



How to Get Started

WALK AND BIKE TO SCHOOL EVENTS

Walk and bike to school events are planned activities designed to enhance and support SRTS programs by providing a **specific occasion to involve students in walking or biking to school**. The idea of encouraging more children to walk to school began as an initiative in Europe but has now spread internationally. Walk to School Week, established in Great Britain in 1994, has grown into an international phenomenon and is celebrated as International Walk to School Day on the first Wednesday of every October. **October now marks International Walk to School Month** and is celebrated in over 40 countries by millions of walking participants; however, walk and bike to school events can take many forms, and **can be held any time throughout the school year**.

Benefits of Walk or Bike to School Events

Promotes Healthy Lifestyles – integrates physical activity, helping students and adults to incorporate walking and biking into a daily routine.

Strengthens the Community – neighbors have an opportunity to interact with each other while walking and biking on their way to school and bringing together a stronger sense of community.

Raises Environmental Awareness – walking and biking to school results in fewer vehicles on the streets therefore reducing air pollution and traffic congestion.

Fosters Safer Streets – focus on improving street and sidewalk conditions and security throughout the community increases when there is more pedestrian movement along the streets.

Promotes Walking and Biking Safely – children develop and learn life skills from adults accompanying them along walks preparing them for road safety and personal awareness skills.

Increases School Spirit – children and adults alike will have the opportunity to come together and celebrate the event while taking pride in what they are doing.

Helps to Kick-Start an SRTS Program – often when students try walking and bicycling, they see how fun and easy it can be, as well as what needs to be done to make conditions better.

Who to Include in Walk or Bike to School Events

Planners

A **leader** is necessary; someone who is willing and able to begin the process and take charge to get the event moving by **getting others involved and forming a team**. (See *Building Your Team Fact Sheet*) The team can include parents, teachers, principals, local community groups, etc. Keep your team small until you are ready to build up and **designate tasks** to additional team members.

CHECKLIST:

Walk and Bike to School Event

- Pick a Date (begin planning 4-5 months prior to event date)
- Form a Team (start small for manageability)
- Decide on the Type of Event
- Emphasize Safety
- Invite the Media / Publicize
- Celebrate!
- Record Success



Participants

Students, parents, teachers, school staff, law enforcement, mayors, council members, local celebrities, community organizations and **many more can take part**. Invite the media to promote and share your big day. Involve local politicians and encourage sponsors for the event.

Facilitators

There are **organizations that can help you** with your Walk and Bike to School event such as your NJ SRTS Coordinator, the NJ Bicycle and Pedestrian Resource Center, SafeKids New Jersey, and your local Transportation Management Association (TMA). See the "Resources" section of this fact sheet for a list of resources that may be beneficial in **planning and running** your event.

When to Hold a Walk or Bike to School Event

Walk to School Events can be held anytime throughout the school year, but keep in mind that International Walk to School Day is celebrated the first Wednesday of October, which is International Walk to School Month. Some schools have designated the first Wednesday of every month as "Walking Wednesday". Others have chosen to **promote walking and biking to school on holidays or in conjunction with school functions**. Halloween can be an exciting day for children to parade to school in their costumes. Walking to the polls on Election Day has also become popular. Earth Day (in April) is a great time to promote walking and biking to school while celebrating the environment. May is Bike Month and bike rodeos can be held on early dismissal days when children can choose to participate in activities rather than go home early.

Things to keep in mind for planning when to hold the event:

First, **plan early**. These types of events take time to plan in order to be successful. It is strongly recommended that you begin planning in the spring for an event that may be held in the fall. Second, do not worry about the weather or if it is garbage day. The whole point of a walk to school event is to prove that **you can walk to school any day and in all kinds of conditions**.

Planning your Walk or Bike to School Day

1. To keep it manageable.... Start Small

Select one person from each list to be your partners and begin planning your event. However, you can and will want bring others in later as you move ahead with your planning.

School

Board of Education
School Superintendent
Principal
Teacher or Nurse

Municipality

Mayor or Administrator
City Council Member
Police
Health Department

Community

Parent(s)
Advocacy Group
Community Group
Business Association

2. Identify Goals and Roles

- Decide on the **type of event** you are going to plan, make sure it is compatible with your community and available resources. If your school has a Travel Plan (*See Developing a Basic Travel Plan Fact Sheet*), use it as a guide to plan your event.



- Decide **when** to hold your Walk or Bike to School Day. Will it be during International Walk to School Month? Will it be for one day? A whole week? One day of every week? Check for scheduling conflicts and develop a schedule.
- Determine what types and how many **volunteers** will be needed. For example, will you need crossing guards?
- Reach out to local businesses to see if they would be interested in **sponsoring** the event or supply food/small rewards to the participants at the end of their walk.
- Determine whether or not you want to hold **other activities** during your walk or leading up to your walk.
- Look into the possibility of **partnering** with your local TMA, *SAFE KIDS NJ*, or others.
- Identify **responsibilities** (who does what) and get their commitment to participate.
- **Plan for contingencies**, such as inclement weather. Some schools provide promotional ponchos for rainy walks; others move their bike rodeos into the gym.

3. Publicize/Promote/Advertise

- Pick a theme for your event - pedestrian safety, physical activity, the environment, etc.
- Inform the media of your event.
- Invite local officials/celebrities to be part of your event.
- Distribute promotional material and safety information to potential participants.

4. Hold the Event

- Have someone in charge to make on the spot decisions.
- Be flexible, have fun, and afterwards, celebrate!

5. Document the Event

- Record your successes. Take lots of photos!

Other Walk and Bike to School Activities

Combining other activities with a walk or bike to school event can turn the day into a **celebration**.

Bike Rodeo - Provides children with a basic understanding of effective cycling by providing stations that teach bicycling skills and educate them about bike safety and rules of the road.

Walking School Bus - Adults supervise groups of children as they walk designated routes to school and pick up kids along the way (*See Walking School Bus Fact Sheet*).

Walk to School Parade - Children and parents meet in a specific location or neighborhoods to walk to school together.

Bike Train - A group of children bike to school together accompanied by adult supervision.

Campus Walks/Walk at School -

If conditions outside of the school are unsafe or poor for walking/biking, schools can hold campus walks or a walk at school event.

NEW JERSEY SafeRoutes to School



Incentives

The following are suggestions for incentives that might be offered to **increase participation** in walk and bike to school events. Note: Prizes should be fun, not elaborate or expensive.

Golden Sneakers - A “golden sneaker” award is a lot like hockey’s Stanley Cup. Paint some sneakers gold to make a trophy and reward a student or class for their walking efforts. The trophy is passed to new winners of walking events over time.

School Welcome - Greet students and provide stickers or certificates for walking to school.

Frequent Walker Cards - Distribute cards to students that can be punched when used to walk or bike to school. When the card is full, congratulate the student with a prize and award a new card.

Walk/Bike Across America - Students total the distance traveled by the whole class within a given time period and plot it on a map. Classes with the longest distance traveled are rewarded.

School Breakfast - Host a healthy breakfast when children arrive on a walk to school day.

Partner with local bicycle stores - Invite local bicycle stores to your event and have them demonstrate safe riding skills to the students to ensure safe trips to and from school.

Local Police - Invite local police to promote safety on the streets.

Resources

New Jersey Safe Routes to School Program
Elise Bremer-Nei, SRTS Coordinator
New Jersey Department of
Transportation
Office of Bicycle and Pedestrian Programs
609-530-2765
elise.bremer-nei@dot.state.nj.us
www.njdot.nj.gov/community/srts

National Center for Safe Routes to School
www.saferoutesinfo.org

SAFE KIDS New Jersey
www.usa.safekids.org/state_display.cfm?coalition_state=nj

The New Jersey Bicycle & Pedestrian Resource Center
(A partnership between NJDOT, FHWA and The Voorhees Transportation Center at Rutgers University)
www.njbikeped.org

International Walk to School
www.iwalktoschool.org

AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety
www.AAAfoundation.org

Transportation Management Associations
www.state.nj.us/transportation/commuter/smartmoves/tmaprograms.shtm

For More Information:

A comprehensive guide to national, statewide and regional resources pertaining to Safe Routes to School is available to download from the NJ Bicycle and Pedestrian Resource Center (www.njbikeped.org) entitled, *Who’s Who in New Jersey for Safe Routes to School*.