

Walk to School Day

Each October, millions of children, parents, teachers and community leaders across the globe walk to school to celebrate International Walk to School Day. It is an energizing event, reminding parents and children alike of the simple joy of walking and biking to school. It also serves as an opportunity to focus on the importance of physical activity, safety, air quality and a more walkable community. Once children and parents discover the joys of walking and biking through such events, they are more motivated to continue on their own. This is why Walk to School events can be a great way to jumpstart a Safe Routes to School Program in your community. Here's how:

Green Bay was able to promote their Walk to School Day event on the morning news the morning of the event. One of the locals, a grandmother who felt unconnected with her neighborhood ever since she stopped walking her own children to school, saw the promotion and waited by her front window for the neighborhood families to walk by. When they did, she went out and introduced herself to them and walked with them to the school. After walking with her neighbors, she once again felt connected with her community as she had when she walked her own children to school many years ago. She also offered to serve as a walking helper for the neighborhood children whenever they walked to school.

Implementing a Walk to School Day

Getting Started

Find parents, teachers, local police and other key community leaders and supporters that will help organize and promote the event. Potential partners include PTA/PTO members, physical education teachers, school nurses, public health department staff or other community members with an interest in physical activity, safety or pedestrian issues.

Planning

Working with your partners, decide what type of event fits your school and community. Then choose a focus for the walk, such as promoting physical activity, pedestrian safety or a cleaner environment and determine whether the event will last one day or a week. Consider involving local businesses, as they may be able to sponsor the event and provide participants with incentives.

Registering

Register your event online. By registering, you make the event known to media, your community and other participants. In addition, you demonstrate a commitment to changing transportation habits and provide an opportunity for data collection. You'll also get access to additional materials and information and the chance to win money for your event! Register at <http://www.walktoschool.org/>.

Promoting your event

Let students, parents and others know about your event and how they can participate. Make announcements at school, publish school newsletter articles and send flyers home. If possible, post signs along the route a few days ahead to let the community know about the event. Business sponsors may want to hang signs in their stores.

Media coverage of the event brings visibility to the event's purpose and can help build support for any changes that need to be made to make it safer for kids to walk and bike to school. When media cover your event, they help spread the word of the great health, safety, environmental and social benefits of more children walking to school every day. Colorful signs held by smiling, walking children and adults creates a perfect photo opportunity. *(Customize the materials provided to you on the CD to your school/ community to help promote the event.)*

At Madison's Midvale Elementary, a K-2 school, a group of parents started an informal walking school bus. Each morning parents and children gathered at the same corner to make their trek to school. Parents soon realized that on days when they were unavailable to walk their own child they could count on their neighbors to do so.

Important: Walk to School Day does not have to be limited to the first week in October. As long as there is enough enthusiasm from children, parents, teachers and other community leaders, Walk to School Day events can be organized at any time of the school year

In Sheboygan Falls, about 250 children participated in Walk to School Day in April 2007. The event coincided with Earth Day intending to help people become more aware of how their everyday choices impact their personal health and the health of their community. Organizers of the event originally expected about 50 children to participate and were overwhelmingly pleased when 250 showed up.

Safety First: Convincing the Parents

MANY PARENTS ARE RELUCTANT TO allow their children to walk or bike to school on their own because of safety issues and many parents do not have time to walk or bike with them. Below are activities that put walking and biking safety first.

Walking School Bus

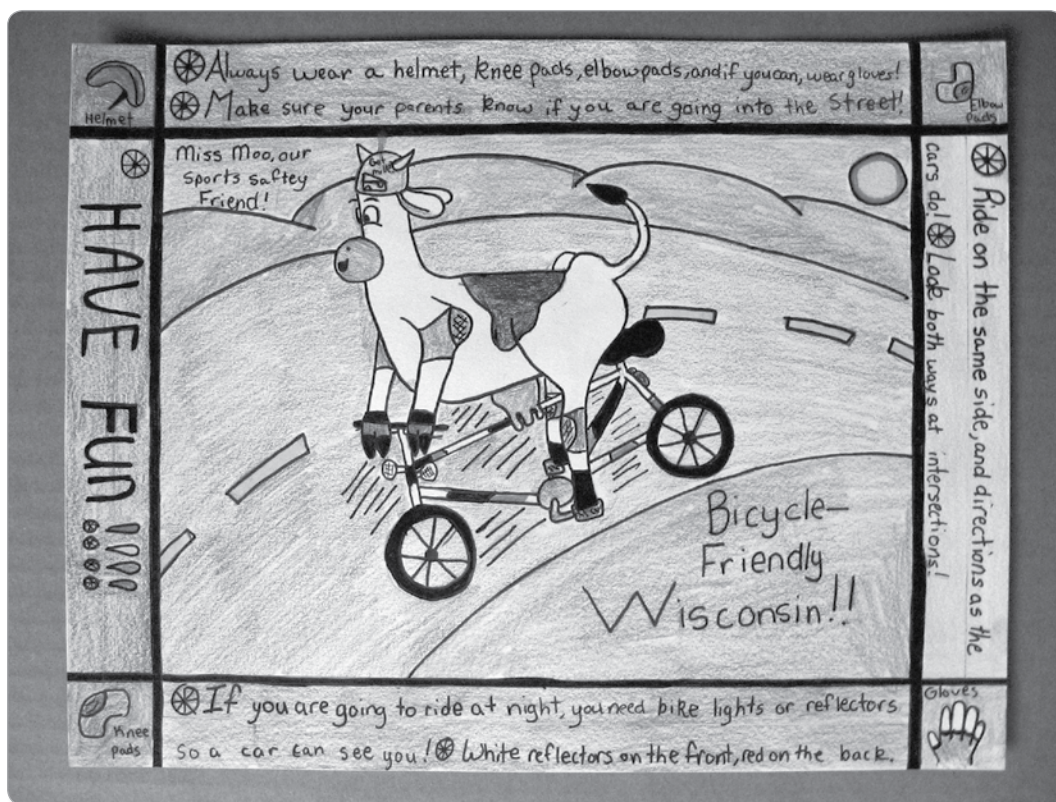
Alleviate parents' concerns for safety by organizing a walking school bus. By inviting adults to walk along with a group of children, parents will feel less concerned with their children walking to school (*For more information on how to start a walking school bus, visit www.walkingschoolbus.org or read the Starting a Walking School Bus Guide included on the supplemental CD*).

Bike Trains

A bike train is like a walking school bus except students ride their bikes to school. Bike trains, however, require students to learn and know bike safety rules and wear a helmet. Hold a workshop on bike safety before the event to teach bike safety rules. Also, there must be a smaller parent to student ratio for a bike train because more attention is needed on each student to ensure their safety. (*For more information on how to start a Bike Train, read the Bike Train section of the Walking School Bus Guide on the supplemental CD*).

Alternative Drop-offs

For students that live too far away to walk or bike to school, an alternative drop-off location can be designated so that these children still have the option of walking and biking to school. A good drop-off location must be big enough to allow safe drop-offs, be close to the school and have safe sidewalks connecting to the school. From the alternative drop-off location, parent volunteers walk or bike with the children to school.



The Bicycle Federation of Wisconsin the Governor's Bicycle Council held a poster contest intended to encourage young people to bike. Here is a picture of the 2006 winner!

Events and Contests: Convincing the Children

CONVINCING CHILDREN TO WALK AND bike to school on *Walk to School Day* may be difficult. Below are a list of events and contests that create enthusiasm for *Walk to School Day* or any day.

Class Competition

Classes can compete against each other based on walking and biking related activities. For example, schools can reward the class that has the highest percentage of students walking and biking to school, the most miles walked or biked to school, etc.

Frequent Rider Miles

This contest rewards students for personal transportation choice. A student receives a tally card to mark his/her points. Students earn two points every time they walk or bike to school and one point every time they carpool or take the bus. When they earn twenty points, students turn in

their card for a small prize and get another card. At the end of the contest, hold a raffle drawing of all the completed tally cards for prizes. Contact local businesses and ask them to donate prizes.

Poster Contest

Poster contests allow children to be creative and have fun while learning about better walking and biking safety practices. Use themes such as pedestrian safety or best biking practices and allow for students to compliment their artwork with creative slogans. Display copies of the winning poster around the community to advertise *Walk to School Day* or *Safe Routes to School*. (Forms for poster contest on supplemental CD.)

In addition, the Governor's Bicycle Council sponsors a poster contest each year. More information is available from the Bicycle Federation of Wisconsin's Web site at www.bfw.org.

Walk and Bike Across America

This contest allows students to get a broader perspective on the freedom provided by walking and biking. Students keep track of the distance that they walk and bike to school by calculating how far they live from school and multiplying that by the number of one-way biking and walking trips. If children are dropped off at alternative drop-off points near the school they calculate

the distance they travel from there. Similar counts are made from home to the bus stop. Children could also be given pedometers for this project.

Each week at a designated time, the students add up the distance that the whole class traveled during that week and plot it on a map. Then they “travel” to a destination chosen by the class within those miles. Students become aware that they can travel great distances on foot or by bike. As your class continues to accumulate miles, the class can research new destinations around the country. At the end of a designated time, the class that has traveled the farthest gets a special reward, such as a video or pizza party.

Hold an assembly

Hold an assembly with speakers on safe walking and biking. Have local dignitaries attend to emphasize the importance of physical activity. Invite parents to attend so they receive the message as well. You could also invite local bike clubs or teams to come speak about biking. Have them bring expensive, lightweight bikes to show the kids and have them wear their local club or team jersey. Racers can talk about what it takes to compete in bike racing, train over long distances and answer questions about how it works. If your local area has a long distance cyclist have them show the children how they hauled their clothes, tent and other belongings by bike. No matter what, have them stress the importance of always wearing a helmet. They may even have a cracked helmet to show the children.

Going Beyond a Day

Safe Routes to School

Increasing physical activity among children, teaching safe walking and biking skills, reducing traffic and improving the environment around schools can not be achieved in one day.

Addressing all these problems takes time.

Walk to School Day is only the beginning, yet it is a great way to start a long-term program.

A *Walk to School Day* event can bring attention to existing obstacles for biking and walking as well as build community enthusiasm to make change. Use the momentum from the *Walk to School Day* to continue building a *Safe Routes to School Program*.