



Safe Routes  
to School  
**National  
Partnership**

# Walk to School Day

## Planning Your Program in 4 Easy Steps!



When kids walk to school, they improve their health, gain independence and confidence, and arrive at school ready to learn. A Walk to School Day event is a simple starting place for getting students started safely walking to school, and introducing schools, families, and community groups to Safe Routes to School.

What is Walk to School Day? Walk to School Day is an international holiday celebrated in October each year. Thousands of communities join in with fun and safe Walk to School Day events that get families, teachers, city staff, and community members walking together, while educating children and families about the benefits of walking. In the United States, around 5,000 schools participate, with hundreds more joining each year.

### Why host a Walk to School Day event?

- If you don't have many existing efforts to encourage students to walk to school, Walk to School Day is a fun and easy way to explore interest, build enthusiasm, and get started.
- If your school or community has a thriving Safe Routes to School program, Walk to School Day is a great energizing event, letting you connect your efforts with those of other students around the state, country, and world.





## 1 Get Going! Make Plans and Gain Support

- **Choose a day.** First, you'll want to decide if you will hold your event on the official Walk to School Day, or if a different day is a better fit for your community. For events in October, register your day on the Walk Bike to School website and be sure to check out their Walk to School Day Resources: <http://www.walkbiketoschool.org/>.
- **Determine what your event will involve.** A basic Walk to School Day event is organized around encouraging students and families to walk to school from home. You can add on additional pieces, such as awards, incentives, giveaways, marking your route with fun chalk drawings, students taking pictures along their route, and more. If you want to encourage groups to walk, organize a [walking school bus](#) in which students meet up to walk together with one or more adults. If students live too far to easily walk from home, start at a location such as a park or shopping center a few blocks from the school. If few students are likely to walk to school due to unsafe streets or neighborhood conditions, you can also plan a [Walk AT School event](#) on your school's track, around the school, or in the gym.
- **Plan your route.** Whether you are just encouraging families and students to walk from home, or planning a walking school bus or remote drop off, having a map of routes that have safe sidewalks and crossings will be helpful and encourage participation. Use your knowledge of the area to recommend routes, or conduct a walk audit as a more methodical way to identify safer routes to and from school—use the [Walk Audit Toolkit](#) to help identify routes.
- **Identify supplies.** Make sure you've thought through what supplies you will need for the event. Some items can be in kind contributions, others may need to be purchased. Signs, small giveaways for walkers, flyers/maps, buttons, armbands, and snacks are some items to consider. Figure out what kind of budget you will have, and determine how to meet your needs.

### Set Goals!

Identify a goal for your program – this will help show success, progress, and garner support for future Walk to School Day programs. Suggested goals are a certain number of students participating or total distance walked.



## 2 Promote and Encourage Participation!

As your event draws closer, you'll want to reach out to students and families as key participants, and also invite others.

- **Communicate with families and students.** Let families know when the event will be held and how they can be involved, either as a volunteer or by encouraging their student to participate. Share maps of routes, send flyers home from school, and use social media to spread the word. Build student excitement by making announcements in class or at assemblies!
- **Keep school staff and administration in the loop.** Identify the key school contacts – principals, secretaries, and district staff – and keep them consulted and up to date on your event details.
- **Promote with potential partners and supporters.** If you need volunteers or contributions, approach businesses, civic organizations, health departments or other community partners.
- **Invite elected officials to walk to school with students.** Elected officials enjoy the opportunity to meet families and join in a community event. By participating, they often become more committed to safe walking and bicycling for students.
- **Invite the media.** Let your local TV, radio, and news outlets know about your event and its purpose, and ask if they can join you! Send the media information 3-4 weeks in advance, and follow up with reporters to get a story in the paper, on the news, or in a blog before, during and after the event. Have facts ready to share about Walk to School Day and why you are holding an event. They might even want to interview families, students, school staff, elected officials, and other supporters.
- **Inform law enforcement.** It's a good idea to make your police or sheriff's department aware of the day and time of your event, and where it will be held if in the public right-of-way. Traffic control falls under their jurisdiction, and your enforcement agency can be an invaluable resource to make your day safe and successful.





## 3 It's Event Day!

- **Thank volunteers.** Provide coffee or refreshments and thank them verbally.
- **Provide incentives for participants.** Have snacks for kids, giveaways or promotion items, and greeters at the school to give high fives to kids that walked!
- **Thank elected officials and partners.** During your program, acknowledge elected officials and partners.
- **Greet media.** Assign someone to welcome media and have a press packet or flyer for them to reference.
- **Assign someone to take pictures that you can use to promote your successful program and inspire future events.** Take photos of dignitaries, elected officials, and partners, as well as kids and families.
- **Gather data on participation.** Do a head count, or ask classroom teachers to take a count of who participated. A popular visual way to document participation is to give kids stickers to put on a big poster or chart as they arrive at school. Knowing how many students participated will be great information to share with the media, partners, and decision makers!



R.D White Elementary Walk to School Day



Stonewood Elementary Walking School Bus

## 4 Learn for Next Time!

- **Review event goals.** Compare actual participation to your event goals.
- **Survey volunteers, students, parents, and school staff about the event.** Their opinions and suggestions will help plan for the future, and you may find more volunteer and community support for your next event.
- **Think about improvements for next year.** Make next year's Walk to School Day even better by noting what went well, what you'll want to modify, and how you can expand the event!



Ridgewood Elementary Walking School Bus