



SAFE ROUTES TO SCHOOL EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS

International Walk to School Day

International Walk to School Day, held in October each year, joins children and adults from around the world to celebrate walking and bicycling to school. This event can be a fun way to kick off an SRTS program.

Safe Route to School Map Plan

Create a map that displays the recommended safe routes to walk and bike to school. This would entail walking the community and routing the routes with proper signage, crossings, etc., to make the students walk as safe as possible. The maps can be distributed to parents within the walking distance to school in hopes that it would provide parents with the necessary tools to allow their students to walk and bike to school.

Mileage Clubs and Contests

Mileage clubs and contests encourage children either to begin walking and bicycling to school or to increase their current amount of physical activity by making it fun and rewarding. Generally children track the amount of miles they walk or bicycle and get a small gift or a chance to win a prize after a certain mileage goal is reached.

Mileage clubs and contests are usually designed in one of three ways:

1. On an individual basis where every child logs miles walked or bicycled and has a chance to win.
2. As a classroom competition where a classroom's collective miles are compared against other classes.
3. As a competition among schools. Winners are rewarded with prizes including medals, certificates or trophies.

Walking School Buses and Bicycle Trains

A walking school bus and bicycle train both consist of groups of students accompanied by adults that walk or bicycle a pre-planned route to school. Routes can originate from a particular neighborhood or, in order to include children who live too far to walk or bicycle, begin from a parking lot. They may operate daily, weekly or monthly. Often, they are started in order to address parents' concerns about traffic and personal safety while providing a chance for parents and children to socialize.



Walking Wednesday

Can be a designated day of the week that students and parents make every effort to walk or bike to school. This can be any day of the week or combined with a week of pedestrian and bicycle safety activities.

Park and Walk

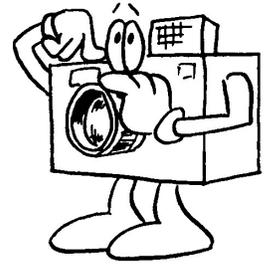
A pre-determined parking lot acts as the meeting area for families who drive and then park and walk the remaining distance to school. Some communities require parents to walk with their children to school while others have designated adult volunteers to walk groups of children from the parking area to school. Park and walk campaigns have the potential to reduce traffic congestion around a school and encourage physical activity for parents and children. This strategy is especially helpful for including families who live too far from the school to walk or who do not have a safe route to school.

Morning Mile/On-campus Walking Activities

In rural areas or other places where it is unsafe or difficult to walk to school, communities can encourage walking on the school campus. For example, school officials can establish walking activities before or after school or during recess, physical education or health class. Walk routes on the school grounds provide all students an opportunity to walk a safe route and increase their physical activity. Ideas presented in the Mileage Clubs and Contests section also provide suggestions for incorporating routine walking into the school day.

Photo Essay

Students that walk to school can record their trip by taking pictures of good and bad situations for pedestrians on their walk to school. Disposable digital cameras can be given to students who use them to take pictures on a walk to/from school. Those pictures are then placed on a display that will be placed in a highly visible area in the school in hopes that it will encourage other students to want to walk to school. Pictures can also be placed on the school website for display.



Bicyclist Safety Skills

Riding a bicycle is a major step towards independence and mobility for children and, like walking, is a skill that can be used throughout a lifetime. Supervised practice time on the bicycle is the most important way for children to gain riding and safety skills. It can also instill confidence and create better riders as well as better future drivers who are more aware of cyclists on the street.

Pedestrian Safety Skills

When pedestrians between the ages of five and nine are injured it is most often when motor vehicles have hit them as they cross the street mid-block, particularly from between parked motor vehicles. Running across intersections and getting off of school buses are also common times for children to be hit by motor vehicles.

In general, children are not ready to cross a street alone until age 10. However, children vary in their developmental readiness to make decisions about where and when to walk and cross a street. Parents are often the best judges of when their child is ready to walk without an adult. When they are ready for this level of independence, children need to know how to choose where to walk, as well as when, where and how to cross a street.

Personal Safety

In addition to pedestrian and bicyclist skills, many schools teach children ways to avoid potential risks in their environment beyond traffic, like criminal activity and people that may want to harm them. Fear of abduction or assault discourages some parents from allowing their child to walk or bicycle to school. Although child abduction, particularly near a school, is very rare, SRTS programs need to address not only the real dangers from crime, but also parents' perceptions.

Whether dangers are real or perceived, both affect parents' decisions to allow their children to walk or bicycle to school. Some students and parents worry about bullying by other children while walking or bicycling to school. Schools address bullying as part of violence prevention programs, which can be incorporated into the SRTS program. Walking school buses can help address personal safety concerns by providing a way for children to walk in a group with adult supervision.

Health and Environment Benefits

Beyond safety, education for children may also address benefits to personal health and the environment provided by walking and bicycling. Health benefits often focus on the importance of physical activity. Children learn about how the cardiovascular and muscular systems function and how physical activity can strengthen these systems. Although most children engage in physical activity primarily because they think it is fun, highlighting the relationship between personal health and physical activity gives children another reason to be physically active.



Education may also include information about the impact of motor vehicle use on air quality and limited energy resources. Children learn that they can help keep the environment healthy by walking and bicycling instead of traveling in a motor vehicle.