



# How to plan a **Walk to School Day** event





# table of contents

It's time to walk and roll! _____	1
Steps to planning a Walk to School Day event _____	3
Great ideas for your event _____	7
When walking from home is not an option _____	8
Safety on the event day and beyond _____	9
What next? _____	12
Resources _____	13



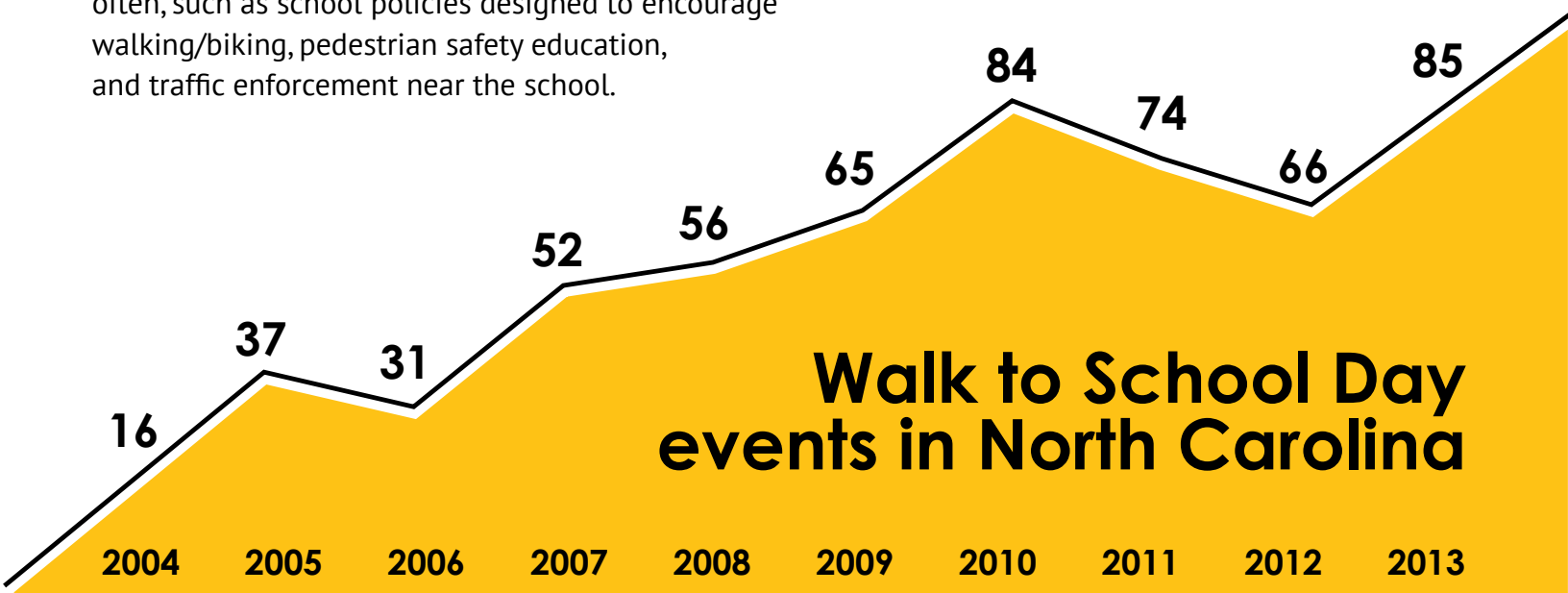
# It's time to walk and roll!



Walk to School Day, held every year in October, is an energizing event. It reminds adults and students alike of the simple joy of walking or bicycling to school. For many communities, the event leads to more walking and bicycling all year long. It also builds support for creating or improving safer walking and bicycling routes. For this year's event date, see [www.walkbiketoschool.org](http://www.walkbiketoschool.org).

Walk to School Day events come in all shapes and sizes. Start small, or start big – the key is to find a good fit for your community. In the past 10 years more than 17,500 schools in 4,500 cities have held 31,000 Walk to School Day events. They do so for a variety of reasons that range from serious to fun, such as promoting physical activity, bringing attention to safety needs, building a sense of neighborhood and inspiring school spirit. Studies have shown that walking to school can positively impact academic achievement, student morning energy levels and attention, truancy, and absenteeism, and can improve schools and their communities through social bonding and community building. In North Carolina, interest in walking and bicycling to school has been growing and so has participation in Walk to School Day.

In a 2013 survey of North Carolina Walk to School Day event organizers, 68% indicated that their event led to the kinds of changes that help make it possible for students to walk and bicycle to school more often, such as school policies designed to encourage walking/biking, pedestrian safety education, and traffic enforcement near the school.



## What if no students live close enough to walk or the route is not safe?

Schools have found creative ways to deal with those issues. For ideas for holding a Walk at School event or using a gathering spot for a group walk, see **When walking from home is not an option.**



"The principal at this new school, built in a neighborhood, organized the event to encourage more parents to walk with their children to and from school. The initial group is small but the school hopes to increase the number of walkers and cyclists as the land around the school is built out and more sidewalks are added."

**-Walk to School Day Event  
Organizer in Forsyth County**



## Who can be a Walk to School event organizer?

A Walk to School event organizer can be anyone who wants to champion holding an event at a local school, as long as the principal gives the green light. Organizers are often PTA members, other parents, school nurses, PE teachers, school principals or local non-profit organizations. Make it official by registering the event at **[www.walkbiketoschool.org](http://www.walkbiketoschool.org)**. This guide is written for anyone who is stepping up to be an event organizer or is involved in planning an event.

## Are you in?

Walk to school events can be simple or complex. This guide aims to give ideas and inspiration for a range of situations and resources. Maybe you don't have a lot of time but you don't want to wait a year. Go the simple route this time. Just take that first step. Who knows where it will lead? Perhaps the greatest tip for success is for the event to tie back to something a community really cares about, whether that's promoting an active lifestyle, safety, the benefits of community or some other reason.

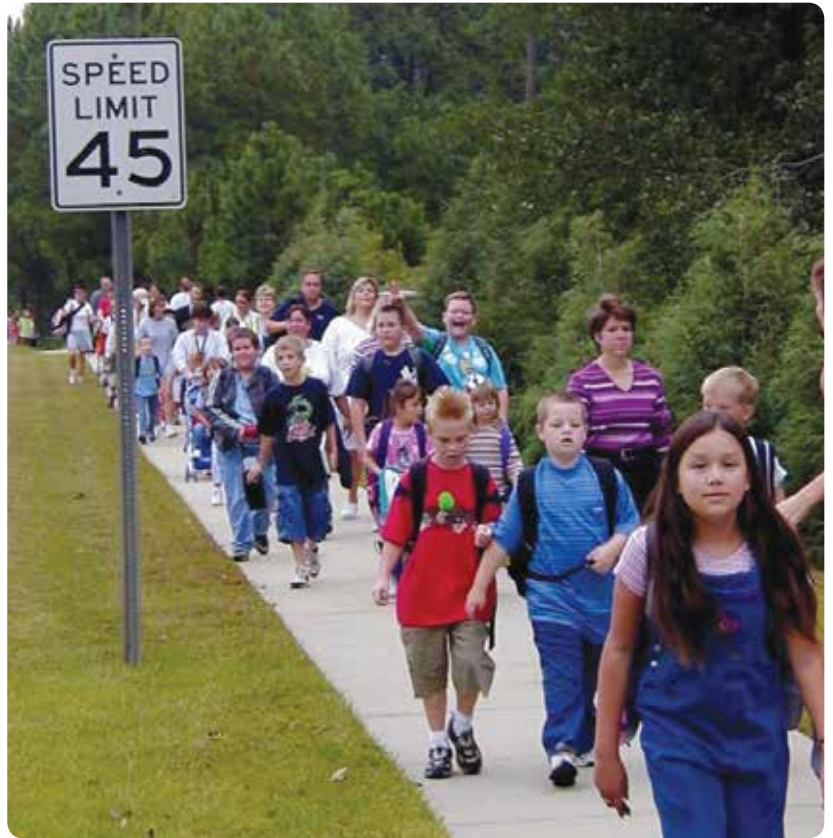


# Steps to planning a Walk to School Day event

This section presents Walk to School Day planning for two different scenarios: When there is a week to plan, read **Option 1**. When you've got time to plan a more elaborate event, read **Option 2**.

Many successful events begin with little time to spare. A smaller event could simply include the families that sometimes walk to school but make it a point to celebrate together on a special day. A larger event could invite others in the community to walk together and include an activity when the walkers arrive at school.

Just as no two events are exactly the same, there is no one right way to have an event. It is about making the event work for your school and community.



## Option 1: When there's no time to spare!

An event can be simple. In fact, it's possible to plan a Walk or Bike to School event in one week. Here's how it can work:

### Day 1:

- Obtain the school principal's approval for a Walk or Bike to School Day event.
- Register the event at **walkbiketoschool.org** to be counted among the millions of participants. Registering your event will also give you free access to extra resources and promotional materials.
- For more information about resources that may be available for your school, contact your local Active Routes to School Coordinator at **[www.communityclinicalconnections.com/What\\_We\\_Do/Active\\_Routes\\_To\\_School/](http://www.communityclinicalconnections.com/What_We_Do/Active_Routes_To_School/)**
- Decide if the event will encourage walking, bicycling or both and how it will be organized. The easiest last minute option is for families to walk from their own homes, with other families joining along the way. For schools that can ramp up quickly, another possibility is for students to meet and form a parade to head to school.

## Day 2:

- Invite students and parents to participate. If the school has a listserv, use it to announce your event. Download fliers that can easily be printed on a home or school computer at **[www.walkbiketoschool.org/get-set/build-excitement/fliers-and-banners](http://www.walkbiketoschool.org/get-set/build-excitement/fliers-and-banners)**.
- Think safety. If some students already walk or bike to school, safety issues should have been addressed. Check with the school, the resource officer (if there is one), or the local police department to see if there are any special safety issues. If groups will be walking, you may want to see if an officer wants to walk with the students.



## Days 3-5:

- Recruit volunteers to help distribute fliers and, if desired, to greet walkers and bicyclists on the big day.

## Day 6:

- Make an intercom announcement to remind students to walk or bicycle to school tomorrow.
- Create posters or a banner that will greet students when they arrive at school. Potential phrases include, "Thanks for walking," "It's Walk to School Day," "We walked to school today!" For banners, visit **[www.walkbiketoschool.org/get-set/build-excitement/fliers-and-banners](http://www.walkbiketoschool.org/get-set/build-excitement/fliers-and-banners)**.

## Day 7:

- Event day is here! Take photos of walkers and riders (if allowed by the school). Once you have the school's permission, share your event photos on the Safe Routes to School Facebook page **[www.facebook.com/saferoutesinfo](http://www.facebook.com/saferoutesinfo)**, or on the Walk and Bike to School event yearbook page **[www.walkbiketoschool.org/go/how-did-it-go/event-yearbooks](http://www.walkbiketoschool.org/go/how-did-it-go/event-yearbooks)**.
- As students arrive, ask them to contribute to a list like: Ways they got their parents to walk and bike to school with them, Top 10 reasons to walk and bike to school and/or Top 10 things that need improvement to make walking and biking to school easier and safer. Save the students' lists to get ideas for next year's event.



## Option 2: An event with a bigger splash

Walk to School Day events sometimes have more than one goal (like to kick off weekly Walking Wednesdays, promote physical activity, have fun!) so it makes sense that there might be multiple partners and different activities before, during and after the event. The sky is the limit but these steps will take you through several planning steps so you can decide how to best maximize your event and reach your goals.

### 1. Get approval from the school

Make sure the school principal supports the event. Some principals even become event champions.

### 2. Envision a fun event

Think about what would work best for your community. Will students meet and form a parade to head to school? Or will families walk from their own homes, adding other families along the way? Will there be a celebration at the school? Ask parents, school staff, administration and students what they think.

### 3. Register the event

Register at [www.walkbiketoschool.org](http://www.walkbiketoschool.org) to have your event part of the official national count and access free downloadable materials such as banners, fliers, stickers, punch cards, puzzles and certificates.

"Our PTA provided fresh fruit, water, and healthy snacks for all of the walkers once they got to school, and we were able to join with a local coffee shop that provided free coffee to parents, which was great!"

**-Walk to School Event  
Organizer in Wake County**



### 4. Approach partners and recruit volunteers

There are likely other people or groups who share the desire to promote walking and bicycling to school. Consider inviting teachers, school administrators, law enforcement, local businesses and public officials – maybe even a local celebrity like a local television meteorologist, a college sports team or the high school's mascot to play a role in the day by walking with students, greeting walkers at the school or donating refreshments or incentives.

Contact your local Active Routes to School Coordinator for more information about resources available for your school  
[www.communityclinicalconnections.com/What\\_We\\_Do/Active\\_Routes\\_To\\_School/](http://www.communityclinicalconnections.com/What_We_Do/Active_Routes_To_School/)



## 5. Think safety

If some students already walk or bike to school, any safety issues should have already been addressed. However, your event may have many more students arriving on foot or bicycle than usual and that may require special consideration. Check with the school, the resource officer (if there is one), or the local police department to see if there are any special safety issues. If groups will be walking, you may want to see if an officer wants to walk with the students. See **Safety on the event day and beyond** for more information about what to consider and potential strategies.

## 6. Make a plan to include children with disabilities

Walk to School Day events create opportunities for children to interact and socialize with their peers. These events can also provide chances to teach pedestrian and bicycle safety skills and positive experiences to encourage independent travel later in life. Learn more about providing access for all students at **[www.walkbiketoschool.org/get-set/plan-the-event/access-for-all-students](http://www.walkbiketoschool.org/get-set/plan-the-event/access-for-all-students)**.

"I had a group of volunteers that helped me make signs and banners to hang up along the route. To promote the event, flyers were posted around school, a flyer went home with the students with all the event details, and morning announcements were made at school. All families were encouraged to carpool to our meeting spot and then walk from there. We ended up having 245 walkers, including Cary's mayor, Harold Weinbrecht, join in the event!"

**-Walk to School Day Event  
Organizer in Wake County**



## 7. Promote the event

Make sure that students and parents know how to participate, and let the local media know when and where things are happening. These events make great newspaper photos and video for TV. See **Resources: Talking points for International Walk to School Day** to help you or the designated spokesperson be ready to talk to media.

For press releases, PSAs, logos, flyers, banners and more go to **[www.walkbiketoschool.org/get-set/build-excitement](http://www.walkbiketoschool.org/get-set/build-excitement)**

## 8. Celebrate

Enjoy the magic of what a day can do!

## 9. Make your next move

If you had a planning team or key volunteers, you may want to host a debriefing meeting to talk about what went well and what should be changed for next year. Many communities are so energized by the event they want to start doing more to make it possible for students to walk and bicycle more often. See **What next?** for ideas for taking it beyond the day.

For more information about how to plan a Walk to School Day event, visit **[www.walkbiketoschool.org/getting-started](http://www.walkbiketoschool.org/getting-started)**.



# Great ideas for your event

1. **Carry** signs that display pedestrian or bicycle safety messages like, “Walking to school is cool,” “Watch for Walkers,” or “Hike it Bike It I like it!” For downloadable event signs, visit [www.walkbiketoschool.org/get-set/build-excitement/event-signs](http://www.walkbiketoschool.org/get-set/build-excitement/event-signs).
2. **Provide** a nutritious breakfast or snack before or after walking.
3. **Incorporate** a walking or biking theme into a physical education class.
4. **Calculate** the total steps or miles accrued during the event and display it at the school.
5. **Invite** the school mascot or wear school colors while walking or biking.
6. **Form** a walking school bus or bicycle train. See [www.walkbiketoschool.org/keep-going/ongoing-activities/walking-school-bus](http://www.walkbiketoschool.org/keep-going/ongoing-activities/walking-school-bus).
7. **Ask** all participating students to sign a banner proclaiming, “We walked to school today!” and hang it in the school. See [www.walkbiketoschool.org/get-set/build-excitement/fliers-and-banners](http://www.walkbiketoschool.org/get-set/build-excitement/fliers-and-banners).
8. **Make and display** posters promoting the event at school, along the route(s), and throughout the community.
9. **Provide** parents with maps of suggested walking and bicycling routes to school using resources like Google Maps ([www.google.com/maps](http://www.google.com/maps)).
10. **Use** the school intercom system to announce pedestrian and bicycle safety tips and to give reminders about the event.
11. **Ask** students to help plan the event. Members of student councils, student safety patrols and other leadership groups can provide good peer role models.
12. **Designate** an area for parents to “Park and Walk” so that children who live further away can participate. It will also reduce traffic congestion at school. Some schools will allow school buses to drop off students at a meeting point so that they can walk the remainder of the route too.
13. **Play** walking-themed songs such as, “Walking in Memphis” by Marc Cohn, “Walking on Sunshine” by Katrina & the Waves, and “I Would Walk 500 Miles” by the Proclaimers, or songs that make students smile like “Happy” by Pharrell Williams.

“Our event was successful because our high school ROTC and band really supports our walk and makes it festive. Our community and parents really support the walk every year.”

**-Walk to School Day Event  
Organizer in Cumberland County**



“Event went really well. Lots of participation and organizations that came out, including Safe Kids Cape Fear, Pilots International, FedEx, Chick-fil-A, Wilmington PD and Wilmington Fire Rescue.”

**-Walk to School Day Event  
Organizer in New Hanover County**



# When walking from home is not an option



Walk at School events, held as part of Walk to School Day, are a great opportunity to bring visibility to the reasons why students cannot walk from home and talk about the needed changes. Walking and biking at school is particularly good when there aren't good walking or biking routes to school or if students live too far away to walk or ride.

Recess, physical education, or even class time can be dedicated to walking or biking together. Students can use the school field or playground or, with a little planning, walk and bike around the school campus. Resourceful event organizers have even held walks in gyms in rainy weather. It's an activity all the children can enjoy, and the walks or rides can be tied into a variety of classroom activities. Schools can host bike rodeos or walking parades after school or during school hours if it is not possible to walk or bike to school.

## Five ideas for Walk at School Day

1. **Look** for a remote meeting point where groups can converge and walk the remainder of the route together. See [www.walkbiketoschool.org/get-set/event-ideas/designated-starting-points](http://www.walkbiketoschool.org/get-set/event-ideas/designated-starting-points).
2. **Walk** laps around the track or create a route around the school campus.
3. **Have** walkers sign a banner. See [www.walkbiketoschool.org/get-set/build-excitement/fliers-and-banners](http://www.walkbiketoschool.org/get-set/build-excitement/fliers-and-banners).
4. **Teach** pedestrian safety before, after, or as part of the walk. (For ideas, see [Safety on the event day and beyond](#))
5. **Invite** the media to the walking activity and talk about the benefits of walking to school and why students currently cannot. (See [Resources: Talking points for International Walk to School Day](#))

"All students, regardless of their mode of transportation to school, participated by walking laps as a school. We integrated safety aspects within the physical education classes. We want students to know the value of being healthy and staying active."

-Walk to School Day Event  
Organizer in Cumberland County



"Parents planned this event to demonstrate interest in kids walking to school and the need for sidewalks and safe crosswalks. All these students live across the road from the school but must be driven or ride the bus because there are no pedestrian accommodations."

-Walk to School Day Event  
Organizer in Forsyth County





# Safety on the event day and beyond

Safety is the priority for any walk to school event. If you're planning a specific event route, consider these guidelines as you map it out. If families are walking from their homes, you may want to give them these tips. To find the safest route to school, look for:



## 1. Places to walk or bicycle where there are sidewalks or paths that are separated from traffic

Choose sidewalks or paths wherever possible, even if that means the trip will take a little longer. If there are no sidewalks or paths, walk as far from motor vehicles as possible, on the side of the street facing traffic. Want to learn more? You can access more pedestrian and bicycle safety resources at [www.walkbiketoschool.org/keep-going/pedestrian-safety](http://www.walkbiketoschool.org/keep-going/pedestrian-safety) and [www.walkbiketoschool.org/keep-going/bike-safety](http://www.walkbiketoschool.org/keep-going/bike-safety).

## 2. Places to cross (if necessary)

Minimize the number of street crossings. Avoid busy, high-speed or multi-lane roads, wherever possible. When available, cross at a location with an adult school crossing guard.

## 3. Pedestrian- and bike-friendly drivers

Look for places where drivers are paying attention, yielding to pedestrians and cyclists and respecting speed limits.

## 4. A comfortable feeling

Use a route that avoids potential problems like loose dogs, the presence of criminal activity, vacant buildings or poorly lit streets. A law enforcement officer or local traffic engineer could also offer helpful input regarding complex routes.

# Make a plan for the event

Before the event, talk to the principal and other members of the planning team to identify potential issues and how to address them. Potential safety concerns that may be mentioned include:

- Routes that don't have places to walk that are separated from traffic
- Routes that require crossing streets without adequate crossings
- Personal security risks like bullying or criminal activity
- The need for students on bicycles to use helmets correctly

These issues don't have to be event-stoppers, but they will certainly influence the event's structure. Whether the concerns are real or perceived, they should be addressed so that students, families and leaders feel comfortable. Often, events are a great opportunity to prompt bigger conversations about how to address any barriers that get in the way of children walking and bicycling to school safely on a regular basis. (See **When walking from home is not an option** for more information about Walk at School events.)

The following ideas might make things click.

- **Consider a remote starting point.** Families and others may meet as a group and walk together, or the location may be used simply for parking and families can walk whenever they arrive. If you designate a specific remote starting point, you have more control over the route and you can pick one with sufficient walking conditions. See [www.walkbiketoschool.org/get-set/event-ideas/designated-starting-points](http://www.walkbiketoschool.org/get-set/event-ideas/designated-starting-points).
- **Get law enforcement involved.** Depending on the community, it might be possible to temporarily close streets or have law enforcement direct traffic and assist with crossing students. Law enforcement officers can also use what they know about nearby traffic conditions to help design recommended walking and bicycling routes during event planning.
- If there are particular streets that should be avoided but alternate routes exist, **create and distribute maps to show walking and bicycling routes.** An online mapping tool can help. One example is Google Maps at [www.google.com/maps](http://www.google.com/maps).
- **Prepare participants with safety education.** Student pedestrians and bicyclists can benefit from education about safe skills before the event. Some organizers get help from law enforcement, others have enthusiastic teachers willing to integrate lessons into their classroom or PE time. Drivers near the school may need to be notified about the upcoming event by using the school's changeable signage, through fliers and other communication channels. Remind them to slow down and yield to walkers and cyclists. If bicycling is part of the event, communications about the event should include a reminder that riders need to wear helmets. Before the event, equip parents with what their families need to know for safe walking and bicycling. See **Resources: Tips for parents and other adults for teaching pedestrian safety to children.**





- **Use walkability checklists.** Before the event, these checklists can be used to get a sense of potential concerns on the routes. If routes are sufficient for walking and bicycling but there's interest in pushing for further improvements (such as an expansion of safe routes for students who still don't have a safe option), ask families to use the checklist as part of the event. Past event organizers have tabulated checklist results and had students present them to city leaders as a way to advocate for change. See **Resources: Walkability checklist.**

## **Beyond the event: Promoting safety every day.**

For ongoing safety-related barriers to walking and bicycling, use the event to bring attention to what needs to be done. Having a community leader or transportation official participate in an event is a great way to get their buy-in and commitment to assist with future changes. See [www.walkbiketoschool.org/keep-going](http://www.walkbiketoschool.org/keep-going) for more ideas.

Students will need safe walking skills that can serve them throughout their lives. Use a lesson plan – or the entire curriculum – from the North Carolina Department of Transportation's *Let's Go NC! A Pedestrian and Bicycle Safety Skills Program* at [www.ncdot.gov/bikeped/safetyeducation/letsgonc/](http://www.ncdot.gov/bikeped/safetyeducation/letsgonc/), or to at least introduce the basic concepts, see *Pedestrian Safer Journey* at [www.pedbikeinfo.org/pedsaferjourney/](http://www.pedbikeinfo.org/pedsaferjourney/).





# What next?

This is when the outcome of the event may surprise you. Many schools and communities want more. So, how do you keep the momentum going?

Start by planning a group debrief, talking about plans for next year's event or establishing ongoing activities at your school. Many events are already a strategic part of long-term efforts to promote safe walking and bicycling. For help transitioning your event into an ongoing activity, visit [www.walkbiketoschool.org/keep-going](http://www.walkbiketoschool.org/keep-going). Here, you'll learn more about walking school buses, mileage tracking, safety education and classroom activities.

"We were very encouraged by the number of families who participated in this event, and are currently working on putting a walking policy in place at our school now."

**-Walk to School Day Event  
Organizer in Johnston County**



"We did this at a magnet school where 90% of the kids are driven or bussed. We had all drivers and busses park on the other side of an adjacent park and joyfully walk in to school. We now do this monthly."

**-Walk to School Day Event  
Organizer in Durham County**



**Special thanks to all of the North Carolina Walk to School Day organizers whose photos and experiences contributed to this guide.**



# Resources

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## **Talking points for International Walk to School Day**

Also available at <http://walkbiketoschool.org/NCtalkingpoints>

## **Tips for parents and other adults for teaching pedestrian safety to children**

Also available at [http://www.saferoutesinfo.org/sites/default/files/tips\\_for\\_parents.pdf](http://www.saferoutesinfo.org/sites/default/files/tips_for_parents.pdf)

## **Walkability checklist**

Also available at <http://walkbiketoschool.org/get-set/event-ideas/walkability-bikeability-checklists>



## Talking Points for International Walk to School Day

Talking points are an important tool that can be used to communicate a consistent message. These talking points may be particularly useful for conversations and meetings with key stakeholders, such as parents and local officials, as well as interviews with the media. While this document is several pages, please note that the most relevant information for Walk to School Day is on the first two pages.

The following information can help communicate important topics and concepts, such as:

- About Walk to School Day
- Why walk to school?
- Safe walking and bicycling

### About Walk to School Day

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- Schools and communities in North Carolina are joining with others around the country and world to celebrate International Walk to School Day. See this year's date at [www.walkbiketoschool.org](http://www.walkbiketoschool.org). Celebrations will include activities like forming walking school buses, learning about pedestrian safety and celebrating new sidewalks or improved crossings.
- Walk to School Day ([www.walkbiketoschool.org](http://www.walkbiketoschool.org)) is a global event that involves communities from more than 40 countries walking and biking to school on the same day.
- To find out who's participating near you, visit [www.walkbiketoschool.org](http://www.walkbiketoschool.org).
- One-time events like Walk to School Day can encourage more students to walk or bicycle to school even weeks after the day of the event.<sup>1</sup>

### Why walk to school?

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- **Fewer children walk or bicycle to school than did so a generation ago.**
  - Nationally
    - Walking/biking to school<sup>2</sup>:
      - In 1969, 48 percent of students in grades K through eight (ages 5 through 14) walked or bicycled to school.
      - In 2009, only 13 percent of students in grades K through eight walked or bicycled to school.
    - Distance and walking/biking to school<sup>2</sup>:
      - In 1969, 89 percent of students in grades K through eight who lived within one mile of school usually walked or bicycled to school.
      - In 2009, only 35 percent of students in grades K through eight who lived within a mile of school usually walked or bicycled to school even once a week.
  - North Carolina
    - Walking/biking to school:
      - In 2011, only 2.7 percent of students grades K through five walked or bicycled to school one or more days per week.<sup>3</sup>
    - Distance and walking/biking to school:
      - In 2011, fifteen percent of children ages 5 through 10 lived less than one mile from school.<sup>3</sup>



- **It's fun!** Walking and bicycling bring a sense of joy and independence.
- **Healthier habits.** The trip to school is a chance for children (and adults!) to get the physical activity they need.
  - Experts recommend that children and adolescents get 60 minutes or more of physical activity each day.<sup>4</sup> In North Carolina, 72.2 percent of students grades K through five and 68 percent of students grades six through eight do not exercise, play a sport, or participate in physical activity for at least 60 minutes for 6-7 days per week.<sup>3</sup>
  - Physical activity is important for the health of all children, including children with disabilities.
  - Less active children are more likely to be overweight.<sup>5</sup> Research shows that overweight children are at increased risk of obesity, and chronic diseases, such as diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure, asthma and various cancer types in adulthood.<sup>6,7,8,9,10</sup>
  - Physical activity is associated with improved academic performance in children and adolescents.<sup>11,12,13</sup>
- **Cleaner environment.** Replacing car trips to school with walking or bicycling can reduce congestion and air-polluting emissions. Passenger cars, trucks, motorcycles, and SUVs together account for 62 percent of transportation-related greenhouse gas emissions.<sup>14</sup> The transportation sector is responsible for one third of all carbon dioxide emissions in the US.<sup>15</sup> Air quality is measurably better at schools located in neighborhoods with integrated street and sidewalk networks, and these schools have more students arriving by bicycle and on foot.<sup>16</sup>
- **Promotes safety.** Building sidewalks, providing education programs and adding traffic calming measures are some of the ways to improve safety. Encouraging walking and bicycling to school can help build support for infrastructure improvements for the trip to school and the broader community.
- **Community benefits.** Reducing traffic congestion and creating a sense of neighborhood by being outside walking and bicycling benefit the community as well as provides time to connect with parents, friends and neighbors.

### Safe walking and bicycling

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Walking and bicycling need to be safe and accessible transportation options. This means creating safe environments for students of all abilities and teaching safety skills to walkers, bicyclists and drivers.

#### Safe walking and bicycling environments include:

- Neighborhood schools that are within walking and bicycling distance from homes.
- Sidewalks or bicycle-paths that connect homes with schools.
- Child-friendly opportunities to cross streets (such as the presence of adult crossing guards, raised medians or traffic and pedestrian signals).
- Slow vehicle speeds accomplished through roadway safety measures (traffic calming) and/or police enforcement where needed.
- Pathways that are accessible for students of all abilities.

#### Driver behaviors, like speeding and distracted driving, are safety concerns. Attentive drivers traveling at slower speeds can save lives.

- Speeding reduces a driver's peripheral vision, increases the distance needed to stop and increases the severity of injury to a pedestrian in a crash.
- Distracted driving draws a driver's vision from the road, hands off the steering wheel or mind off of the act of driving. Examples include talking or texting on the phone and eating while driving.
- Distracted driving increases the braking distance needed to safely avoid pedestrians and bicyclists. Multi-tasking while driving also slows cognitive ability, processing and reaction time.<sup>17</sup>

**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.**

- If more children walked or bicycled to school, it would reduce the number of cars near the school at pick-up and drop-off times, making it safer for walkers and bicyclists and reducing congestion.
- According to a review of over 100,000 surveys of parents, fifty-five percent of parents who reported not allowing their children to walk or bicycle to school identified the number of cars along the route to school as a significant issue in their decision-making process.<sup>18</sup>

**Safety education includes working with:**

- Children - to provide them with basic safety skills, such as wearing a bicycle helmet, how to choose where to ride, how to obey crossing guards and be visible to drivers.
- Parents - to create awareness of the need for pedestrian and bicyclist safety education and opportunities to walk and bicycle, and the importance of practicing safety skills with their children.
- Drivers - to alert all drivers to the presence of walkers and bicyclists and the need to slow down.
- Law enforcement - to enhance pedestrian and bicyclist safety with school zone enforcement.
- Local officials - to identify changes that improve walking and bicycling conditions around schools.

**Teaching children walking and bicycling safety skills can help create lifelong traffic skills.**

- Short periods of skills-based training can significantly improve child pedestrian behavior.<sup>19</sup>

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- <sup>1</sup> Buckley, A., Lowry, M., Brown, H., Barton, B. (2013). Evaluating safe routes to school events that designate days for walking and bicycling. *Transport Policy*, 30, 294-300.
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# Tips for Parents and Other Adults For Teaching Pedestrian Safety to Children

## SafeRoutes

National Center for Safe Routes to School



TIP SHEET

Walking is a fun and healthy way to spend time with your children while teaching them skills that can serve them well throughout life. The walk to school is a great time to use these safety tips.

### Be a walking role model

Children learn through experience. Walking with parents or another caregiver is an important way for children to practice crossing real streets and picking safe places to walk. There is no magic age when children are old enough to walk without an adult. But, as a parent, you should decide when your child has the skills and experience to deal with traffic safely without you.

As you walk with your child, remember these safety tips:

- Wear bright-colored clothes, and carry flashlights or wear reflective gear if it is dark or hard to see.
- Look for traffic at every driveway and intersection. Be aware of drivers in parked cars that may be getting ready to move.
- Obey all traffic signs and signals.
- Cross the street safely:
  1. Stop at the curb or edge of the street.
  2. Look left, right, left and behind you and in front of you for traffic.
  3. Wait until no traffic is coming and begin crossing.
  4. Keep looking for traffic until you have finished crossing.
  5. Walk, don't run across the street.



### Choose the safest route to school

Select a walking route with less traffic and intersections.

- Pick places where there are sidewalks or paths separated from traffic. If there are no sidewalks or paths, walk as far from the motor vehicles as possible and, if possible, on the side of the street facing traffic.
- Limit the number of street crossings. When available, cross at a location with an adult school crossing guard.
- Avoid crossing busy or high-speed streets.

### Understand your child's limitations

Children are not small adults. It will take time and practice for a child to develop the ability to deal with lots of traffic. Over time, children develop the ability to accurately judge the speed and distance of oncoming traffic. Young children may think that a car is able to stop, when in fact, it is not. Also, children may think that if they can see a driver, the driver can see them. But, children are smaller and harder for drivers to see. Get down to a child's height to experience their perspective and see what they see.

# Walkability Checklist

## How walkable is your community?

### Take a walk with a child and decide for yourselves.

Everyone benefits from walking. These benefits include: improved fitness, cleaner air, reduced risks of certain health problems, and a greater sense of community. But walking needs to be safe and easy. Take a walk with your child and use this checklist to decide if your neighborhood is a friendly place to walk. Take heart if you find problems, there are ways you can make things better.

### Getting started:

First, you'll need to pick a place to walk, like the route to school, a friend's house or just somewhere fun to go. The second step involves the checklist. Read over the checklist before you go, and as you walk, note the locations of things you would like to change. At the end of your walk, give each question a rating. Then add up the numbers to see how you rated your walk overall. After you've rated your walk and identified any problem areas, the next step is to figure out what you can do to improve your community's score. You'll find both immediate answers and long-term solutions under "Improving Your Community's Score..." on the third page.



Take a walk and use this checklist to rate your neighborhood's walkability.

# How walkable is your community?

## Location of walk

## Rating Scale:



### 1. Did you have room to walk?

- ☐ Yes ☐ Some problems:
- ☐ Sidewalks or paths started and stopped
  - ☐ Sidewalks were broken or cracked
  - ☐ Sidewalks were blocked with poles, signs, shrubbery, dumpsters, etc.
  - ☐ No sidewalks, paths, or shoulders
  - ☐ Too much traffic
  - ☐ Something else \_\_\_\_\_

**Rating:** (circle one)  
1 2 3 4 5 6

**Locations of problems:**  
\_\_\_\_\_

### 4. Was it easy to follow safety rules? Could you and your child...

- ☐ Yes ☐ No Cross at crosswalks or where you could see and be seen by drivers?
- ☐ Yes ☐ No Stop and look left, right and then left again before crossing streets?
- ☐ Yes ☐ No Walk on sidewalks or shoulders facing traffic where there were no sidewalks?
- ☐ Yes ☐ No Cross with the light?

**Rating:** (circle one)  
1 2 3 4 5 6

**Locations of problems:**  
\_\_\_\_\_

### 2. Was it easy to cross streets?

- ☐ Yes ☐ Some problems:
- ☐ Road was too wide
  - ☐ Traffic signals made us wait too long or did not give us enough time to cross
  - ☐ Needed striped crosswalks or traffic signals
  - ☐ Parked cars blocked our view of traffic
  - ☐ Trees or plants blocked our view of traffic
  - ☐ Needed curb ramps or ramps needed repair
  - ☐ Something else \_\_\_\_\_

**Rating:** (circle one)  
1 2 3 4 5 6

**Locations of problems:**  
\_\_\_\_\_

### 5. Was your walk pleasant?

- ☐ Yes ☐ Some problems:
- ☐ Needed more grass, flowers, or trees
  - ☐ Scary dogs
  - ☐ Scary people
  - ☐ Not well lighted
  - ☐ Dirty, lots of litter or trash
  - ☐ Dirty air due to automobile exhaust
  - ☐ Something else \_\_\_\_\_

**Rating:** (circle one)  
1 2 3 4 5 6

**Locations of problems:**  
\_\_\_\_\_

### 3. Did drivers behave well?

- ☐ Yes ☐ Some problems: Drivers ...
- ☐ Backed out of driveways without looking
  - ☐ Did not yield to people crossing the street
  - ☐ Turned into people crossing the street
  - ☐ Drove too fastp
  - ☐ Sped up to make it through traffic lights or drove through traffic lights?
  - ☐ Something else \_\_\_\_\_

**Rating:** (circle one)  
1 2 3 4 5 6

**Locations of problems:**  
\_\_\_\_\_

### How does your neighborhood stack up? Add up your ratings and decide.

1. _____	<b>26-30</b>	Celebrate! You have a great neighborhood for walking.
2. _____	<b>21-25</b>	Celebrate a little. Your neighborhood is pretty good.
3. _____	<b>16-20</b>	Okay, but it needs work.
4. _____	<b>11-15</b>	It needs lots of work. You deserve better than that.
5. _____	<b>5-10</b>	It's a disaster for walking!
Total: _____		

Now that you've identified the problems,  
go to the next page to find out how to fix them.



Now that you know the problems, you can find the answers.

# Improving your community's score

## 1. Did you have room to walk?

Sidewalks or paths started and stopped  
Sidewalks broken or cracked  
Sidewalks blocked  
No sidewalks, paths or shoulders  
Too much traffic

### What you and your child can do immediately

- pick another route for now
- tell local traffic engineering or public works department about specific problems and provide a copy of the checklist

### What you and your community can do with more time

- speak up at board meetings
- write or petition city for walkways and gather neighborhood signatures
- make media aware of problem
- work with a local transportation engineer to develop a plan for a safe walking route

## 2. Was it easy to cross streets?

Road too wide  
Traffic signals made us wait too long or did not give us enough time to cross  
Crosswalks/traffic signals needed  
View of traffic blocked by parked cars, trees, or plants  
Needed curb ramps or ramps needed repair

- pick another route for now
- share problems and checklist with local traffic engineering or public works department
- trim your trees or bushes that block the street and ask your neighbors to do the same
- leave nice notes on problem cars asking owners not to park there

- push for crosswalks/signals/ parking changes/curb ramps at city meetings
- report to traffic engineer where parked cars are safety hazards
- report illegally parked cars to the police
- request that the public works department trim trees or plants
- make media aware of problem

## 3. Did drivers behave well?

Backed without looking  
Did not yield  
Turned into walkers  
Drove too fast  
Sped up to make traffic lights or drove through red lights

- pick another route for now
- set an example: slow down and be considerate of others
- encourage your neighbors to do the same
- report unsafe driving to the police

- petition for more enforcement
- request protected turns
- ask city planners and traffic engineers for traffic calming ideas
- ask schools about getting crossing guards at key locations
- organize a neighborhood speed watch program

## 4. Could you follow safety rules?

Cross at crosswalks or where you could see and be seen  
Stop and look left, right, left before crossing  
Walk on sidewalks or shoulders facing traffic  
Cross with the light

- educate yourself and your child about safe walking
- organize parents in your neighborhood to walk children to school

- encourage schools to teach walking safely
- help schools start safe walking programs
- encourage corporate support for flex schedules so parents can walk children to school

## 5. Was your walk pleasant?

Needs grass, flowers, trees  
Scary dogs  
Scary people  
Not well lit  
Dirty, litter  
Lots of traffic

- point out areas to avoid to your child; agree on safe routes
- ask neighbors to keep dogs leashed or fenced
- report scary dogs to the animal control department
- report scary people to the police
- report lighting needs to the police or appropriate public works department
- take a walk with a trash bag
- plant trees, flowers in your yard
- select alternative route with less traffic

- request increased police enforcement
- start a crime watch program in your neighborhood
- organize a community clean-up day
- sponsor a neighborhood beautification or tree-planting day
- begin an adopt-a-street program
- initiate support to provide routes with less traffic to schools in your community (reduced traffic during am and pm school commute times)

## A Quick Health Check

Could not go as far or as fast as we wanted  
Were tired, short of breath or had sore feet or muscles  
Was the sun really hot?  
Was it hot and hazy?

- start with short walks and work up to 30 minutes of walking most days
- invite a friend or child along
- walk along shaded routes where possible
- use sunscreen of SPF 15 or higher, wear a hat and sunglasses
- try not to walk during the hottest time of day

- get media to do a story about the health benefits of walking
- call parks and recreation department about community walks
- encourage corporate support for employee walking programs
- plant shade trees along routes
- have a sun safety seminar for kids
- have kids learn about unhealthy ozone days and the Air Quality Index (AQI)

# Great Resources

## WALKING INFORMATION

### **Pedestrian and Bicycle Information Center (PBIC)**

UNC Highway Safety Research Center  
Chapel Hill, NC  
[www.pedbikeinfo.org](http://www.pedbikeinfo.org)  
[www.walkinginfo.org](http://www.walkinginfo.org)

### **National Center for Safe Routes to School**

Chapel Hill, NC  
[www.saferoutesinfo.org](http://www.saferoutesinfo.org)

### **For More Information about Who Can Help Address Community Problems**

[www.walkinginfo.org/problems/help.cfm](http://www.walkinginfo.org/problems/help.cfm)

### **State Bicycle & Pedestrian Coordinators**

<http://www.walkinginfo.org/assistance/contacts.cfm>

## FEDERAL POLICY, GUIDANCE AND FUNDING SOURCES FOR WALKING FACILITIES

### **Federal Highway Administration**

Bicycle and Pedestrian Program  
Office of Natural and Human Environment  
Washington, DC  
[www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/bikeped/index.htm](http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/bikeped/index.htm)

## PEDESTRIAN SAFETY

### **Federal Highway Administration**

Pedestrian and Bicycle Safety Team  
Office Of Safety  
Washington, DC  
[http://safety.fhwa.dot.gov/ped\\_bike/](http://safety.fhwa.dot.gov/ped_bike/)

### **National Highway Traffic Safety Administration**

Traffic Safety Programs  
Washington, DC  
[www.nhtsa.dot.gov/people/injury/pedbimot/pedSAFE](http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/people/injury/pedbimot/pedSAFE)

## SIDEWALK ACCESSIBILITY INFORMATION

### **US Access Board**

Washington, DC  
Phone: (800) 872-2253;  
(800) 993-2822 (TTY)  
[www.access-board.gov](http://www.access-board.gov)