

# BTA ambassadors become roll models for young riders

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CONTRIBUTING WRITER

*"I want to have your job when I grow up."*

When the Bicycle Transportation Alliance's Bike Safety Education instructors hear remarks like this from kids they're teaching in Portland, it's both rewarding and exciting. If we plan to meet the growing demand for bike safety

programs in schools, we'll need to hire more teaching staff to teach the curriculum – so we're glad to hear that kids will want our jobs!

In fact, the BTA is looking specifically to hire new staff just like these kids – or their older brothers, sisters, and neighbors – through a new workforce development program starting this fall. The BTA intends to hire two new Assistant Ambassadors from the same communities where the BTA is teaching, said LeeAnne Ferguson, education programs manager at the BTA.

"Our educators are very much role models for those kids. Kids connect with young adults, especially if they are reflective of the very neighborhoods that the kids are from."

The BTA teaches bike and pedestrian safety to 5,000 students in Portland Public Schools. Twenty of the 48 Portland schools that receive the program have mostly non-white student populations.

Ferguson believes both students and their parents will appreciate having role models from the community working alongside the kids as Assistant Ambassadors. She points to a study conducted last year by ENRICH with IRCO found that immigrant communities in East Portland schools expressed support for having their kids attend bike and pedestrian safety classes.

Are you interested in having your children attend bike/pedestrian safety classes?

African 76% yes  
Asian 96% yes  
Slavic 50% yes  
Latino 68% yes

But fewer of the parents themselves were interested in taking bike and pedestrian safety classes:

Are you (the parent) interested in taking bike/pedestrian safety classes?

African 35% yes  
Asian 20% yes  
Slavic 2% yes  
Latino 38% yes

Ferguson believes that developing a workforce that is more attuned to neighborhood experiences will help the bike safety program connect with new communities in several ways, from speaking the same language over the phone to knowing when to plan biking and walking events so they don't interfere with church or community activities.

The BTA started partnering with workforce development organizations a few years ago, but until this year, the contract with Portland Bureau of Transportation required a certain amount of classroom teaching experience for instructors to be hired. When the BTA renewed its contract terms this year, Ferguson created a revised staffing structure that included a new position for Assistant Ambassadors.

Assistant Ambassadors will work 20-30 hours per week, assisting full-time instructors in classrooms receiving bike safety education. The curriculum consists of 10 lessons, taught over the course of either five two-hour lessons (in one week) or 10 one-hour lessons (in two weeks). The Assistant Ambassadors will join instructors for lessons six through 10, which includes time both in the classroom and on the street.

Most of the focus in these lessons is on actual hands-on riding skills, such as learning right of way, practicing right and left turns, and keeping eyes on the road. The BTA has found that the most challenging lessons for students to master is right-of-way and making left turns. Assistant Ambassadors will provide assistance during these critical skill-building sessions.

Ferguson says this job would be a good fit for anybody who's interested in working in education or outdoor education. Applicants do not need to be great, professional bicyclists (we'll teach safe riding skills) and prior classroom experience isn't required. Second language fluency is preferred,

especially in Spanish, Vietnamese, Somali, Russian, and Cantonese, the most common non-English languages spoken in Portland Public Schools.

To recruit potential Assistant Ambassadors, the BTA is partnering with organizations like Portland Youth Builders and Self Enhancement Inc. that prepare and



Assistant Ambassadors teaching bike and pedestrian safety with children

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connect job seekers with employers. One of the ways these organizations prepare candidates for the job search is by practicing mock interviews, with staff from hiring organizations participating in the mock interviews and posing actual questions used in real interviews.

The BTA will be hiring two Assistant Ambassadors for the fall season and two for the spring season.

Ferguson encourages readers to forward the job announcement to people who may be interested in applying. Job seekers can apply through the BTA's website at [www.btaoregon.org/assistantambassador](http://www.btaoregon.org/assistantambassador). Contact LeeAnne Ferguson at [leeanne@btaoregon.org](mailto:leeanne@btaoregon.org).



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Healthy Streetbeat is a monthly column for Street Roots written by the Bicycle Transportation Alliance (BTA). Our contributors are Rob Sadowsky, executive director, and Margaux Mennesson, communications director.



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