

# WALK TO SCHOOL DAY



EVENT PLANNING  
TOOLKIT

WALKING TO SCHOOL IS A WONDERFUL WAY FOR STUDENTS (AND SOMETIMES THEIR PARENTS!) TO GET PHYSICAL ACTIVITY EVERY DAY. STUDENTS WHO HAVE EXPENDED SOME ENERGY, AND BREATHED IN SOME EARLY MORNING FRESH AIR, ARE MORE READY TO LEARN. BY REDUCING VEHICLE TRAFFIC AROUND SCHOOLS, IT IS SAFER FOR CHILDREN AND IMPROVES AIR QUALITY FOR ALL.

What can a school do to increase the number of students choosing active transportation? Make it fun! Show the school community that your school encourages walking! You can do that by having a few dedicated days each year when the school comes together and celebrates active transportation with a Walk to School Day event.

Sometimes known as an “I Walk” event, a Walk to School Day event is a fun and easy way for families to try active transportation for the first time, and to celebrate those already walking and wheeling every day.

In order to help you plan your first event, or make an existing event even better, the Ottawa Student Transportation Authority (OSTA), in collaboration with EnviroCentre, has prepared this toolkit. It is free to use and full of ideas, planning tips and tools.



# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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The City of Ottawa  
Transportation Planning Department



Ottawa Public Health



Ottawa Catholic School Board



Ottawa-Carleton District School Board



Green Communities Canada



Ontario Active School Travel



## WHAT IS IN THE TOOLKIT?

- ➔ Detailed guidelines on best practices, which will shrink planning time and make it easier to hold a quality and impactful event.
- ➔ An editable workbook that you can populate for your school, which will generate a customized event plan that meets your school community's needs and culture.
- ➔ Customizable templates to help with planning and promotion.
- ➔ Fun activities to incorporate into the classroom and help kids learn about the benefits of active transportation.
- ➔ Data collection tips and tools.

**TIP:** A Walk To School event can help achieve broader school priorities such as environmental sustainability or student health and wellbeing. Use this event to fulfill a requirement for EcoSchools, a Board Strategic Objective or curriculum requirements.

# PLANNING YOUR EVENT

You're on your way!

Below is a breakdown of some important planning considerations. When you fill in the [workbook provided](#) the information will automatically create an event plan that is easy to use and share.



## FORM A TEAM OF CHAMPIONS!

It takes a small team of individuals to have a successful Walk to School Day event.

With the information and tools provided, anyone can plan a successful event. Perhaps there is a Teacher or Educational Assistant who is keen to work on this project.

Your School Council might have a few parents determined to create a safer school site. Even some older students with leadership qualities can assist.

Here's what's involved:

- ▶ Planning the event
- ▶ Designing the site layout
- ▶ Engaging school community partners, recruiting volunteers
- ▶ Communication and promotion
- ▶ Organizing classroom and outdoor activities
- ▶ Setting up, running the event and taking down equipment and signage
- ▶ Measuring success

Your community partners might wish to participate in your committee.

Consider asking your School Health Nurse, School Resource Officer, crossing guard, etc. to get involved. Each organization has different motivations, skills and resources they can bring to the table.



**TIP:** Getting involved in planning a school wide event is an excellent opportunity for teachers aspiring to become Vice-Principals to develop their management and organizational skills.

## SET A DATE AND TIME:

Verify your school calendar and select a date. By aligning your date with existing province-wide events, you can leverage the momentum in the media and be part of a bigger movement. People who hear the same message over and over are more likely to change their opinion or behavior, especially when they are trying something new.

Examples of other similar events include:

- ▶ iWalk Month in October
- ▶ Winter Walk Day in February
- ▶ Earth Day in April
- ▶ Environment Week in June





## SET A RAIN DATE:

It's important to set a rain date, just in case. Keep an eye on the weather leading up to your event, and decide when your school administration would change the date. Your Communication Plan should include how you will inform your school community that the date has changed.

## NAME YOUR EVENT

There are many existing names used for Walk to School events. By coming up with your own name, you can brand it with your school logo and culture.

Here are a few examples used here in Ottawa and beyond:

- ▶ iWalk Day
- ▶ Walk and Roll Day
- ▶ Get Your Walk On
- ▶ (School Name) Walk/Wheel Day



**TIP:** Run a student event-naming contest as a way of engaging students and motivating them to participate.

## EVENT TIMELINES & PLAN

As you fill in the [event planning workbook](#) an event plan will automatically populate on the last tab (Event Plan), and will help flag when tasks need to be initiated and completed.

The Event Plan includes:

- ▶ **Pre-event timelines** which focus around planning and promoting your event, as well as collecting your baseline data for who usually walks, takes the bus/van or gets driven to school.
- ▶ **Day of event activities** which include welcoming your school community as they walk to school, sharing the excitement on social media, fun outdoor

activities to create a festive environment, and classroom activities to amplify learning.

- ▶ **Post-event timeline** focuses on clean-up and gathering follow-up data to see how many students participated in the event.

## BUDGET

From materials to create interesting signage, balloons to draw attention, giveaways to reinforce the message, cones to help with safety, and so on, there may be some costs for your event. Aside from using your school budget, there are other ways to fund your event:

- ▶ School Council Funds or Fundraiser
- ▶ Ottawa Student Transportation Authority (OSTA)

[Pitter Patter Grant](#)

- ▶ Community Partner Sponsorship or In-Kind Contribution



Here is a list of potential items you might consider including in your budget. The workbook allows you to add lines as required:

- ▶ Poster board for signage (remember the stakes!)
- ▶ Thick markers or poster paint
- ▶ Cones, safety vests
- ▶ Balloons
- ▶ Giveaways, certificates of participation, prizes
- ▶ Craft paper for a banner
- ▶ Coffee/tea for Walk-a-Block meet and greet with parents
- ▶ Colour printing of promotional materials

**TOOL:** The **OSTA Pitter Patter Grant** is a micro-grant of up to \$250, available to schools who wish to implement or support a School Active Transportation Initiative during the current school year in which the application is made.

[Click here to apply.](#)





**TIP:** Your community partners may have giveaways to share. Ask your School Health Nurse, Resource Officer, and OSTA for support. Consider the environment when choosing giveaways. Low/no waste options are always best.

## OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES

As educators, you know that students learn in a variety of ways. Supplementing the actual walk to school with other outdoor activities immediately after the initial effort reinforces the message that walking to school is the best way to get there.

Not all students will be able to walk to school. By adding activities on school grounds, everyone will feel included and be given the opportunity to take part.

This also gets everyone thinking about the benefits of walking (to school, to the park, to a friend's house, anywhere).

Here are a few suggestions to get you started:

- ▶ **Have students sign a banner** or poster that says I Walked to School Today OR I Love to Walk!
  - Set up a table in the yard with the banner/poster with a pre-written message.
  - As students arrive to school, they can sign or draw something related to their walk to school.
  - Hang it somewhere inside for everyone to see.
- ▶ **I Love to Walk colouring station**
  - Set up a table in the yard with paper and crayons/markers.
  - Have students draw something they saw or liked when they walked (to school, to the park, anywhere).
  - Post them in the school for all to see.

### ▶ Meet Phys or school mascot

- If you have a mascot greeting students, you can take pictures of students with the mascot.
- If possible, provide the picture to the student as a souvenir or post them on a screen or wall.

### ▶ Dance-off with music

- Music is a great way to create a festive environment.
- Use your outdoor or portable PA system to play fun music.
- Have a dance off and get everyone moving before the school day starts.

### ▶ Walk around a track – Get a sticker for each lap - five to get a prize!

- Designate an area as a track where students can do laps.
- For each lap, they can get a sticker or mark on their hand.
- After five, they can get a prize.



# CREATE a SITE PLAN

Most Walk to School Day events take place on the school site, with some consideration for a two-block radius around the school. A site plan allows you to identify key areas for the event, and important safety considerations.

Every school site is different, but most typically, you need to think about:

- ▶ Main access points leading from the community onto school property
- ▶ Bus and school purpose van drop off zones
- ▶ Parent vehicle drop off zones
- ▶ Staff parking
- ▶ Pedestrian walk-ways
- ▶ Bike/scooter parking, particularly for extra bikes/scooters that day
- ▶ Kindergarten entrance and other yard entrance(s)
- ▶ Traffic and parking for on-site daycare or other organizations sharing your facility
- ▶ Busy intersections, sidewalks, pathways and Crossing Guards
- ▶ Other potential traffic from nearby businesses or other busy places
- ▶ Accessibility for students with special needs
- ▶ Walk-a-Block meeting point (if applicable – see below for further information)
- ▶ Greeter locations
- ▶ Signage locations
- ▶ Activity station locations
- ▶ Location for handing out giveaways, swag, prizes
- ▶ Garbage and recycling bins
- ▶ Access to bathrooms and first aid
- ▶ Welcoming special guests – media, elected officials, mascot, special pictures
- ▶ Volunteer gathering point prior to the event



**TOOL:** [Click here](#) for instructions on how to use Google Maps and Microsoft Paint to create a customized site plan. Once completed, the site plan will be easy to print and share with staff and volunteers to ensure that everyone knows what is happening where.

**MITIGATE RISK:** Changing traffic patterns around your school, even for just one day, will take careful planning. Mitigate risk and increase safety by identifying any areas of concern early on and planning for ways to address them. Check out OSTA's Walk Routes to School maps for your school's Walk Zone. It shows Crossing Guard locations, hazard areas and other safety elements you can include on your Site Plan.

**MITIGATE RISK:** Let your Board Facilities Department know about your event. They can notify you of any conflicts (like construction) that might impact your event.



## INCLUSIVENESS AND PARTICIPATION

Plan an event so that all students, even those who arrive by bus or van, can participate. Everyone will want to take part and there are easy ways to plan activities so that all students will benefit from some exercise and feel included (see section above on ideas for outdoor activities).

It is also important to consider how students of all abilities can participate. Here are a few suggestions and considerations:

- ▶ Are the outdoor activities accessible to all? For example, when you create a walking track, consider a paved area.
- ▶ Use tables that are at a height that anyone can access.
- ▶ Notify parents of children with special needs in advance. Being able to inform children of changes to the morning routine goes a long way to reduce anxiety or negative reactions to a different morning routine.

Your school board will have other ideas and considerations for ensuring your event is inclusive. Be sure to tap into those resources.

## WALK-A-BLOCK

Is there traffic chaos around your school during the morning and afternoon bell times?

An effective way to make school zones safer by reducing traffic is to encourage families to park away from the school and walk the last block or two. This is commonly known as Walk-a-Block or Drive-to-Five.

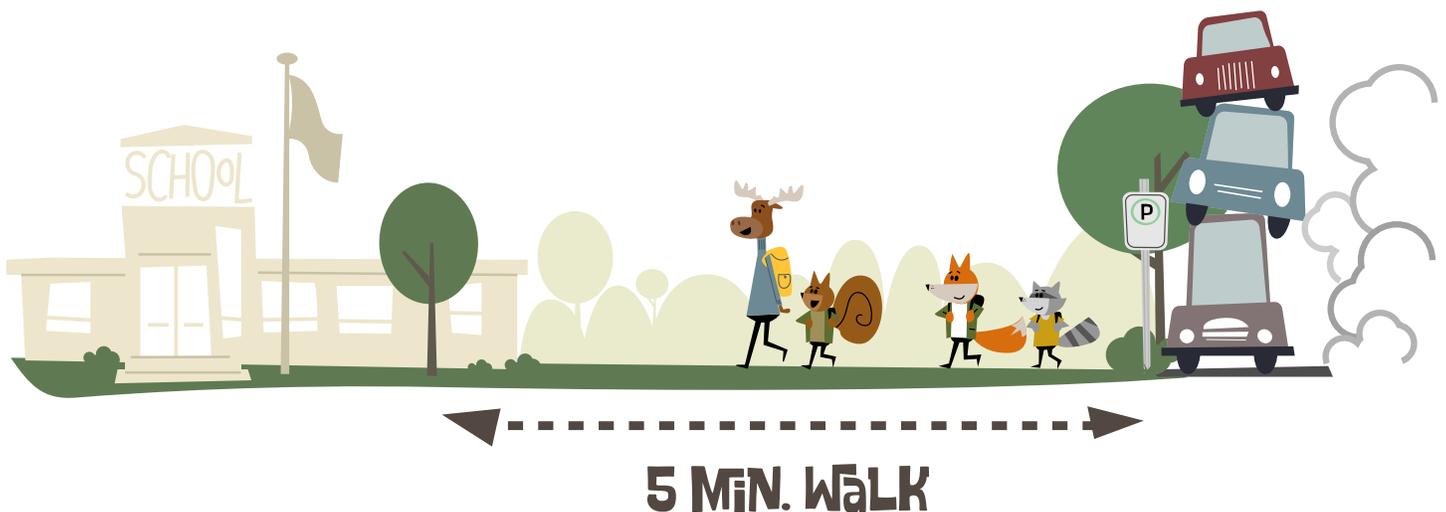
A Walk-a-Block flyer is a tool for parents that identifies the five-minute walk radius around the school. Some schools establish formal Walk-a-Block locations by identifying a nearby parking lot that is not being used during the morning drop off period (for example: a church, community centre, library or business).

[Click here](#) for an example in Ottawa.

**TOOL:** [Click here](#) for detailed instructions on how to use Google Maps to create your own customized Walk-a-Block map.

**TOOL:** [Use this template](#) to make it easier to develop your own Walk-a-Block map. The template includes sample text, messaging and ideas for encouraging parents to consider this option.

# WALK-a-BLOCK



# ENGAGING PARTNERS

Community partners can provide support, supplies, promotional opportunities and more. Identify your key partners in the [workbook](#) and engage them to strengthen your event.

These partners will usually need to understand:

- ▶ The location, date and time of your event
- ▶ The goal of the event
- ▶ What you want, or need, from them
- ▶ How they will be recognized for their participation

Here are some partners you might consider:

- ▶ **Ottawa Public Health School Health Nurses** have great resources and they can book their mascot 'Phyz', who is always a fun addition to an event. Ask early because Phyz is in high demand!
- ▶ **Ottawa Safety Council** can let the Crossing Guards and Walking School Bus Leaders in your area know about your event!
- ▶ **Local elected officials** like your City Councillor and Trustee. They need lots of notice to put the event in their calendars.
- ▶ **Ottawa Student Transportation Authority (OSTA)** has giveaways (email request), the Pitter Patter Grant and can send a representative to your event. OSTA actively promotes Walk to School Days online and in its reports to Trustees.
- ▶ **EnviroCentre** provides School Active Transportation programming throughout the city. If you are lucky enough to have one of their Facilitators working with your school, make sure you take advantage of their contacts and expertise.
- ▶ **Superintendents** are always looking for ways to connect with your school community.

- ▶ **Local Commercial Sponsors** can provide healthy snacks, swag and prizes for free.
- ▶ **Local Religious Organizations** can provide space for a Walk-a-Block meeting station or parking, and promote your event.
- ▶ **Community Centres** can provide space for a Walk-a-Block meeting station or parking, and promote your event.



**TIP:** Community Partners like to contribute money, items or in-kind services to events and organizations whose goals align with their own. Finding out what the organization stands for ahead of time, and showing how your event supports their ideals, vision or strategy, increases your chances they will get on board.

**TIP:** Having Phyz at your event is easy! Your school health nurse will book the mascot, have it delivered, and accompany it the day of the event. You will need a volunteer (teacher or parent) who will wear it. The Phyz mascot costume can get very warm inside, and glasses-wearers may fog up! Make sure your volunteer is aware of these considerations.

**TOOL:** Find out who your [Ward Councillor is here](#), who your [OCDSB Trustee is here](#), and who your [OCSB Trustee is here](#).



# COMMUNICATION PLAN



Communication is one of the most important aspects to making your Walk to School Day event a successful, safe event, with maximum participation from students and parents alike.

## HAVE A PERSON OR TWO ASSIGNED TO COMMUNICATIONS

If you have a team member who is experienced with social media and promoting events hopefully they can help with this important task. If not, no worries! This toolkit provides a timeline for different types of messaging and sample text to promote the event and engage partners and the school community. Someone should be specifically assigned to the communications role, including on the day of the event.

**MITIGATE RISK:** *It's important that the designated communications person is aware of any sensitive issues, like student media releases.*

**TIP:** *Start promoting your event early and repeatedly so the message stays top of mind.*

**TIP:** *Communication and promotion are big jobs! Tap into parent champions already active on social media to enhance your school's efforts.*

**TOOL:** *We've created multiple attention-grabbing [social media messages that you can customize.](#)*

## PROMOTING YOUR EVENT

Each school has dedicated channels for reaching their community.

They include:

- ▶ **SYNERVOICE** – A pre-recorded short message delivered to parents by phone

- ▶ E-mail Blasts – E-mail notifications delivered to parents who have provided their e-mail address to the school.
- ▶ Newsletters – Usually a monthly electronic communication, or a printed one depending on the school community.
- ▶ Website – Including a school calendar and important messages.
- ▶ Facebook – Posting information and pictures to the school's online community.
- ▶ Twitter – Posting messages to the school's online community that links other organizations and themes.
- ▶ Instagram – A fun way to post pictures for the school's online community.
- ▶ School Council – Parents reaching out to parents.
- ▶ Student Council – Students reaching out to students.
- ▶ Posters – Special messages up in hallways or in classrooms.
- ▶ **Flyers** – Customized promotional materials about the event.
- ▶ Word of mouth – The “real” social medium, before there was social media!

**MITIGATE RISK:** *Letting parents/guardians and students know what to expect, and where to go ahead of time, will help them navigate their way to school. We want everyone to have a safe and enjoyable walk to school so they'll try it again on their own.*

**Communicate, communicate, communicate!**



**TIP:** Pick a theme based on what matters most to your school community; Does your school focus more on academic success? Does your school have environmental goals?

**TOOL:** Choose from one of the many [prewritten social media messages](#) based on what your school's goal or vision is.



## PRE-EVENT COMMUNICATIONS

### → 4-6 WEEKS BEFORE YOUR EVENT

Here are some examples of places to post your event, or ways to generate awareness of the upcoming event:

- ▶ School Council agenda
- ▶ School calendar
- ▶ Website text – Save the Date!
- ▶ Notify your neighbours, community association, community centre or those who share your facility
- ▶ Newsletter article (what's coming up, school priorities)
- ▶ Facebook post – you can even create a Facebook event that parents can like and share
- ▶ Invite elected officials (Municipal Councillor, School Board Trustee, Mayor).
- ▶ Check with Board Facilities to see if there is any upcoming construction that could affect your event
- ▶ Send out requests for volunteers through the channels listed above.
- ▶ [Let OSTA know!](#)



**TOOL:** Use [this customizable invitation](#) that you can send to your Trustee, community partners, City Councillors, etc.



**TIP:** Know your audience! Choose a messaging tone that speaks to your community: Serious and factual for parents who like statistics or fun and inviting but still emphasizes an underlying goal; sense of urgency for schools that have specific issues or neutral for a broader demographic.

### → 2-4 WEEKS BEFORE YOUR EVENT

As the event gets closer, engage students and start building excitement and school spirit!

- ▶ Engage students to learn about active transportation through classroom activities, creating posters, flyers or other communications materials. This will also generate peer-to-peer communication, which reinforces the message and makes them a part of the event, not just participants.
- ▶ Post your event on social media with an invitation to participants.
- ▶ Inform your Board's communications team of your event to augment your promotional efforts. [Click here](#) to e-mail OCDSB and [here](#) to e-mail OCSB.



**TIP:** A poster contest is a great way to get students involved in promoting Walk to School Day! Invite them to create signs, posters, or banners about why they like walking or wheeling.

**TIP:** Existing student clubs like a Green Team, Eco Club or School Active Transportation Club, are already thinking and living the message. Engaging them is an opportunity for them to show leadership and influence their peers.

### → 1-2 WEEKS BEFORE YOUR EVENT

The final promotional push is important for generating awareness and excitement about your event. Here are some opportunities to consider:

- ▶ Ask parent volunteers to hang posters or flyers throughout the neighbourhood.

- ▶ Send an electronic or hard copy newsletter home with your Walk-a-Block map and details about the event.
- ▶ Conduct a student “hands-up survey” in classrooms and talk about the results with students.
- ▶ Post positive motivational [messages on social media](#) to build excitement.



**TOOL:** Conduct classroom surveys so you have baseline information to compare the event data to. Data helps quantify results and can be fun to use in math class to connect activities to curriculum. [Here is a link to a sample Hands-Up Survey data collection form.](#)

**TIP:** Putting up signs in your neighbourhood also means taking them down after the event. Please be a responsible and environmentally friendly communicator!



## ➔ 2-3 DAYS BEFORE THE EVENT

Here are a few things to think about on the days leading up to your event:

- ▶ Does the Rain Date message need to go out? If yes, see the section above for the channels to use.
- ▶ Post positive motivational [messages on social media](#) to build excitement.
- ▶ Send an e-mail to remind volunteers of their tasks and the designated meeting point. Send your Site Plan to make it easy for them to see what is happening where, and key meeting points

**MITIGATE RISK:** Let your bus/van drivers know that your event may change traffic patterns and that there will be more pedestrians than usual.



## ➔ DAY BEFORE THE EVENT

- ▶ Send out [Synervoice message](#).
- ▶ Ask teachers to remind students that the event is taking place tomorrow. Students can put a note in their agenda to remind parents.

## ➔ DURING THE EVENT

While the event is taking place, share your event on social media to demonstrate success and inspire other schools to try it, too. It's also important that on site communication happens at the beginning so everyone knows what to do and what their role is in running a fun, safe, inclusive event. Here are a few things to consider:

- ▶ Ensure the point person is ready to greet staff/ volunteers at the gathering place to share instructions.
- ▶ Post pictures on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram with captions.
- ▶ Post positive messages about your event.

**MITIGATE RISK:** Candid shots are always fun to look at, but be mindful of which students may have their pictures taken and distributed. Student privacy and protection are a priority. Setting up some shots with “authorized students” might fill the gap.



**TIP:** You can amplify your message by “tagging” other organizations that have similar interests.

## TAG PARTNERS

### @OttSchoolBus

Ottawa Student Transportation Authority cares about all mobility options for students.

### @EnviroCentre

EnviroCentre delivers Student Active Transportation Planning Program to schools across the city.

### @Ottawahealth

Your Ottawa Public Health School Health Nurse is an important partner.

### @OCDSB or @OCSB

Your School Board Communications Department will gladly share your event.

### @ (enter trustee or city councillor handle)

Find out your elected officials' handles. They will be happy to share your event, and may even join you if possible.



## HASHTAGS

A “hashtag” allows followers to link up conversations through a common topic. In Ottawa, we use:

#OttWalk2School

#GetYourWalkOn

#ottmarcheàlécole

**TIP:** Search for these hashtags on social media to see what other schools are doing locally!



## ➔ AFTER THE EVENT

Say thank you to your community, students, parents, partners, and elected officials by posting a thank you note. Here are some ideas:

- ▶ Post a thank you for those who worked hard putting on the event on social media.
- ▶ Share the success of the event including any data that you captured that shows the event increased the number of people walking to school.
- ▶ Post pictures of your school drop off area with fewer cars and tell the community why this is important to the school and students. Showing people what is possible and connecting their transportation choice to a healthier and safer school zone is an effective way to demonstrate that change is possible.
- ▶ Provide students with a certificate of participation. This is something they can bring home, be proud of and can motivate them to keep doing it.

**TOOL:** We have created [a customizable certificate of participation](#). Just use mail merge with student names, and fill in your school's information.



# FUN & EDUCATIONAL CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

Connect active transportation to classroom learning!  
There are so many curriculum-based teaching lessons out there that engage students before, during and after the event



## Activity 1

### GRAPHING ACTIVE TRANSPORTATION IN OUR CLASSROOM

Description: In this activity, small groups of students will work with two sets of data to create double bar graphs and present graphs to the class. Students will study trends and compare data between grades and with the entire school.

[Click here](#) for the full activity, including curriculum links, materials, tally sheets and instructions.

## Activity 2

### ROAD SAFETY BINGO

Description: Students will learn to identify common traffic signs found in their community and reinforce their understanding through a game of Active Traffic Sign Bingo!

[Click here](#) for the full activity including curriculum links, materials, images and instructions.

## Activity 3

### WALKING YOUR WAY TO SAFETY

Description: Students will learn and practice pedestrian safety rules through in-class discussions and a supervised group walk through their neighbourhood.

[Click here](#) for the full activity, including curriculum links, materials, and instructions.



# MEASURING SUCCESS

A culture change doesn't happen in a day.

Measuring the gradual change can help build momentum and challenges the participants to do even more the next time. Students like goals and being recognized and rewarded for reaching their goals. So do their parents/guardians.

Conducting the classroom "student hands-up" survey a week or two BEFORE the event, sets the tone and introduces the idea of data collection, goal-setting and monitoring change to students.

Doing the same student hands-up survey THE DAY OF the event can be used as a learning opportunity on data-management, analysis and measuring goals.

How many students actually participated in the event? Did we reach our goal? The same hands-up survey can be done AFTER the event (week/month later) to see how many students continued to walk to school.



**TOOL:** Here are a few sample data collection forms. You can choose to use a [Google Form](#) or [Paper Survey](#).

**TIP:** What is a great reward for students? Taping their Principal or VP to a wall, giving them a pie in the face or doing an ice-bucket challenge! Set a goal for participation in your school and if the students achieve it, be prepared for some messy, silly fun.

**TIP:** Engage senior students to analyze the data. They can turn this opportunity into a real life data management project and share the results with the school at an assembly or during morning announcements.

## SHARE THE RESULTS

Your school community loves setting goals. They like knowing if they've achieved them even more!

Here are some ideas and for ways of collating and analyzing the data:

- ▶ Have your students use their math skills to demonstrate and practice Enhance Data Management skills.
- ▶ Submit to OSTA through internal mail and they will help you collate and analyze the data.
- ▶ Once your senior students have analyzed the data and generated some outcomes, take it a step further and have them identify some recommendations for how to improve the results of the next Walk to School Day event.



**TIP:** Include event results in your next newsletter and Facebook post to highlight the positive impact they had. If students came up with ideas/recommendations, and goals for next time, include those too.



INVESTING TIME AND EFFORT IN YOUR WALK TO SCHOOL DAY EVENT IS A MEANINGFUL WAY TO HELP FAMILIES DISCOVER THE MANY BENEFITS OF WALKING TO SCHOOL.

A school community event like this helps people take the first step towards incorporating active transportation into their daily routine. Trying something new with a little fun and encouragement can go a long way to change how parents/guardians decide to get their kids to school.

WE HOPE THIS TOOLKIT WILL MAKE PLANNING EASIER,  
AND SPARK IDEAS FOR YOUR EVENT.

**HAPPY WALKING!**

