



WASHTENAW COUNTY PUBLIC HEALTH
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**Several Washtenaw County Schools are Teaching Children
to Put Their Health and Safety First**

YPSILANTI, MI., September 30, 2008. Washtenaw County Public Health Officials announced today that “Walk to School Day” will be celebrated by seventeen schools in Washtenaw County on Wednesday, October 8. In observance of International Walk to School Day, parents and community members are invited to participate in this celebration of health and safety by walking and bicycling to school with students along the routes they use every day.

Although common just a generation ago, there has been a dramatic reduction in the rates of walking to school. In Washtenaw County, a survey of residents in 2005 found that only 14% of children walked to school one or more days per week (Washtenaw County Health Improvement Plan, 2005 Survey, <http://hip.ewashtenaw.org>). Nationally, 42% walked or biked to school in 1970; but today only 16% walk or bike (CDC, http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/kidswalk/then_and_now.htm). In Michigan and other states, traffic jams around schools are now common and cause safety hazards for children and environmental pollution.

To help promote walking and biking to school and increase route safety, the Washtenaw County Public Health Department applied for and received a grant from the Michigan Department of Community Health to facilitate the Safe Routes to School program at Thurston and Carpenter Elementary Schools within Ann Arbor Public Schools (www.saferoutesmichigan.org). Safe Routes to School is an international movement that builds on the momentum of “Walk to School Day”. Many schools in Michigan begin a Safe Routes initiative as a follow-up to “Walk to School Day”.

In celebration of “Walk to School Day”, Carpenter and Thurston schools are encouraging parents to walk or bike with their child to school. Both schools will also have a remote drop off location where school buses and parent drivers may drop off students who will then walk to school under the watch of parent volunteers.

For Carpenter Elementary, this location will be at the corner of Hawks and Central. For Thurston, this location will be Bromley Park at 2775 Briarcliff Street. The events will start at 8:30 a.m. “We’re encouraging the whole community to get involved because this really is a community issue. Lots of health benefits are associated with going to school in a non-motorized way. And it’s a great way to spend time with your kids,” said Health Educator Lily Guzmán.

Other schools participating in Washtenaw County are: Ann Arbor Public Schools: Allen, Burns Park, Dicken, Eberwhite, Logan, Mitchell, and Slauson; Dexter Community Schools: Creekside Intermediate School; South Lyon Community Schools: Salem Elementary; Saline Area Schools: Heritage, Woodland; Ypsilanti Public Schools: New Beginnings Academy, West Middle, East Middle.

To learn more about Walk to School Day and Safe Routes to School, contact Lily Guzmán, MPH, MSW, Health Educator at Washtenaw County Public Health, 734-544-2983, guzmanL@ewashtenaw.org, or www.saferoutesmichigan.org.

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