



October 7, 2020



Coordinator's Corner

The start of each school year usually means new teachers, new classes, and new routines. This year, students in many Virginia divisions will return to school in a different way, with virtual classes as we continue to fight the Covid-19 pandemic.



For students attending classes at home, physical activity is more important than ever. Getting outside for a walk or bike ride can have significant benefits for academic performance, physical health, and mental health. We won't be able to celebrate Walk to School Day the way we have in the past. Instead, we're encouraging everyone to participate in Walk to School Day Any Way You Can, with special activities designed to get students outside and moving around throughout the month of October.

In this newsletter, we'll talk about how you can participate in Walk to School Day. Next, we'll announce a new survey that's taking the place of Student Travel Tallies this fall, and discuss ways that walking and bicycling can impact students' mental health. Finally, we'll learn about how the national Safe Routes Partnership is looking at alternative ways for schools to promote safety other than using law enforcement.

If you have any questions or would like to learn more about the topics included here, please don't hesitate to reach out! You can call the Virginia SRTS Hotline at 1-855-601-7787 or send us an email at info@virginiarts.org.

Regards,

Katherine Graham

Kathy Graham

Virginia SRTS Coordinator

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CALENDAR

OCTOBER

7: Walk to School Day

8: QuickStart Mini-grant due

31: Parent / Caregiver Survey closes

Walk to School Day Any Way You Can!



Walk to School Day is Wednesday, October 7. With many school divisions in Virginia choosing virtual or hybrid instruction this fall, it's going to be a bit different in most places. Walkable communities and safe and sustainable travel behaviors have never been more important.

That's why this year, Virginia Safe Routes to School encourages you to participate in Walk to School Day **any way you can**.

Looking for ideas for what to do? See our new Walk to School Day Any Way You Can resources page. Also check out walkbiketoschool.org, which includes 20 great Walk to School Day event ideas for families, neighborhoods, and schools. Whatever you do, please [register your event online](#) so we know you participated—even if it's just a few people.

Remember, while October 7 is the official Walk to School Day, you can register a Walk to School Day event on any day in October. You can even register more than one event!

Every school with at least one registered event will receive a 2020 Walk to School Day Any Way You Can decal. You won't see these again after this year. Who knows, in 2040 they may be a collector item!

Finally, don't forget to follow social distancing and mask wearing guidance provided by the Commonwealth of Virginia. We hope to see you out there!

Are You Walking + Biking During the Pandemic? Tell Us!

If you're a parent or caregiver in Virginia, we want to hear from you! Please [click here to take our Fall 2020 Parent and Caregiver Survey](#), which takes less than 10 minutes.

The survey will help us understand how the pandemic has influenced walking and bicycling.

We also have a [Spanish language version of the survey - click here!](#)

If you fill out the survey between now and October 31 you could win a \$25 cash card! To be eligible, parents and caregivers must provide an email address where they can be contacted. Ten winners will be selected in a drawing. At least two gift cards will be [awarded to each region](#)—Coastal, Piedmont, and Blue Ridge.

We'll share the results with you in our winter newsletter!



GirlTrek Mobilizes Black Girls to Walk for Self-Care



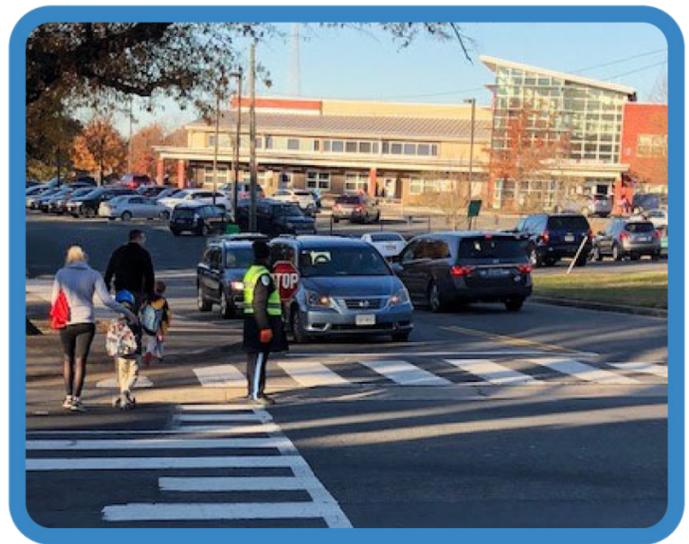
Members and leaders of GirlTrek at the organization's annual Stress Protest retreat.

Walking is a powerful thing. It allows you to get outside, strengthen your body, calm your mind, and connect with friends and family. For Black women and girls, taking the time to go on a daily walk is a radical act of self-care.

GirlTrek, a nationwide movement for Black women's health, is championing walking as a tool for healing and transformation in Black communities. GirlTrek is on a mission to reduce causes of preventable deaths of Black women and to build up communities in the process. That's why GirlTrek is calling for **1 million** Black women and girls to pledge to develop a habit of walking every day. Join the movement on girltrek.org and connect with Black women walking in Norfolk, Richmond, or the DMV area. GirlTrek is also encouraging you to walk to the polls for the 2020 Presidential election – **exercise** your power to vote!

Changes for the 6 E's

A core part of many Safe Routes to School programs are the 6 E's: Equity, Engineering, Encouragement, Education, Evaluation, and Enforcement. The E's guide and organize the work Safe Routes to School programs do in schools and communities around the United States.



A crossing guard helps students cross the street in Arlington.

Police officers play an important role in some Safe Routes to school programs, such as training and managing crossing guards. In recent years, however, there has been growing attention to racial bias in policing. That's why the Safe Routes Partnership, a national advocacy group, announced this summer that it will replace "Enforcement" as the 6th E with "Engagement." However, the Safe Routes Partnership's decision is not binding, and your community may still choose to involve law enforcement in SRTS activities.

What does this mean for Virginia's Safe Routes to School? At the state level, we want to continue the conversation about the *(continued on next page)*

(continued from previous page) role of police officers and other enforcement activities in Safe Routes to School programs. We want to focus on how enforcing safety in our programs, which benefits everyone, can be achieved most effectively and equitably. Upcoming, we will provide additional resources to support community-led safety initiatives such as crosswalk monitors or physical improvements for walking and bicycling. In addition, we will be talking about how to incorporate the new E – Engagement – into Virginia’s Safe Routes to School programs.

Physical Activity is Great for Mental Health!

Most people reading this newsletter are probably familiar with the recommendation that children and adolescents engage in an hour or more of moderate to vigorous exercise every day. This exercise doesn’t need to happen all at once, and before schools closed in the spring some students would easily hit the recommended target by walking or biking to school, running around with their friends during recess, or playing organized sports.

With organized sports on hold and many students learning online this fall, integrating physical activity into daily routines is more important than ever. Not just to maintain physical health—by developing stronger muscles and bones and helping prevent chronic disease—but to help support mental health in a time when we’re all experiencing isolation, stress, and uncertainty.

How does physical activity improve mental health?

- Physical activity immediately boosts the brain’s dopamine, norepinephrine, and serotonin levels—all of which affect focus and attention.
- Physical activity allows children to have a better outlook on life by building confidence, managing



anxiety and depression, and increasing self-esteem and cognitive skills.

- Physical activity may also improve sleep quality, which is closely linked to mental health.

Tips to incorporate more physical activity into your fall routine:

- **It’s okay to start small.** Multiple sources agree that the mental health benefits of physical activity begin accruing even with short bursts of activity. Start with 5 to 10-minute activity breaks throughout the day.
- **Be a role model.** Get the whole family involved by going on a walk around the neighborhood or playing a game of catch in the front yard. Weather less than ideal? Put on some music for an indoor dance party or find an exercise video online. Talk to children about how they feel before and after engaging in physical activity.

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- **Set a goal/use an activity tracker.** Whether you track minutes, steps, or distance, setting a goal of going for a walk every day, hitting a certain number of steps, or building up to a certain distance like a 5K, having a goal in mind can help keep everyone motivated. Younger children may benefit from daily sticker rewards, while older students might work towards a bigger prize.
- **Mix it up.** Organized sports may be off the table for now, but there are any number of activities kids can do be active—walking, biking, running, dancing, playing tennis, playing catch with siblings, etc. Ask your PE teacher or search your local Parks & Recreation Department’s website for new ideas.



Students in a Walking School Bus in Galax.