

NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Walking student safety: families, drivers, schools and Province have roles

As we return to our fall work and school schedules, now more than ever safety on our streets is crucial. In addition to its physical activity and environmental benefits, a recent study from the University at Buffalo has found walking to school helps reduce stress for students (*Medicine & Science in Sports & Exercise*, August 2010 issue). This is good news, but how can we both encourage students to hoof it to school and make it safe and convenient?

“There is no one person or entity we can point to and say ‘You can make it happen if you do X, Y or Z,’” says Janet Barlow, Active & Safe Routes to School Coordinator of the Ecology Action Centre (EAC). “Ultimately, families, motorists, schools and the Province have roles to play in ensuring students who are within a reasonable distance are interested in walking to school and able to do so safely.”

Families can save on gas by allowing their kids to walk or cycle to school. If you’re concerned about Johnny or Jane walking alone, consider arranging a Walking School Bus (an adult-led walking group) with neighbours. “Ask your school’s Parent-Teacher Association or School Advisory Council to help get parents involved in setting up Walking School Buses. They’re fun and practical,” says Barlow.

Motorists can slow down and pay attention on our streets so students can arrive safely. Commit to this cause by becoming a Pace Car driver where you pledge to drive the limit and display “mobile speedbump” and “pace car” decals on your car. Entire communities can adopt the program (learn how at www.pacecar.ca).

Schools (and school boards) can make it easier and safer for students to walk or wheel to school by looking at it from a planning perspective. A dozen schools throughout NS are doing just that through the School Travel Plan project. “School Travel Plans,” explains Barlow, “are essentially active transportation plans involving the school, parents, municipality and police in solving traffic and access problems.”

“The Province can play a role making sure policy is in place to enable safe walking or cycling to school,” Barlow says. This includes revisiting where we close and build schools, reducing speeds in school zones and making pedestrian and cycling training, such as Active & Safe Routes to School’s Making Tracks initiative, mandatory curriculum in our schools.

Active & Safe Routes to School (www.saferoutesns.ca) is coordinated by the EAC in partnership with the NS Department of Health Promotion and Protection as part of the Active Kids Healthy Kids Initiative.

“We keep hearing reports and studies that walking to school is beneficial on so many levels,” says Barlow. “The evidence is there, so now we all have to do our part to ensure it actually happens.”

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Interviews with parents and school staff could be arranged on request.

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