

events as tools for change



philadelphia, PA



Pedestrian and Bicycle Information Center



WHETHER addressing the need to make walking and biking safer for children and youth or encouraging them to be more active, events can be a powerful tool to start, grow and sustain change. Events can celebrate good things, put a light on neglected issues, galvanize community support, or even start advocacy. They can be particularly good at helping all stakeholders to come together and experience what is working, what isn't, and how to collaborate to fix what is broken.

vision zero for youth

Now more than ever, opportunities for positive change exist in communities across the country. Cities of all sizes are committing to eliminating traffic fatalities and serious injuries, often as part of Vision Zero Initiatives. A growing number are focusing on improving safety for youth.

It is events like Walk and Bike to School Days that helped to start this focus.

The successes of Walk to School Day events, held every October since 1997, and Bike to School Day, held every May since 2012, provide excellent examples of how events serve large purposes. Each year thousands of schools, students, parents, and their communities participate.

FOUR FACTS ABOUT WALK TO SCHOOL DAY AND BIKE TO SCHOOL DAY

1. In 2019, **ONE IN 19** schools participated in Walk to School Day and **ONE IN 29** schools participated in Bike to School Day
2. **ONE HALF** of participating school communities say that Walk to School Day is **PART OF A SERIES OF ONGOING ACTIVITIES** in support of walking and biking to school throughout the year.
3. **ONE IN FOUR** events hosted a **MAYOR OR LOCAL DIGNITARY**.
4. **MORE THAN 60%** of Walk and Bike to School Day surveyed organizers say their events led to **POLICY OR ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGES** in their communities—the kinds of changes that can make walking and bicycling to school possible on a regular basis, not just for a few special days.

CHANGES MOST OFTEN IDENTIFIED AS RESULTING FROM A WALK OR BIKE TO SCHOOL DAY:

- Adding **REQUIRED SAFETY EDUCATION**
- Adding **WALKING** and **BICYCLING PROMOTION** to school policies
- Adding **SIGNAGE** that supports safe walking and bicycling to the school
- Increasing **TRAFFIC ENFORCEMENT** near the school
- Adding or improving **SIDEWALKS, PATHS** or **CROSSWALKS**

celebrate where it is safe

Through an event, some communities find they have an enjoyable walk or bike to school and realize they want to do it more often. Some just like having fun together. A teacher sees how nice it is to get to meet parents she had not seen before. A principal thinks about how much more focused students are when they get a bit of exercise. A student is just happy to walk with both her dad and new teacher. Regularly scheduled walking activities like Walking Wednesdays and walking school buses often are an outgrowth. Some parents and students just decide to keep walking on their own.

This is the very first time our school did it. We are a very rural school and it was great. Normally 20 walkers come a day. On this special day, we had 290 kids and parents bike and walk to school!

WEST PALM BEACH, FL (2018)

We first participated in 2017. Since then, we host monthly Bike to School Days and the kids love it!

FAIRHOPE, AL (2019)

fix where it is not safe

Some event participants see the possibility of broad benefits to walking and biking. Some see dangerous conditions or bad behaviors by drivers and decide something is going to get done about it. A mayor sees a chance to rally support for a new program. The first attention should go to fixing conditions where students have no other (or safer) ways to get to school other than on foot, then improving places where students could choose to walk if it were safe and appealing. The issues might be that there are no sidewalks, no safe places to cross streets, or something else.

We had a ribbon cutting ceremony to celebrate a new crosswalk improving access to the school campus. Town of Apex staff including the town planner, engineers and the crew who built the crosswalk were in attendance.

APEX, NC (2018)

Making improvements to the physical environment often requires both public support and political will. Special events can help build momentum and attention for both of these critical parties.

reaching for larger goals

A special event can serve as the starting point for a safety project at a specific school, a citywide safety effort for youth walking and biking to school, a movement to improve health by encouraging physical activity, or a longer-term safety effort like Vision Zero for Youth.

20TH ANNIVERSARY OF WALK TO SCHOOL DAY LAUNCHED VISION ZERO FOR YOUTH

An excellent example of how local government leaders and community members can use an event to mobilize communities was the celebration of twenty years of Walk to School Day that occurred in October 2016. The emphasis was on encouraging mayors to launch movements committed to safe walking and biking, such as committing to reaching zero traffic deaths starting with children and youth. This event was the national start of the Vision Zero for Youth Initiative.

MAYORS AND OTHER ELECTED OFFICIALS TAKE A STAND

Mayors use their participation in Walk to School Day to assert their goals for the community. For elected officials who need to get community support to devote resources towards pedestrian safety, a special event like Bike and Walk to School Day offer city leaders an opportunity to commit to safety and affirm their support for walking and biking. The Mayors' Statement on Safe Walking and Biking for Youth does just that. Both mayors and event organizers used or adapted the Mayors' Statement to fit their plans for the event.



2016 Washington, D.C. Mayor Muriel Bowser is first to sign Mayors' Statement during celebration of 20 years of Walk to School Day.



2019 Philadelphia Mayor Jim Kenney signs the Vision Zero for Youth Mayor's declaration.

MAYORS' STATEMENT ON SAFE WALKING AND BIKING FOR YOUTH

The ability of people to safely walk and bicycle is a vital part of what makes communities thrive. We recognize that by creating opportunities for children and youth to safely walk and bicycle, we can benefit people of all ages, abilities and resources. My community is committed to work to promote safe walking and bicycling and to eliminate fatal and serious traffic crashes among all road users. Now is the time to act. We know the benefits this would bring to the health and well-being of our children, our communities, and the nation are immeasurable.



COMMUNITY MEMBERS CREATE DEMAND

Community members also use the Mayors' Statement to provide language for them to bring to their mayors and city leaders to help advocate for safe walking and biking for youth. Many event organizers use the Mayors' Statement in their invitations to mayors, encouraging their mayors to not only attend the event, but also to use it as a launching point for further initiatives. Within their communities, event organizers also used the statement as a promotional tool, spreading it through newspapers, press releases, and social media to both promote the Walk to School Day event and the cause of youth safety.

Event organizers explained how their mayors supported 2019 Walk to School Day and safety in their communities:

Mr. Rappold kicked off our event with a short talk with students about the city's efforts to promote a healthy city that includes safer walking and biking routes, including walking to our school.

BECKLEY, WV (2019)

Both the mayor and city manager worked with the community chief of police and the entire police station to collaborate on the event. The city manager and mayor both walked with the students to school, along with the school principal and one of our police officers.

NOBLE, OK (2019)

Our mayor has been involved in the Lincoln Charter School International Walk to School Day since 2012. The event has been held in partnership with our city officials ever since. Mayor C. Kim Bracey is a health champion for our children and our city. She walks, bikes and inspires our young people to be active.

YORK, PA (2019)



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