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Dear School Community Members,

The partners of Health by Design invite you and your students to join in celebrating **Walk to School Day on October 7, 2009**. Walking and biking to and from school offers tremendous potential for health, environmental, and cost savings benefits! As you no doubt realize, the number of students who walk and bike to school has declined dramatically in just one generation. Safe options for active transportation provide our youngest citizens a chance to engage in the neighborhoods in which they live, socialize with parents and friends, and to experience a sense of independence and responsibility.

We certainly recognize that there can be many challenges to walking and biking to school. Safety is obviously of highest priority. Maybe sidewalks and crosswalks are missing near your school or traffic is too heavy for safely biking. Perhaps most students live a significant distance away. And given Indiana weather, who knows if you'll need sunscreen, mittens, or an umbrella?!

The good news is that many administrators, teachers, parents, and students have already tackled these issues and found creative solutions. More than 40 communities throughout Indiana are participating in the Safe Routes to School program. There are numerous organizations and local leaders willing to provide you the resources and support you need to join in the fun!

Without question, it is our goal for more children to walk and bike to school *every day*. Still, Walk to School Day provides a neat opportunity to raise awareness, build enthusiasm, and promote the policy and environmental changes needed to ensure a lasting impact. Attached is a simple four-step process for getting started and a fact sheet with lots of helpful information. A few key websites are listed, but www.walktoschool.org is your one-stop-shop for everything you might need to organize for October 7th. And don't forget, our Health by Design partners are more than willing to provide input, help find answers, and share resources.

We hope that you will choose to participate in Walk to School Day and that your community will embrace walking and biking options for getting to and from school every day. We look forward to seeing pictures of your event and hearing of your success! Take care & good luck.

Sincerely,

Kim Irwin
Executive Director
Alliance for Health Promotion

Michael O'Loughlin
Safe Routes to School Program Manager
Indiana Department of Transportation

Walk to School Day Getting Started

Walk to School events can be as simple as a few kids and parents meeting to walk to school or very elaborate celebrations. Event logistics range from a central walking location to people walking from their homes. Below are four simple steps for getting organized. Visit the website www.walktoschool.org for extra help, materials, and resources.

1. Get Partners

Principal, Police, Parents:

Successful events have the support and participation of the principal, police and parents. Ask them to be partners. The school principal can give the school's commitment, while the local police department is a valuable resource and will ensure that safety is a priority. Parents add energy and enthusiasm and make the walk work.

Public Officials:

Schools have gotten sidewalks fixed and new trails built in record time because of partnerships with public officials and other community leaders, such as mayors and city council members. Walk to School celebrations give leaders the opportunity to publicly support health, environment and safety initiatives, so consider finding ways to involve them.

2. Plan

Work with partners to plan the celebration. Together, decide what type of event fits your school and community. Then choose a focus for the walk, such as promoting physical activity or pedestrian safety, and determine whether the event will last one day or a week. Local businesses may be willing to sponsor the walk by providing refreshments or small gifts for participants.

3. Register

Registering an event makes it known to media, the community and other participants. Registered communities will also get access to additional materials.

4. Promote It

Tell students, parents and others how to participate. Making announcements at school, publishing school newsletter articles and sending flyers home are just a few ways to get the word out. Posting signs along the route a few days ahead will help the community know. Business sponsors may want to hang signs in their stores.

Media coverage of the event brings visibility to the event's purpose and 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.

Walk to School Day Related Facts and Information

Except where otherwise noted, all statistics are taken from the 'Talking Points' resource, which includes citations, on the Walk to School website: <http://www.walktoschool.org/resources/talking-points.cfm>

- In 1969, 42% of students walked or bicycled to school; only 16% of students between the ages of 5-15 walked or bicycled to or from school in 2001 (the latest year for which data are available).
- The average cost per student using bus transportation was \$737 in 2004-2005, up from \$466 in 1980-1981. Each bus route can cost from \$30,000-\$60,000 per year.
- Nearly 30% of Indiana youth, ages 10-17, are overweight according to the [2009 F as in Fat report](#) from the Trust for America's Health.
- Experts recommend that children get at least 60 minutes of age appropriate physical activity on most, preferably all, days of the week.
- Walking or bicycling to and from school is an easy way for children to get some physical activity each day, which all children need.
- It takes about 5-10 minutes for children to walk a quarter of a mile or bicycle an entire mile.
- Physical activity is associated with improved academic performance in children and adolescents.
- The daily walk to school offers children an opportunity to spend time in the natural environment; exposure to nature and time for free outdoor play can have multiple health benefits including stress reduction, relief of ADHD symptoms in children, and increased cognitive and motor functioning.
- Passenger cars, trucks, motorcycles, and SUVs together account for 62% of transportation-related greenhouse gas emissions. The transportation sector is responsible for 1/3 of all carbon dioxide emissions in the US.
- Studies in some cities show that 17-26% of morning rush hour traffic can be school-related.
- Air pollutants can be especially harmful to children because their respiratory systems are still developing; at least 14 million school days are missed annually due to asthma.
- Teaching children walking and bicycling safety skills – such as how to choose where to walk and cross streets, obeying crossing guards, and being visible to drivers - can help create lifelong traffic skills.
- Vehicle speed is a key element in safety. A pedestrian hit by a car traveling 40 mph has a mere 15% chance of survival; at 20 mph, that chance of survival increases to 85%.
- Safety education also includes working with parents, drivers, law enforcement, and local officials.

Related Websites

Walk to School Day: <http://www.walktoschool.org>

National Center for Safe Routes to School: <http://www.saferoutesinfo.org>

Safe Routes to School National Partnership: <http://www.saferoutespartnership.org>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: <http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/kidswalk/>

Indiana Safe Routes to School Program: <http://www.in.gov/indot/2956.htm>

Health by Design: <http://www.healthbydesignonline.org/>