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Students put their feet (or wheels) on the ground Oct. 7

International "Walk and Bike to School Day" garners statewide support

SALEM – More than 180 schools around the state are participating in this year's international "Walk and Bike to School Day" on Oct. 7. For some, it's an 11-year tradition (Ardenwald Elementary, Milwaukie); for others, it's a chance to reward good choices with a healthy breakfast (Willagillespie Community School, Eugene). To see a complete list of participating schools in Oregon, visit www.walknbike.org.

"We see schools come up with all kinds of ideas to encourage walking and biking," said Julie Yip, Safe Routes to School program manager at the Oregon Department of Transportation. "Whether it's an entire community event or parents meeting at a park to walk with their kids, participating in this event shows the many benefits of walking or biking to school, such as finding a safe route, getting some exercise and just having fun!"

In 1997, the Partnership for a Walkable America sponsored the first National Walk Our Children to School Day in Chicago, modeled after the United Kingdom's lead. Back then, it was simply a day to bring community leaders and children together to create awareness of the need for communities to be walkable.

By the year 2002, children, parents, teachers and community leaders in all 50 states joined nearly 3 million walkers around the world to celebrate the second annual International Walk to School Day. The reasons for walking grew just as quickly as the event itself, expanding to include the benefits brought on by exercise and reduced emissions.

In 2005, new legislation recognized the value of the Safe Routes to School programs and began funding state programs. Schools have received funds for sidewalks, bike shelters, crossing safety programs and more. Applications for the latest round of funding were due in June 2009 for next year's projects, where \$2 million was available for infrastructure projects and \$500,000 for educational activities. The Safe Routes to School Advisory Committee is currently reviewing applications for these funds.

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