

Walk to School Day Event Planning Guide



FALL INTO FITNESS WITH MONTGOMERY COUNTY'S WALK TO SCHOOL DAY!

Join us by planning your own event for Walk to School Day! This guide from Montgomery County's Safe Routes to School Program and the Montgomery County Department of Transportation will give you all the instructions, suggestions, and ideas you need to plan and execute a memorable event that really shows kids just how fun walking and biking to school can be.

WHAT'S INSIDE?

2 Planning your event

Find out what you'll need to do, who's best suited to help you do it, and how you can make the most of this opportunity to encourage kids to walk and bike to school.

5 Promoting your event

What good is a great Walk to School Day if no one knows about it? This section will show you how to inform parents, students, and local media about the important work you're doing by holding this event.

6 In the classroom

Your event can even encompass school hours. Turn to this section for standards-based activities that will teach kids the importance of walking and biking regularly.

8 Planning tools

View a sample schedule of what a successful event looks like. You'll also find a checklist of all the things that must be accomplished to make sure your event succeeds.

10 More information

Learn more about Montgomery County's Safe Routes to School program and its mission to get Montgomery County's kids more active through safer routes to school.



PLANNING YOUR EVENT

The success of any event depends on how well it's planned. This section will give you plenty of advice and tips for creating an outstanding event that kids, parents, and teachers will remember for years to come.

TASKS

As you get started, there are the primary tasks you'll want to keep in mind. If you can effectively handle these tasks, you're well on your way to an outstanding event:

- **IMPORTANT:** Register your event at <http://www.walkbiketoschool.org/>
- Select a team to help you plan the event.
- Decide what activities your event will include.
- Develop a strategy for recruiting volunteers.
- Create a plan for rewarding participants.
- Promote your event to students, parents, and the local media.
- Schedule activities so participants and volunteers know where they should be and when they should be there.

REGISTERING YOUR EVENT

Once you register your event at <http://www.walkbiketoschool.org/>, you'll be granted access to resources and materials that will make promoting your event a snap. You'll also have the opportunity to upload photos and share your event's success with others, as well as see how others ran their events.

SELECTING YOUR PLANNING TEAM

Planning a Walk to School Day event can be a big job. To keep things manageable, consider selecting a planning team to help you. It doesn't need to be a large team (in fact, it's probably best to keep it small), but it will be important for you to have someone to share the workload.

To start selecting your team, look for one to three people who fit one or more of these criteria:

- **Competent time managers** – These folks can manage multiple tasks gracefully, so they won't mind adding event planning to their workload.
- **Passionate advocates** – People who are serious about promoting health and activity in our county.
- **Powerful allies** – Choose at least one team member who has authority over others in your school. These people can help push things through more smoothly.
- **Eager helpers** – People who love to contribute to good causes and are willing to go above and beyond to make it happen.

At your school, look to teachers (PE, health sciences, etc.), administrative staff, and the principal's office. Active parents can also make good team members. Once your team is selected, make sure each member understands the goal of the event: to get as many kids walking or biking on that day as possible. In the long-term, the goal is to encourage kids to do this more often . . . and to encourage their parents to see walking and biking as a reasonable means of transport for their kids each day.

CHOOSING EVENT ACTIVITIES

The activities you choose for your event will depend only on how involved you want your event to be. There are activities to be done before, during, and after school as well as in the evening. Use one of these activities or any combination to tailor your Walk to School Day event to your needs. The day can be as involved or simple as you want it to be!

Here are some ideas for each of the time frames:

BEFORE SCHOOL

- Set up a snack table where kids who walk or bike to school can pick up their healthy snacks as a reward.
- Designate park and walk where you arrange for buses and parents to drop off students at a particular location so the whole school or certain grades can all walk to school together. Encourage parents to walk with their children.
- Set up games on the playground that revolve around the importance of walking and biking.
 - Have kids count steps from one piece of equipment to another to help them put the recommended 10,000–15,000 steps a day into perspective.
 - Have kids walk the track (develop a makeshift track around the playground, if needed) and make it a contest, rewarding kids who walk the most laps.
- Give away pedometers so the children can track their steps throughout the day.
- Hand out information to parents who drive their kids about the importance of their children getting adequate exercise.

DURING SCHOOL

- Hold an assembly where the local police give demonstrations about biking and walking safety.
- Encourage teachers to use in-class activities that are appropriate to the age of their students (see pages 10–14 for ideas).
- At recess, hold a health and fitness fair on the playground, where students can play games and learn about nutrition, exercise, obesity, and the importance of lifestyle choices in staying healthy. Community partners could include the local YMCA, nutritionists or dieticians, and doctors or nurses who can discuss the health effects of sedentary living.

AFTER SCHOOL

- Set up a snack table to give walkers and bikers a healthy snack to tide them over until they get home.
- Conduct a walk-a-thon where students walk or bike a predetermined route (with checkpoints and adult supervision)
- Designate park and walk for drivers who can drive children a safe distance from their homes if they live too far away to walk the whole way.

THAT EVENING

- Set up a special parent meeting to go over:
 - The obesity epidemic and its deadly effects and nutrition
 - Ways for kids to get adequate activity
 - Ideas to make walking/biking to school more convenient

RECRUITING VOLUNTEERS

Once you've established precisely what activities you'll be including at your Walk to School Day event, it's time to talk about who can run the activities. Your small committee can only do so much when it comes to running multiple activities. If you need more people, here are some places to look:

- Faculty and staff – Many teachers won't mind coming in a little early or staying a little late to run a fun activity. This is a great place to start.
- Parents – If you know parents, who are particularly active in school, don't work outside the home, or have flexible work schedules, these are perfect people to tap as activities volunteers.
- Community groups – Look for neighborhood associations, church groups, or activist groups that focus on community health to lend a hand with running activities.
- Public officials – Your event could be a good public relations opportunity for a councilperson or state senator. Ask if they'd like to volunteer as well.
- Public service workers – Police officers often speak in schools about topics that are pertinent to walking and biking.

Start by deciding how many total volunteers you'll need. Then develop a list of people you want to contact. When you contact people, find out exactly what times they'll be available. Some people may be available all day, whereas others will only be available for an hour or two. Here's the key: Keep asking until you have enough volunteers to fill your needs. After you've scheduled the day, you can give each volunteer his or her time, place, and activity assignment.

REWARDING PARTICIPATION

The goal of the Walk to School Day is to show kids just how fun walking and biking to school is. If they're offered an incentive, non-walkers/bikers are more likely to participate in the day's activities and see how much fun walking and biking can be! Some simple rewards can include healthy snacks, certificates of participation, extra credit points in PE or health sciences, or even just verbal recognition over the school's public address system. You can also work with community members to secure rewards that are even more attractive.

Some of these reward items include:

- Pedometers from a local sporting goods store
- Coupons from a healthy local eatery
- Discounts on athletic shoes and gear
- A free bike (donated by a local shop) given to one lucky participant
- Free week passes at a kid-friendly gym in town
- Books about healthy eating

Your committee can work with community members to get these reward items free or at a discounted cost. Remember, rewards aren't the most important part of the day, but they may help motivate new walkers and bikers to give active living a try.

PROMOTING YOUR EVENT

Congratulations! You've figured out most of your event's details. Now it's time to let people

know what you're planning. Remember, no matter how good the event is, if no one knows about it, there's no way it can succeed. When promoting your event, there are three major groups you need to target: students, parents, and the press.

GETTING STUDENTS EXCITED

First and most importantly, it's imperative that students are aware of the day's events and all the activities and rewards that will be available to them. Here are some ways to inform students:

- Hang posters around the school
- Have teachers prep students in class
- Make school-wide announcements each day leading up to the event.
- Post information about the Walk to School Day on your school's web site.
- Create a Facebook or MySpace page for your Walk to School Day and invite all students to be friends. This will allow you to send them frequent updates and reminders.

LETTING PARENTS KNOW

Parents are the ultimate decision makers when it comes to letting their kids walk or bike to and from school. It's important that they understand just how important adequate activity is to their children's health. Here are some easy ways to let them know what's going on for the Walk to School Day:

- Send a piece of backpack mail home with the students
- Mail letters to parents from the principal, stressing the importance of the day
- E-mail parents regularly with updates and reminders about the day's events.
- Have teachers remind parents whenever they're in contact.

GIVING THE PRESS THE SCOOP

Creating greater awareness of your event and the problems it seeks to solve will help ensure that your event has a lasting impact. Here's how to alert the local news media about the Walk to School Day:

- Create a press release to send out to all local news outlets
- Contact local TV and radio stations and ask to be interviewed on air about the event and how important it is to address childhood health in your community.
- Write a letter about the event to the editor of your local paper.
- E-mail all local news outlets and invite them to bring cameras to cover your event.
- Direct the press to your Web site, where you have all the latest information about the events for the day.
- Send your information to the local community calendars put out by news outlets in your area.

IN THE CLASSROOM

As the Walk to School Day approaches, teachers may want to use the excitement generated by the event as an opportunity to engage kids in learning exercises about walking, biking, and

health in general. On the following pages, you'll find in-class activities designed to work with classroom lessons.

TEACHING WITH THESE ACTIVITIES

How you want to work these activities into your lesson plan is up to you.

To achieve maximum effectiveness, you may want to consider:

- Timing these activities to coincide with your school's Walk to School Day.
- Spreading activities out over a full week prior to the event.
- Adding a reward or incentive program for students who walk or bike to school.
- Keeping things fun as well as informative.

IN-CLASS ACTIVITIES: GRADES K-1

Step-by-Step Health

OBJECTIVES:

- Students will count the number of steps it takes to reach a common destination and compare that number to the ideal daily step count.
- Students will recognize the importance of maximizing their daily steps to maintaining health.

TIME/DURATION: 1 hour

MATERIALS:

- Colored construction paper
- Scissors for each student
- Marker for each student

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Hand a different color of construction paper out to each student.
2. Instruct the students to trace their foot onto the construction paper several times, and then cut out the footprints.
3. Students should tape their footprints to the floor, forming a path from their desks to a common destination (the coatroom, the blackboard, the wash sink, etc.)
4. On the way, students should count how many footsteps it takes them to reach their destinations.
5. Seat the students and explain to them that in order to stay healthy, they should be taking at least 10,000 steps a day.
6. Ask them how many more steps they need to take.
7. Older students can tell you how many times they'd need to walk that path to reach 10,000 steps.

IN-CLASS ACTIVITIES: GRADES 2-4

Choices and Health

OBJECTIVES:

- Students will research how exercise and nutrition choices affect health.
- Students will recognize the importance of making good choices to stay healthy.

TIME/DURATION: 1 week

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Give the whole class an overview of the importance of exercise and nutrition on overall health.
2. Assign half of the students a report on nutrition and the other half a report on exercise.
3. Have students research how their topic affects health and write a short report.
4. Each student should present the report to the class.
5. After presentations, facilitate a discussion on how nutrition and exercise work together to create better health.
6. Talk to students about the risks of not exercising or eating nutritious foods.

IN-CLASS ACTIVITIES: GRADES 5-8

Advertising Campaign

OBJECTIVES:

- Students will formulate a strategy using several tactics to communicate the benefits of walking and biking to school.
- Students will develop a creative concept for the campaign.
- Students will implement their campaign within the school.

TIME/DURATION: 1 week

MATERIALS: Students will provide

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Get permission from your school's principal for your students to create a school-wide campaign.
2. Inform students that they will be creating an advertising campaign around the school to promote the health benefits of walking and biking.
3. Lead them in a brainstorming session to think of creative ways to convey the benefits.
4. Once there's a concept most people like, ask the students in which ways they can communicate this message to the school:
 - a. Posters
 - b. E-mails
 - c. Letters to students
 - d. Pamphlets for parents
 - e. A TV commercial to be shown to classes
 - f. PA announcements
5. Once several methods have been identified, assign students to groups. Each group will be responsible for one of the methods the class has decided upon.
6. Give the groups a week to develop a plan to implement their tactic and write the text for the messaging. The tactics should all use the same concept.
7. Unveil the campaign to the school.

SCHEDULING THE BIG DAY

Now that you've planned the events, recruited the volunteers, and told the world about your day, you're ready to start scheduling. Make sure to provide a schedule of the day to all the teachers, parents, and volunteers. Here is a sample of how an event may run. Use this as a guideline that will vary based on the activities you've chosen to include:

Walk to School Day sample schedule

6:45 a.m. Volunteers arrive to set up morning activities

- Morning snack table just near front entrance
- Morning workout track around playground

7:10 a.m. Kids begin arriving for morning activities

8:00 a.m. Kids begin class, morning volunteers clean up their stations

9:10 a.m. Students gather in gym for police lecture and demonstration of walking and biking safety

10:00 a.m. Recess volunteers arrive to set up walking and biking challenges in playground

12:00 p.m. Students participate in recess activities

1:00 p.m. Students attend classes for which teachers have prepared in-class activities

1:30 p.m. Volunteers arrive to set up Health & Fitness Fair in gymnasium, after-school snack table at front entrance, and park and walk stations

3:00 p.m. Health & Fitness Fair opens to students and parents

- Speaker about childhood obesity
- Speaker about planning a safe route to school
- Presentation to parents on bike safety

7:00 p.m. Health & Fitness Fair closes and parents are asked to stay for a discussion of their concerns about kids walking and biking

8:00 p.m. Day ends. . . a huge success!

YOUR TO-DO LIST

Use this list to guide you through the important tasks associated with planning your event. IMPORTANT: Register your event at <http://www.walkbiketoschool.org/>.

Pick your team – Select a few people to share your workload.

Plan your activities – Whether you want one activity or 10, you need to decide what you're going to do before you can continue planning.

Recruit volunteers

- Teachers
- Parents
- Community members
- Public service professionals

Devise a reward strategy for participants

Secure rewards from local vendors

Promote the event

- Hang posters
- Write PA announcements
- Open a Facebook or MySpace page
- Give talking points to teachers
- Send backpack mail to parents
- Mail parent letter
- E-mail parents
- Send out press releases
- Offer to be interviewed on local news shows
- Write a letter to the editor
- Get on community calendars
- Send invitations for press to cover the event

Encourage teachers to do in-class activities

Schedule the day of your event

Provide schedule to all pertinent parties

- Parents
- Volunteers
- Students
- Teachers/staff

Make sure you have everything you need for each activity

- Volunteers
- Prizes
- Snacks
- Presenters



WHAT IS SAFE ROUTES TO SCHOOL?

Safe Routes to School is a program of the Montgomery County Department of Transportation. We're committed to helping build safe routes to school, so kids can walk and bike more. . . getting the exercise they need for happy, healthy lives. Here's how we do it:

- Support projects to make communities more walker/biker-friendly
- Educating teachers, students, parents, and communities on safe walking and biking
- Encouraging kids to walk or bike to and from school—after all, it is fun!

Visit www.montgomerycountymd.gov/walk to find out more about helping build healthier communities with Safe Routes to School.

LEARN MORE ABOUT SAFE ROUTES TO SCHOOL

Visit the national site at www.saferoutesinfo.org to learn about bringing Safe Routes to your school and community, or visit the Montgomery County website at www.montgomerycountymd.gov/mcdot.

QUESTIONS?

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