Walk to School Day: One Community’s Experience

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Safe Routes to School Programs: Legal Implications for Schools
Conditions Needed for Success

- **School location and neighborhood**
  - Each school should consider possible safety issues prior to the event, such as location of the walking routes to intersections, pedestrian or rail crossings, where sidewalks are located and the conditions of the sidewalks, and possible impediments to walking.
  
  - School staff members and/or School Resource Officers (or other law enforcement) should walk the routes prior to the event to identify any concerns and discuss those with the school principals.
  
  - Safe walking routes maps should be developed for students who plan to participate in the event, and the maps should be shared with parents/guardians and law enforcement officials.
Conditions Needed for Success

- **Community and school support**
  - Each school should make a full effort to inform the communities of the safe route walk event and secure the support of parents, businesses, government agencies, and others.
  - This level of support will be critically important to sustaining future safe route events.

- **School Resource Officer involvement**
  - Schools should ask that School Resource Officers or other law enforcement officers be deployed along the walk routes or to monitor the routes during the event.
  - Since some students have not walked to school before, the SROs or other officers or staff members should spend time in the classrooms or over the school intercom discussing walking safety (e.g., crossing intersections, obeying signs, not using headphones or cell phones while walking, etc.).
Conditions Needed for Success

- **Other Considerations**

  - Create a checklist for parents/guardians that includes appropriate dress for walking, a copy of the school walk route, estimation of the amount of time it should take for the child to walk to school, what their child should carry or not carry to school that day (e.g., a heavy bookbag may be okay for a school bus ride, but not for a two mile walk), phone number of the school, etc.

  - Safety issues should be considered up to and including the day of the event. Conditions in neighborhoods due to a storm, for example, can change the safety of sidewalks.

  - Schools should check the expected weather and traffic conditions of the event day, and ask law enforcement to inform the school of any conditions or events that may impede or jeopardize the event.
Other Considerations

The school should share the safe walking route maps with students and parents/guardians ahead of time to make certain that any questions and concerns can be addressed well before the event.

Measures of Success

Develop a survey for feedback

A survey for staff, students, and parents to evaluate the event can provide very valuable information on the success of the event and recommendations for future safe routes events.