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Dear School Community Members,

Remember walking or biking to school when you were a kid? The partners of Health by Design invite you and your students to lace up your shoes and pump up your tires again for **Walk to School Day, Wednesday October 5, 2011**. The number of students who walk and bike to school has declined dramatically in just one generation, from 47.7% in 1969 to only 12.7% in 2009. Safely biking and walking to school would provide our youngest citizens a chance to explore their neighborhoods, while getting some vital exercise and socializing with friends and parents.

We recognize there may be challenges to walking and biking to school. Safety is of highest priority. Maybe sidewalks and crosswalks are missing near your school or traffic is too fast or heavy for safely biking to school. Perhaps students live more than two miles away. And who can predict Indiana's weather?

The good news is that administrators, teachers, parents, students, planners, engineers and health officials across the country have tackled many of these issues and found creative solutions. To date 223 awards have been issued in Indiana under the Safe Routes to School (SRTS) program to support more walking and biking. Numerous organizations and local leaders can provide you suggestions and contacts for the resources and support you need to join in the festivities.

Our goal is for more children to walk and bike to school every day. Still, this event provides a great 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 and key websites. **Please register your local event at www.walktoschool.org**. This site is also your one-stop-shop for everything you might need to organize your events. And don't forget, the Health by Design Coalition and its partners are available to provide input, help find answers and share resources.

We hope that you will choose to participate in Walk to School Day on October 5th and throughout the year and that your school community will embrace walking and biking as preferred options for getting to school every day. We look forward to hearing about your success!

Sincerely,

Kim Irwin
Executive Director
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Michael O'Loughlin
SRTS Program Manager
IN Department of Transportation

Marcie Memmer
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IN State Department of Health



Walk to School Day 2011 - Hike it! Bike it! I like it! Wednesday, October 5th 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.

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Resources and Talking Points

Find additional Talking Points at: <http://www.walktoschool.org/downloads/WTS-talking-points-2011.pdf>

Fewer children walk or bicycle to school than did so a generation ago.

- In 1969, 48% of students in grades K through eight (ages 5 through 14) walked or bicycled to school; in 2009, only 13% of students did so.
- This is an opportunity lost. Walking or bicycling to school gives children time for physical activity and a sense of responsibility and independence; creates opportunities to be outdoors and provides time to connect with parents, friends and neighbors.

Transportation and fuel costs are significant expenses.

- The average cost per student transported using bus service in 1980-1981 was \$490. In 2007-2008 the average cost had risen to \$866.

Perceptions about traffic can lead to even less walking and bicycling.

- As more children are driven, more parents become convinced that traffic conditions are unsafe for walking or bicycling.
- School travel by private family vehicle for students grades K-12 accounted for 10 to 14% of all automobile trips made during the morning peak period in 2009.

Walking and bicycling need to be safe and accessible transportation options.

- Higher speeds exponentially increase the chances that a driver will hit a pedestrian crossing or along the roadway and that the injuries sustained will be life changing (brain injury, physical impairment) or life ending.
- Teaching children walking and bicycling safety skills helps create lifelong traffic skills; safety education also includes working with children, parents, drivers, law enforcement, and local officials.

Physical activity contributes to overall health.

- Experts recommend that children do 60 minutes or more of physical activity each day; walking and bicycling to school offers an opportunity for children to get physical activity as part of their daily routine.

Vehicle emissions contribute to air pollution and global climate change, threatening human and environmental health.

- If half of the students at an average size elementary school choose to walk to school their impact could be a savings of over 39 tons of greenhouse gas emissions a year, the equivalent of the carbon-removing abilities of 1000 trees.
- 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.

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://saferoutes.in.gov>

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

