

Organizing Walk to School Day

Organizing a Walk to School Day can be fun and rewarding for everyone. Each school finds its own method of creating a safe environment for kids to walk and bike to school. Below are some suggestions that can make your day go smoothly. Find out what works for you. Remember to give each of your volunteers something to do. If everyone does a little, then no one is burdened with too much work.

The Basics

- ♦ Collaborate with the school administration, teachers, and the PTA to organize the event.
- ♦ Arrange for crossing guards and/or adult monitors.
- ♦ Notify police.
- ♦ Have a greeter(s), a table, and garbage cans.
- ♦ Have someone buy or get donated food if you are having treats. (Some grocery stores can reserve items for you if you get in touch with them well in advance.)

Walking School Buses and Bike Trains

- ♦ Publish a *bus* route and pick up points or bus stops throughout the neighborhood.
- ♦ Assign at least two adults for each *bus* or *train* with a dozen children.
- ♦ For school-wide parades— establish staging areas north, south, east, and west of the school where people can catch the bus and walk or bicycle together.
- ♦ Assign at least five adults to each staging area: one to coordinate the buses and trains; two for walking; and two for biking.

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- ◆ Invite other parents, neighbors, and community leaders to walk or bike along

Publicity

- ◆ Send home flyers.
- ◆ Hang posters around the school, neighborhood, churches, and recreation centers.
- ◆ Post signs on roads (e.g., Drive Slowly Children Walking, Stop for Pedestrians in Crosswalks).
- ◆ Send out e-mails to parents, community leaders, the media, etc.
- ◆ Phone parents and volunteers to remind them of their tasks.
- ◆ Put announcements in the school newsletter.
- ◆ Have the principal make ongoing announcements 1-2 days before the event.
- ◆ Notify teachers and ask them to remind students.
- ◆ Send out press releases and invite the media to participate.
- ◆ Have students make signs and flags to carry (similar message to signs above)

Recruit additional volunteers

- ◆ Senior groups, i.e., AARP, senior centers, etc.
- ◆ Biking or hiking clubs
- ◆ Community groups, i.e., Elks, Lions, Rotary, etc.
- ◆ Recreation centers

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- ♦ Local neighborhood association
- ♦ City council, State legislature, School board, etc.

Keys to Creating a Successful Walk to School Day

Involve the people who can create change

- ♦ Contact your mayor, city council representatives, school district superintendent, school board members, police chief, and city traffic engineer to join you.
- ♦ Think big—invite the governor, federal and state legislators, and state department of transportation officials to participate. Let them know that the media has been invited.
- ♦ Urge them to take part in the event with their own children or others.

Make it a community program

- ♦ Enlist the help of parents, teachers, local business people, neighborhood associations, and other community organizations when coordinating your event.
- ♦ Contact parent/teacher organizations, local emergency medical services, and city police, fire, and public health departments.
- ♦ Ask local businesses to donate food or prizes for participants.
- ♦ Ask a local business near your school to let you use its parking lot as a staging area.

Publicize and promote the event

- ♦ Use e-mail, backpack mail, phone calls, and flyers to get the word out.

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- ♦ Send a press release to the news media. Follow-up with phone calls to local media outlets. Include:
 - Which state or community leaders will take part in the event.
 - The number of children and parents who are expected to walk.
 - Which other community groups are involved.
 - Best locations and exact times to join the walk.
 - Pictures with a news release to local papers immediately following the event.
 - Send flyers home to parents well in advance of the event. Have daily announcements about Walk to School Day at school the week before so that students will be ready and excited.
 - Have students create posters advertising the event.

Steps to Planning Walk to School Day

Step 1

- ♦ Log on to the national Walk to School web site at www.walktoschool-usa.org. Register your school and event coordinator on the site. For more information, check out the *Resources* section of the web site.
- ♦ Learn more about Walk to School Day and find other participants in Colorado registered on the web site by clicking the *Who's Walking?* button. Then click on Colorado on the U.S. map to see the communities and schools that are participating throughout the state.
- ♦
- ♦ Read the *Walk to School Initiatives* booklet that provides a simple overview about why this event is important and the many ways people use Walk to School Day to change their communities.
- ♦ Read *Frequently Asked Questions* in the *Introduction* section of this tool kit.

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Step 2

- ♦ Contact the three P's (principal, police, and parents) and propose a Walk to School Day in your community.
- ♦ The school principal can give you the school's commitment.
- ♦ The local police department is a valuable resource and will ensure that safety is a priority.
- ♦ Parents can add energy and enthusiasm and make the walk work.
- ♦ Use the *Walk to School Initiatives* booklet to generate ideas for Walk to School programs!

Tips for talking to the three P's

- ★ Make sure that the school principal and administrators, the police, and parents understand the ways that they and the community will all benefit from participating in Walk to School Day.
- ★ Remember to explain the benefits of Walk to School Day. Children and parents will be active, healthy, and spend time together; traffic and congestion will be reduced; streets near the school may be safer and air quality better as a result; and everyone will have fun.
- ★ Give them printed information. Make copies of the eight-page booklet, "Walk to School Initiatives." This concise summary makes a clear and compelling case for the importance and value of Walk to School Day. By handing someone a document, you give the person something to read and digest after you've finished talking.
- ★ Approach people as potential partners. Don't just ask for permission - propose partnerships. This means that they can contribute their perspectives and feel ownership in the event.

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- ★ Start with a simple premise. Describe the basic idea of Walk to School Day. Very simply - parents and children being encouraged to walk to school on that one day to celebrate walking as a healthy, safe, enjoyable way for children to get to school.
- ★ Encourage others to build on the idea. Often those you're talking with will want to add to the simple idea. Encourage this, and recognize that each may have a different agenda. For example, school administrators may be concerned with dwindling transportation budgets and see walking as an economical alternative. The police may focus on the opportunity for pedestrian and driver safety education, while parents might like the chance for their children to be more physically active.
- ★ Prepare key points in the areas of health, safety, and access. Give potential partners a factor on which to base their involvement. These could be national statistics, such as the recent doubling of obesity rates among children, or local issues, such as budget cuts in physical education programs. Look at "Quick Facts" in the "Media" section of this tool kit or check statistics at www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/physical/index.htm
- ★ Leave the conversation agreeing on a clear next step. Don't walk away until the person has either committed to supporting Walk to School Day, or to another concrete step. That could be as simple as reading the material you're leaving behind and discussing it with you again. Make an appointment for that follow-up conversation before you leave.

Step 3

- ♦ Invite elected and public officials, and get them to commit to improve walking conditions. They represent the fastest way to make change happen. The media helps publicize problems such as unsafe crossings, etc.
- ♦ Hold a press conference at the start of your walk or at school when people arrive. This is a great time for a formal proclamation by elected officials. Urge school and public officials to commit to specific steps they will take to make it easier to walk all of the time.
- ♦ Check out the many different officials who have participated in walking events.

State legislators

County Commissioners

City Council members / Mayors / City managers

Police / Fire professionals

Health Departments / Hospitals

United Way / Community service organizations

SAFE KIDS Coalitions

City / County / State Transportation agencies

State / local Pedestrian/Bicycle Planners

Bicycle & Pedestrian advocacy groups & coalitions

Safe Communities program

Recreation departments

Fitness Councils

Sierra Club

Environmental groups

Cardiovascular Health Agencies

Nonprofit organizations

Teachers / School Board members / Administrators / PTA members / College students

And many, many more!

Step 4

- ♦ Register your school online at www.walktoschool-usa.org.
- ♦ Why an event in conjunction with International Walk to School Day? Because that's when everyone will be walking. There will be thousands of events in the U.S., over four million children participating worldwide, and the media and public officials are aware of this International movement. By registering, you make your event known and provide your contact information to any local and national media hoping to cover this important story. And when the media covers your event, they help spread the word of the great health, safety, environmental, and social benefits of more children walking to school every day. You'll also get automatic updates on event plans and available resources for putting on your walk.
- ♦ Visit www.saferoutesinfo.org for information on Safe Routes to School initiatives.

Step 5

- ♦ Decide what type of event fits your school and community.
- ♦ You can plan your walk any way that works for your community. Check out the www.walktoschool-usa.org web site for some common approaches to consider.
- ♦ Customize your walk for your community. Here are four common approaches communities have taken to implement Walk to School Day.
 1. Everyone walks one specific route. Invite elected officials, parents, and children to meet in a specific neighborhood at a designated point and walk to school together. You can even have buses drop students who live further away at the designated walk location. This is a good approach if general conditions aren't conducive to walking, or if you're looking for the greatest visual impact for news media coverage.
 2. Multiple groups walk from different neighborhoods. Designate several specific routes children, parents, and local

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officials will take from various neighborhoods. Suggest starting times so that kids along the way can join the passing crowd, and all will converge on the school at the same time. Some communities designate the best choices as Safe Routes to School (Read more at www.transact.org/Reports/sr2002). This is a great way to launch Walking School Buses from those neighborhoods (read more at www.walkingschoolbus.org).

3. Hold a welcoming event at school. Whether you have formal walking groups, or simply urge children and parents to walk from their own homes, you can hold a welcoming event at school. Invite public officials to say a few words, and if willing, address parents' suggestions on improving walking routes. The welcoming event can be formal, for the press, or at an informal coffee or chat.
 4. What about schools located too far away or in a dangerous area? In communities where most of the students travel farther than a walkable distance or where the walking conditions are simply too dangerous, you can still have a Walk at School Day – just do it on the school playground. Specific recess time, physical education or even class time can be dedicated to getting out and walking together. It is an activity that all children can enjoy, and the walks can be tied into a variety of classroom activities.
- ♦ Classroom teachers can get involved by incorporating walking into their curricula. Ideas for classroom participation include:
 - **Art, Computer Class** – Create posters promoting Walk to School Day and safe driving, walking, and bicycling messages.
 - **Geography** – Survey and create maps of walking routes to school.
 - **Health** – Measure walking time accumulated by students; study health benefits of physical activity. Use pedometers to measure steps.
 - **Physical education** – Have students do physical conditioning. Learn walking warm-ups and stretches and do some progressively longer walks in class to prepare for Walk to School Day.

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- **Mathematics** – Keep logs of walking time or steps; calculate speeds and distances, individual and group averages, trends and statistical analyses (do boys or girls walk more?).
- **Physics** – Study the biomechanics of walking. For example, measure stride lengths-do they vary with height, weight, age, or leg length? How does walking speed depend on step speed and stride length?
- **Biology** – Look for plant or animal species, or inventory indigenous species along walking routes. Catalogue seasonal changes in the flora and fauna.
- **English** – Write press releases and public service announcements to promote Walk to School Day. Write essays or keep a diary about walking experiences.
- **History** – Walk to historical locations in your community and study their significance.
- **Social Sciences** – Photograph important things about your community observed while walking to school. Is there anything you would change? What can you do about it?

Step 6

- ♦ Give your event a mission. Each Walk to School Day takes on the character of its community and most participants find that having a mission has a more lasting impact on the event.
- ♦ Teach pedestrian and bicycle safety. The Colorado Bicycling Manual (official bicycle and pedestrian rules of the road and trails in Colorado) is free from the Colorado Department of Transportation Bicycle/Pedestrian Program. Email bicycleinfo@dot.state.co.us for more information.
- ♦ Contact your local SAFE KIDS Coalition to support your efforts (www.safekids.org).
- ♦ Use the Walkability and Bikeability Checklists included in this tool kit to measure your neighborhood’s “walkability” and “bikeability”. These tools

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will help you notice where changes need to be made such as intersection improvements or the need for additional crosswalks, etc. These types of capital improvement projects should be incorporated into the community's long-range goals.

- ♦ Change driver behavior.
- ♦ Get kids moving.
- ♦ Find out why obesity rates among American children have doubled in the past 20 years. Learn more about the importance of keeping our children moving (read more at www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/physicalactivity.htm).
- ♦ Find out who in your state and local public health department is doing work to promote physical activity and fight obesity among children (See CDC state-by-state listing at <http://apps.nccd.cdc.gov/DNPAProg/>).
- ♦ Read about tips on organizing meetings and planning at www.nps.gov/phso/rctatoolbox/.

Step 7

- ♦ Promote the day and urge everyone to take an active role.
- ♦ Write a Public Service Announcement (PSA) to be read on local radio and television.
- ♦ Write a press release using the sample we have provided in the “Tools” section.
- ♦ Generate sponsorship ideas. Following are local places you might solicit for Walk to School sponsorships or support, and what they might contribute:
 - Grocery store, coffee shop, or bakery: breakfast foods and drinks for kids and parents when they arrive at school.
 - Office supply: school supplies for children's prizes (pencils, erasers, etc.)
 - Sporting goods/Outdoor recreation stores: tennis shoes, book bags, baseball hats, reflective material, and small prizes for random

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drawings for participants and children who walked farthest, most often, etc.

- Kiwanis, Rotary or Lions clubs, community service groups: Volunteer to be crossing guards and walk with groups of children, organize safe driving activities or host a reception at school.

What Now?

This is a great start for a successful Walk to School Day, but if you want to do more, read the *Walk to School Programs* section of this tool kit.

Communities are doing amazing things to keep walking to school safe and accessible for all children, and to make permanent improvements in the pedestrian environment so that everyone can enjoy walking.

In addition, you can have your city council, school district, or organization adopt one of the following proclamations, which you can then use in your media packets, to garner support for your walk to school program from individuals and other groups, and to frame a copy to place in your school's trophy case.

Sample Proclamation

On Your Organization's Letterhead

PROCLAMATION

WALK TO SCHOOL DAY

October (fill in date)

WHEREAS, International Walk to School Day will be held on October (fill in date); and

WHEREAS, This event, taking place around the world, will focus on the benefits of walking or biking rather than driving to school, creating cleaner, safer, and environmentally healthier schools for children; and

WHEREAS, This day affords parents the opportunity to spend more time with their children, reduces car use and traffic hazards, promotes physical activity, and contributes to a safer community.

THEREFORE, We, the (YOUR City, School District or Organization), do hereby proclaim October (fill in date) as Walk to School Day and encourage everyone to participate in this very worthwhile event.

Sample Proclamation

On Your Organization's Letterhead

COLORADO PEDESTRIAN MONTH

October 1-31, year

*Concerning Colorado Pedestrian Month,
Colorado Walks Wednesdays, and Walk to School Day.*

- WHEREAS, Walking contributes to improved health, safer streets, stronger communities, and a cleaner natural environment; and
- WHEREAS, Children walk to and from neighborhood schools during the busiest times of the day, when many motorists are rushing to and from work; and
- WHEREAS, Each year in the United States, an estimated 5,700 pedestrians are killed, including more than 800 children; and
- WHEREAS, Hundreds of children and adults could be saved each year if every community made pedestrian safety a priority; and
- WHEREAS, The Walkable America Checklist, created by the National Safety Council, enables Coloradans to determine the "walkability" of their communities; and
- WHEREAS, Children, parents, and community leaders throughout the world and nation are joining together to participate in International Walk to School Day and Week in October each October to evaluate pedestrian safety in their communities; and
- WHEREAS, Cardiovascular disease affects nearly 5 million Americans (Women's Heart Foundation); and
- WHEREAS, Walking at least half an hour, six days a week, can cut mortality rates from heart disease in half (Cooper Institute for Aerobics Research); and

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- WHEREAS, Thirty percent of U.S. adults 20 years of age and older—over 60 million people—are obese and the percentage of young people who are overweight has more than tripled since 1980. Among children and teens aged 6–19 years, 16 percent (over 9 million young people) are considered overweight (National Center for Health Statistics); and
- WHEREAS, Walking is an ideal low impact exercise that has multiple health benefits such as the ability to reduce the risk of heart disease and cancer, lower total cholesterol, raise healthy HDL cholesterol, lower blood pressure, maintain healthy bones and muscles, stabilize blood sugar, improve immunity, and relieve stress (Women's Heart Foundation); and
- WHEREAS, Adults should engage in moderate intensity physical activities for at least 30 minutes on 5 or more days of the week (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention/American College of Sports Medicine); and
- WHEREAS, Children and adolescents should participate in at least 60 minutes of moderate intensity physical activity most days of the week, preferably daily (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention/American College of Sports Medicine).

Therefore, Be It Resolved by (Your City, School District, Organization) that:

- (1) The month of October be designated as "Colorado Pedestrian Month";
- (2) Every Wednesday be designated as "Colorado Walks Wednesdays";
- (3) The International Walk to School Day date in October set annually by the Partnership for a Walkable America be designated as "Colorado Walk to School Day";
- (4) (Your City, School District, Organization) encourages the residents of Colorado to participate in "Colorado Pedestrian Month", "Colorado Walks Wednesdays", and "Colorado Walk to School Day and Week", and to increase their awareness of pedestrian safety while finding ways to increase the number of walking trips into their daily lives.