



2021

COMMUNITIES COME TOGETHER FOR 25TH ANNUAL CELEBRATION

In the fall of 2021, many schools returned to full-time, in-person classes for the first time in over a year, while others that had remained in-person opened to more group activities. With the continued presence of the pandemic, schools and communities showed a commitment to coming together again. This October's Walk to School Day reflected these trends. Across **49 STATES AND THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA, PARTICIPANTS REGISTERED 2,884 EVENTS** on the Walk and Bike to School Day website, walkbiketoschool.org, throughout Walk to School month in October. In 2020, registration expanded from schools only to also include families and neighborhoods to accommodate local pandemic-related guidelines. Registration in 2021 continued this offering but the vast majority of Walk to School Day events were held with schools.

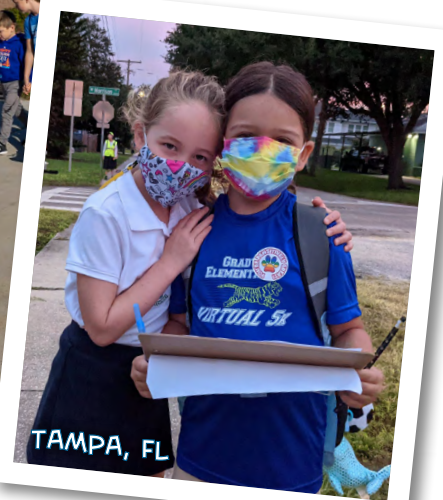
Continuing the interest seen with Bike to School Day, Walk to School Day showcased the importance and fun of walking and rolling to school for communities ready and able to get outside, be together, and enjoy the day. The National Center for Safe Routes to School joined local community leaders and community organization representatives including the Ward 6 Public Schools Parent Organization, US Department of Transportation Deputy Assistant Secretary for Safety Policy Robin Hutcheson, FIA Foundation and approximately 300 students and families from 12 schools for the National Walk to School Day event in Lincoln Park in Washington, DC.



WASHINGTON, DC



NEW YORK MILLS, MN



TAMPA, FL

“

We had a record number of walkers: 96% of our students, all teachers and staff, town officials, parents and friends. Neighborhood watch members handed out water and snacks, put up yard signs and really filled any gaps where and when needed.

– HERMOSA, SD

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“

This was our first time participating in the Walk to School Day, and it was a fantastic turnout. It brought our community together.

– CHAPEL HILL, NC

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WHY WALK? STRENGTHENING BODIES AND COMMUNITY CONNECTION

Following Walk to School month, 2,032 event organizers received a request to complete a survey about their 2021 Walk to School Day experience. 295 participants responded, yielding a 15% response rate. This report features these survey responses, which provide insights into local trends and stories of community commitment to safety, health and fun.

- A little over 50% of survey respondents reported events that featured walking only, around 40% of respondents held events with both walking and biking, and 10% reported only biking.
- Respondents also highlighted their perception of their school/community's motivations for holding a Walk to School Day event. Increasing school spirit stood out this year as the most-selected motivation, chosen by 72% of respondents. This is a change from past years when physical activity/obesity prevention ranked highest.
- Respondents reported increased concern for the environment and climate change as motivation to encourage walking and biking to school compared to recent years (17% in 2020 vs. 32% in 2021).

TOP 5 MOTIVATIONS FOR ORGANIZING AN EVENT

1. Increasing school spirit
2. Physical activity/obesity prevention
3. Building a sense of neighborhood
4. Supporting a Safe Routes to School program
5. Bicycle/pedestrian safety



Through work from last year, we were able to redesign the school parking lot. With pandemic concerns more [caregivers] than usual drive to drop off/pick up kids. We used this year to celebrate/understand the new traffic and pedestrian flow.

– SOUTH GLENS FALLS, NY



MESQUITE, TX

COMMUNITIES USED EVENTS TO HIGHLIGHT SAFETY

Year after year, schools and communities around the country use Walk to School Day as a tool to bring attention to what's needed for safe, active transportation. The 2021 event continued this theme. Whether it was inviting elected officials to join students on their walk to school, promoting new sidewalk and crosswalk projects, or conducting walk audits to identify opportunities to improve pedestrian safety, **NEARLY 40% OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS USED WALK TO SCHOOL DAY TO DRAW ATTENTION TO ROAD SAFETY NEEDS IN THEIR COMMUNITIES.** The variety of strategies that participants used to create safer walking environments for their students indicates a continued commitment to enhancing road safety.



We are trying to get the City to reduce speed limits throughout the City so that it is safer for kids to walk/bike/scoot to school... so we invited the Mayor, City, County leaders [to participate in the event].

– MOUNT RAINIER, MD



Our event received local coverage on WYFF4 and the Greenville Newspaper to highlight the need for a safer walking route after a family was injured at the busy intersection near our neighborhood.

– FOUNTAIN INN, SC



BACK TO SCHOOL TOGETHER

With funding from the FIA Foundation and partnership with Johns Hopkins Center for Injury Research and Policy, the National Center for Safe Routes to School convened a committee representing key health and transportation organizations in spring of 2021 to support safe travel for students as in-person school re-opened in the fall. Back to School Together (VISIONZEROFORYOUTH.ORG/BACK-TO-SCHOOL-TOGETHER/) includes key strategies for school travel, a centralized location for school travel-related guidance, and documentation of innovative actions taken by communities, many of which have benefits beyond the pandemic. Strategies include encouraging active travel, managing vehicle speeds and reducing congestion on campus. Actions and innovations include slow streets/school streets, expanded school walk zones, park and walk programs and quick-build infrastructure improvements.

NEW, COMMUNITY-DRIVEN CHANGES TO ACCOMMODATE WALKING AND BIKING TO SCHOOL

Not only does Walk to School Day spotlight the importance of road safety, but for many schools, it leads to targeted support for students walking and rolling to school through new programs and infrastructure. In **2021, NEARLY ONE-THIRD OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS REPORTED THAT THEIR SCHOOL OR COMMUNITY TOOK NEW ACTION THIS SCHOOL YEAR TO SUPPORT STUDENTS THAT ARE WALKING AND BIKING TO SCHOOL**, such as staggering student release times to reduce conflicts between drivers, bicyclists, and pedestrians. Many schools reported that they have continued hosting monthly walking events beyond Walk to School Day or have established a formal “walking school bus” for students. Other schools developed after-school biking programs or have started incorporating a bike safety unit in the gym curriculum. Organizers also mentioned additional parking for bikes and scooters and crossing guards placed at the school. The positive response to Walk to School Day from students and families also led some schools to develop incentive or reward programs to encourage students to continue with their human-powered commute beyond the annual Walk to School Day event.

In addition to programmatic changes, **65% OF RESPONDENTS REPORTED SOME TYPE OF POLICY OR BUILT ENVIRONMENT CHANGE ATTRIBUTED TO THEIR WALK TO SCHOOL DAY EVENTS, THE HIGHEST PERCENTAGE REPORTING POLICY OR ENGINEERING CHANGES SINCE 2014**. Most reported changes indicate some concern with the built environment around the school and reflect issues faced by schools nationwide dealing with increased vehicle traffic. The top three changes include the addition of signage that supports safe walking or biking to school (30%), changes to drop off and pick up procedures (28%), and the addition of sidewalks, paths, or crosswalks (20%). Note that percentages total more than 100% as respondents could check all that applied.



We staggered the release of students who are walking to leave school at a different time than the bus and car riders. The crossing guard meets them at the school door and walks them to the first intersection.

- PLYMOUTH, IN

One neighborhood has created a walking school bus to school daily.

- MILLBRAE, CA

We added a new bike parking area and we have changed traffic a bit so our main crosswalk is not being blocked as well as added a 2nd “crossing guard” in the front drive for added student safety.

- DALLAS, TX

COMMUNITIES TAKE ACTION TO MANAGE SPEED AND TRAFFIC

Managing motorist speed and traffic congestion are two common challenges for communities across the country. The World Health Organization has formally recommended a speed limit of no more than 20 mph in places where pedestrians and motorists mix, underlining the importance of slow speeds. Addressing speed and reducing car trips to school can improve both safety and health for students and all road users through reduced crashes, injuries and tailpipe emissions.

In the 2021 Walk to School Day survey, **OVER ONE-HALF OF SURVEY RESPONSES INDICATED THAT THEIR SCHOOL OR COMMUNITY IS TAKING ACTION TO MITIGATE TRAFFIC SPEEDS AND CONGESTION.**

Speed reductions near school routes, road diets to reduce speeds and pedestrian crossing distances, and restructuring carpool line traffic flows to reduce conflicts with walking and biking students are examples of strategies various schools and communities have used to address traffic speed and congestion. The addition of new crosswalks, flashing lights at school crossings, and lighted speed monitoring devices all aim to bring increased visibility to children walking and biking to school.

To further support slowing speed and reducing traffic near schools, some event organizers reported advancing policy or advocacy efforts to enhance road safety for children walking and biking to school. This included extending school zones, establishing Vision Zero resolutions and action plans, and advocating for systems-focused approaches to creating safe routes to school.

“We have successfully advocated for all way stops on common walking routes from the school. This slows traffic and gives students an opportunity to cross the road.”
— TAMPA, FL



“On the main road in front of our school, a speed reduction to 35 mph was made several years ago and this summer a road diet was completed that transitioned a 4-lane highway (2 lanes per direction) to a 2-lane road with a middle turn lane, bike lanes on both sides, and three new crosswalks with blinking lights.”
— HENRICO, VA



KEEPING UP THE MOMENTUM AND WELCOMING AN UPDATED NAME

The weather is turning colder, but many students and families continue to walk, whether it is by choice or necessity. See the “Beyond the Event” resources on our website to find more ways to keep the momentum going all year round.

In 2022, we are rebranding Walk to School Day as Walk & Roll to School Day, and Bike to School Day as Bike & Roll to School Day — names that better reflect our longstanding goal of promoting safe, accessible spaces for all active trips, starting with children and the trip to school.

With spring comes the next national event, Bike & Roll to School Day, scheduled for **MAY 4, 2022**. The next Walk & Roll to School Day will be **OCTOBER 12, 2022**. Keep up to date on all things Walk, Bike & Roll to School at WALKBIKETOSCHOOL.ORG.

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