Walk to School Initiatives

Take Steps Toward A Better Way
America is at a crossroads.

In one direction, walking in our communities is getting harder and harder, and it happens less and less. Most trips that were once made by walking and bicycling have been replaced by automobile travel. Unsafe street crossings, speeding motorists, and a lack of sidewalks limit many children’s ability to walk or bicycle in their own neighborhoods. These unwalkable environments force children to play inside, often in front of the television or computer.

Meanwhile, the number of overweight children is growing at an alarming rate, putting them at risk for life-long health problems.

In the other direction, communities are building sidewalks, trails and pathways, safe street crossings and plentiful destinations within walking distance – all to encourage us to get out and walk again.
School Day to get community on the right path.

Each October, millions of children, parents, teachers and community leaders across the globe walk to school to celebrate International Walk to School Day.

**Walk to School Day** is an energizing event, reminding parents and children alike of the simple joy of walking to school. But it’s usually also a kick-off event. Walk to School Day becomes a catalyst for on-going efforts to increase walking and bicycling all of the time.

Then change begins.

For most communities, a one-day event is not enough. Parents and children, teachers and elected officials all see the promise of healthier, happier students, quieter, cleaner, safer streets, and more connected neighborhoods. That’s when they move beyond a one-day event, often through the steps outlined below.

**Take it Beyond a Day** Many communities use health and fitness messages, pedestrian and driver safety training, neighborhood walkability assessments, and daily “walking school buses” to maintain the momentum and keep people walking.

**Work for Safe Routes to School** Daily walking opens everyone’s eyes to the need for sidewalks and trails, safe street crossings, more cautious drivers, safer walkers and bicyclists, and even state legislation to fund improvements.

**Make it Permanent** In the end, Walk to School efforts are about changing community culture. In the process, they build an environment that’s more inviting for every walker, young and old.

Read about International Walk to School Day and other steps your community can take. There is no single path. Start anywhere.

Just start.
Participate In Walk to School Day

Walk to School Day brings parents, teachers, children, and community leaders together to focus on the importance of physical activity, safety and walkable communities. Walk to School Day events teach kids and parents to think of walking as an active, safe and healthy means of transportation.

Three Steps and You're Walking

1. Go to www.walktoschool.org to find out about this year’s October event and visit www.iwalktoschool.org to see what other countries are planning.
2. Talk to your principals, police, and parents right away. Line up partners. Invite elected, health, safety and transportation officials, local businesses and the media to join the event.
3. Register your event on the Walk to School Day website and find walking checklists, sample press releases, flyers, logos, and more!

For detailed information on how to conduct a walk program, check out the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s KidsWalk-to-School guide at www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/kidswalk/index.htm.

Take It Beyond The Day

Increasing physical activity among children, teaching safe walking skills, easing traffic and improving the environment around schools can not be achieved in one day. Many communities are using Walk to School Day to kick off long-term programs designed to bring about permanent changes.

Start a Walking School Bus

Many communities who want to make walking to school safer have started walking school buses. In a walking school bus, a small group of children walk to school together under the supervision of one or more adults. In Chicago, more than 175 schools participate in a walking school bus program created by the city and the Chicago Police Department. To find out more about walking school buses, go to www.walkingschoolbus.org.

Students in Newmarket, Ontario, Canada, complete their walk.

Students in Buffalo, New York smile for a snapshot on Walk to School Day.
Measure Your Neighborhood's "Walkability"

Using a simple five-question walkability checklist (available at www.walktoschool.org), adults and children can examine their neighborhoods and measure how friendly their streets are for walkers. The checklist helps users identify specific walking problems, such as a lack of sidewalks or dangerous street crossings and offers solutions. Results can be shared with community leaders to prompt change.

Figuring Out What to Fix:
- **Checklists** Oakland, California translated walkability checklists into several languages and used the results to get sidewalks fixed and hire more crossing guards.
- **Video Footage** The county public works department in Clarkston, Georgia, repositioned a light and re-striped crosswalks after receiving a videotape from the walk highlighting hazards.

Teach Safe Walking

Walking skills will not only make children become better pedestrians but they’ll learn to become better motorists when the time comes.

Ways to Relay the Safety Message:
- **Obstacle Course** Walk to School organizers in Ocala, Florida, built a pedestrian obstacle course and asked children to demonstrate the safest response to each hazard.
- **Safety Zone** Houston, Texas, used Walk to School Day to kick off the Children’s Safety Zone in a Spanish-speaking, urban district that will receive intense pedestrian safety education for two years.

Get Kids Moving

Walking or bicycling to school is a great way to get kids moving again. Even schools not located within walking or bicycling distance have found ways to get their students active.

Ideas To Encourage Physical Activity:
- **Walking Wednesdays** Establish at least one day a month for everyone to walk to school or schedule a weekly walk at or around the school.
- **Pedometers** Use pedometers (devices that count steps) to track the distances students walk. Plot mileage on a map of the United States. See how long it takes the school to walk across the nation.

For more information on ways to get kids moving, visit www.walktoschool.org.

Change Driver Behavior

Traffic congestion and speeding cars can make the area around schools a dangerous place for kids on foot or on bike. Many communities have used Walk to School Day to encourage drivers to slow down and to reduce traffic in front of schools.

- **Drop Off Zones** In Langley, British Columbia, Walk to School Day coordinators encouraged the use of drop off zones located one block from school. Traffic in front of school was reduced from 90 to 19 cars per day.
- **Speed Enforcement** The Madison, Wisconsin, Area SAFE KIDS Coalition worked with local traffic officers to get speed boards posted around schools. During the week of the event, officers ticketed school zone speeders.
Make It Permanent

Walking should be a viable option for everyone in a community. For that to happen, communities must make walking part of everyday life, incorporating it into civic culture, decision making, and the personal habits of the citizens.

Make Walking a Way of Life

- **Follow the Funding** Some states provide mini-grants to schools hosting walk to school events, while others are following California’s example and earmarking transportation funding for improving routes to school (read more about California’s new law at [www.baypeds.org/saferoutes.html](http://www.baypeds.org/saferoutes.html)).
- **A Full-Time Job** Assign a school “non-motorized transportation coordinator” whose job it is to promote and support safe walking and bicycling to school.
- **Location** Place schools in the community so that more students can walk or bike to school and after-school activities.
- **Build the Network** Create or enforce codes that require sidewalks and paths throughout your community.

Examples of Safe Routes to School projects

- **NYC Improvements** The New York City Department of Transportation is working with schools and communities in all five boroughs to make engineering improvements that will improve safety for children near schools.
- **Safety Program** The "Portland Kids on the Move" program is a comprehensive traffic safety program using education, engineering and enforcement to reduce traffic related injuries and fatalities.

To read more about Safe Routes to School programs around the United States, check out the web resources on the right.

Congressman James L. Oberstar (right), the Senior Democrat on the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, has initiated Safe Routes to School programs in the United States. He and Congressman Edward J. Markey (left) walk with a group of students as a part of WalkBoston’s Safe Routes to School Program.
**Promote the Health Benefits**

- **Rewards** Recognize kids who’ve walked the farthest or classes with the greatest participation.
- **Learn Health** Read about the benefits of daily exercise: resting and exercise heart rates, strength, and endurance.
- **Challenge the Family** Have students catalogue family health changes: miles walked, weight lost, dietary habits, fitness improvements.
- **Mile-Walk Challenge** At the beginning of the school year, time a one-mile walk. Repeat after nine-months of walking to school, and recognize the biggest improvements.
- **Walking Curriculum** Draw maps, calculate miles, observe nature and history, or write poetry. Walking can be a part of every class!

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**A smiling group of walkers make their way in Chester, Vermont.**

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**Below: Walkers in Lubbock, Texas emphasize the importance of pedestrian safety.**

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**Resources on the web**

**WALK TO SCHOOL**

**Walk to School Day**
- USA: www.walktoschool.org
- International: www.iwalktoschool.org
- United Kingdom: www.walktoschool.org.uk
- Canada: www.goforgreen.ca/walktoschool
- California: http://www.cawalktoschool.com

**KidsWalk-to-School Guide**
http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/kidswalk

**Safe Routes to School**
- National Summary: www.transact.org/Reports/sr2002
- California: www.dhs.ca.gov/routes2school www.4saferoutes.org
- Florida: www.dcp.ufl.edu/centers/trafficsafetyed/
- New York: www.saferoutestoschool.org
- United Kingdom: www.saferoutestoschools.org.uk/
- Canada: www.greenestcity.org

**Walking School Bus**
www.walkingschoolbus.org

**WALKING AND BICYLING**

**General Information**
- Pedestrian and Bicycle Information Center www.pedbikeinfo.org
- www.walkinginfo.org
- National Center for Bicycling and Walking www.bikefed.org

**Safety**
- The National SAFE KIDS Campaign www.safekids.org

**Health**
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/

**Street Design and Traffic Calming**
- Institute of Transportation Engineers www.ite.org
- Surface Transportation Policy Project www.transact.org
A Quick Guide to What's What

**International Walk to School Day:** A one-day event that occurs around the world every October. Children, parents, teachers and community leaders walk to school together to promote being active and making streets more friendly for walking and bicycling.

**Walk to School Programs:** Programs that extend Walk to School Day events into more sustained programs to encourage safe walking and bicycling to school. They rely on neighborhood, school, transportation, public works, health, safety and environmental partners to accomplish specific goals. They occur at the neighborhood, school, county or state level.

**SAFE KIDS Walk This Way:** A year-round pedestrian safety program conducted by the National SAFE KIDS Campaign with support from FedEx Express and 3M. Local SAFE KIDS coalitions launch the programs by participating in International Walk to School Day. SAFE KIDS coalitions work with parents, educators and community leaders to teach pedestrian safety to kids, enforce speed limits and other traffic regulations, and improve school environments through research, engineering and traffic calming.

**Walking School Bus:** A small group of students who are accompanied by one or more adults on their walks to and from school. This can be a component of walk to school programs.

**KidsWalk-to-School:** A walk to school program, developed by CDC, to guide community members and local and state health officials on how to implement walking school buses and other walk to school program activities.

**Safe Routes to School:** A sustained walk to school program that uses a comprehensive approach (encouragement, education, engineering, and/or enforcement) to make school routes safer for kids to walk and bicycle. The programs often use policies and dedicated transportation funding to create permanent change and normalize walking.

**Safe Routes to School Legislation:** Legislation that dedicates funding to create safe walking and bicycling routes to school. The model is California’s law that directs significant transportation funding to Safe Routes to School programs at the local level.