



Coordinate and Enhance Your Walk to School Day Events



What is Walk to School Day?

Walk to School Day is an international event that involves communities from across the world walking to school on the same day. It started in 1997 and has continued to grow ever since.

What is the Importance of Walk to School Day?

It reminds schools, school districts, students and their families that there are a lot of benefits to walking to school. It promotes healthy habits, puts the spotlight on pedestrian safety and allows local jurisdictions to review neighborhoods and improve marked crossing locations in current infrastructure as needed.

What is my experience with Walk to School Day?

As the School Safety Coordinator and Safe Routes to School Coordinator for the City of Phoenix for over 20 years, I had coordinated and participated in nearly 600 events. Over that time period, nearly 240,000 students, parents, school staff, district staff, city staff, regional staff and state officials participated in my events.



How would I Coordinate a Walk to School Day Event ?

Every jurisdiction is different. There isn't one perfect way to coordinate these events. It took me a few years to come up with a method that I was happy with and worked well for Phoenix and our partnering schools. Here is the method I used for coordinating Walk to School Day Events:

- 1. Identify Schools In Advance** - In April before the end of the school year, I identified schools of interest and placed them on a list. Since Phoenix has 400 K-8 schools, I looked at working with new schools when possible to give everyone a chance. Once I created the list, I would review the walking areas around each school to gauge possible concerns with the route and create ways to work around when possible.
- 2. Create a Proposed Calendar of Events** - Once the site reviews were completed, I created a proposed calendar of events. This allowed me to have a calendar to work from and make sure that issues like double-booking of days or time overlaps wouldn't occur.
- 3. Meet with School Administration's as Required** - I found that it was better to meet in person with new schools to run through expectations for the events and to make sure the school and I were on the same page. Schools that had done the event a few times didn't end up needing these meetings.
- 4. Send out invitations** - From the proposed calendar, I created and send out invitations to the schools on the calendar to participate in the City of Phoenix Walk to School Day Events. This would include walk date and a pre-walk safety assembly. The schools could agree to participate with the proposed dates, agree to participate but change the dates or not participate in the events at all.
5. Update the Calendars and Invitations as required- As schools responded to the invitations, I would then have to make adjustments to the calendar of events and contact other schools on my list to fill in the holes in the calendar for schools that couldn't participate.
- 6. Prepare Route Maps** - I used my reviews to create a proposed Walk to School Day Route Map for each school. I sent the proposed map to each school administration for review.
- 7. Prepare Advertising Fliers** - Once the maps were approved, I created an advertising flier (in English and Spanish) for each school event. The flier would spell out where the group would meet, what time they would start meeting, what time the walk event would start and the route the group would be using. In the beginning, I would give schools a month to advertise and send out fliers. It wasn't very effective. In the end, I found that 1-2 weeks before the walk was enough time so I would send the fliers to the schools at that time.
- 8. Set up Safety Staff** - Having police presence ensures a safe Walk to School Day Event. I coordinated with them starting a month before the walking events occurred. Phoenix has multiple precincts so meeting with each one is crucial. We would review the time of the event and the walking route. From there, they would decide how many officers would be required for each event. If a route had a major street crossing, we would come up with the best solution for that ahead of time. I also met with Phoenix Fire education staff and the Traffic Education Safety Unit from the police department to discuss presenting pre-walk safety assemblies.
- 9. Pre-Walk Safety Assemblies** - When possible, I suggest organizing and hosting pre-Walk to School Assemblies for all students. It serves a couple of purposes. First- it is the best way to advertise the event. Students can go home and talk about the assembly and the upcoming walk event. Second- it offers the best chance to discuss pedestrian safety and educate students and staff and third- it allows the school to present whatever messages they would like to about the event or any walking issues the school is having. Students are a great source for entertainment or to help drive the peer-to-peer education information. Other local or national health advocates can get involved as well as local police and fire personal. I ended up building a team over the years so we would follow the same routine every year when we put the assemblies together. I also brought on different groups of entertainers or educators to enhance the training assemblies. The included state nutrition staff, hospital nutrition staff, sports mascots, etc.

WALK TO SCHOOL



- 10. Review site 1-2 days before the walk event** - This is important to do in case there are changes to the route due to construction or damage. Weather events like flooding or trees being knocked over can also happen. This review allowed me time to make changes if needed.
- 11. Be at the meeting site at least 45 minutes early** - There was often an issue with kids getting there early, confusion on where to meet, etc. Being there early allowed me time to coordinate as needed.
- 12. Watch your time at the event** - In order to gain the trust of school administration, I made it a priority to make sure the group left for the walk on time and got to school on time. Administrators hate nothing more than missing school time. I would test the time of each walk by parking at the school and walking to the meeting site. That let me know what time the group needed to line up so we could get to school on time.
- 13. Organize the walking line when possible** - I learned early that if I didn't set up the line the right way, the group would become disjointed and arrive at the school at different times. School staff and parents would lose control of the students as well. These are the best ways to organize a line:
 - **Have a banner in front** - Having a banner in the front controls the speed that the group moves at. School staff in the front of the line will institute a rule that no one can pass the banner.
 - **Line up younger kids first** - Lining up younger kids in the front also controls speed. If older students are in the front, they will walk faster and turn the walk into a race. Younger kids can't do that
 - **Have 1-2 staff people in the front for control.** The front of the line staff folks will make sure the rules are followed and also help police when the group needs to stop before they cross or if there are other issues.
- 14. Walk and have fun**- Even though a lot of planning is involved, you can't forget it is a fun event for everyone who participates. Once the walk starts, walk and have fun!

What Are Some Ways to Enhance Walk to School Day Events?

There are many ways to make your Walk to School Day Events special and one-of-a-kind. Here are some examples:

- 1. Bring out a high school or college marching band-** Marching bands provide the sounds for a great walk as well as a visual force to look at. The students look up to these players. It makes them that much more engaged in the walk event.
- 2. Bring out a sports mascot-** Everyone loves their local professional or college sports teams. Bringing out the mascot from one of those teams will bring instant excitement to your event. Over the years, I've had every mascot from all of the Phoenix sports teams. They all have been great on Walk to School Day.
- 3. Bring out entertainers-** Special entertainers can bring a different kind of energy to the events. Musicians can perform at the beginning or the end of the walk; multi-tasking entertainers like Ronald McDonald can perform magic, sing, dance and hype up the walkers at the beginning, middle and end of the event.
- 4. 4) Involve Your Government Leaders-** Walk to School Day is a fun way for government leaders like the Governor, Mayor and City Council Members to reach out and support their residents and neighborhoods. It allows for these leaders to raise awareness for healthy lifestyles and the health benefits that can come from walking to school. Having a government leader involved can bring media to your events. This allows more eyeballs to learn about the events and want to participate.



**MAKE IT
ONE-OF-
A-KIND**



5. Add a school spirit element to the events-

This could involve many different possibilities. Some examples are crazy hair day, crazy sock day, pajama day, Halloween costumes and Superheroes Costume day. Some schools take it a step further and come up with a theme for each grade level.

6. Add a contest element-

Some contests I have set up over the years include an essay “What Does Walk to School Day Mean to Me” contest, an art contest, a costume contest, a dance contest, the craziest hat contest, the craziest hair contest, and the craziest socks contest. The contests allowed sponsors or other business or government partners to participate and provide prizes. The top essays and art work were often displayed at City Hall and at the participating schools.

7. Have schools create posters and banners-

Grade levels would often create these posters and banners. It’s a great way for students to show school spirit. They also look great in photographs and on TV.

8. Create Pre and Post Walk Events-

A pre-walk event could be at a local restaurant where walk participants could get breakfast (at a discount rate or as a fundraiser) before the walk starts. Another example of a pre-walk event would be held at a community center where walk participants would get breakfast and then help judge the student’s Halloween costumes before the walk. Post-walk events would all be at the participating schools. Examples would be a stage set up on the playground for speeches, a concert or an emergency vehicle show.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Walk to School Day is a worthwhile event especially as driving to school becomes more pervasive and walking to school falls into the background. The exercise and the fun time parents can spend talking and catching up with their children is invaluable and is time no one ever gets back.

For support on coordination of your Walk to School Day Event, please contact:
Donald Cross, (602) 377-3093
 email: dcross@y2keng.com | website: www.y2keng.com