural populations all across the country.

What is the role of the RPA and DOT respectively in administering this SRTS program and coordinating with partners?

* The Liaison position is housed within the RPA, Upper Explorerland Regional Planning Commission, so the RPA is in charge of coordinating the grant funding.
* The RPA’s established relationships with community and county officials opens the door for the SRTS Liaison to connect with these key SRTS stakeholders.
* The RPA also serves as one of the core partner of the Northeast Iowa Food and Fitness Initiative, helping to direct the work of the Initiative