

## **SAMPLE OP-ED: CHANGING THE HABITS OF AN ENTIRE GENERATION**

By Sheilagh Griffin

On October 6, over 4 million kids around the world will take a step – literally – toward their vision of a real solution to the health, economic, and environmental problems our communities face today. International Walk + Bike to School Day is a global event that encourages children, parents, teachers, and community members to celebrate the vibrancy and diversity of real people and families who care about the health and well-being of their community. It's a chance to change the habits of an entire generation.

Studies show that physical activity improves health and wellness, lowers stress, and decreases congestion and pollution. We know the benefits of active transportation - health, climate, air quality, economy, affordability, land development patterns, improved learning and work ethic – are good for individuals and communities.

Yet many kids in Oregon do not meet the recommended sixty minutes of physical activity needed to build endurance and strength and maintain a healthy weight. Encouraging walking and biking to school is an effective way for schools and parents to promote the health and well being of their students and the health of the environment that we all share.

Research indicates that since the early 1970s there has been a steady decline in the number of children walking and biking to school, even among those children living a mile or less from school. Reasons for this trend include increasing concerns for child safety, traffic along pedestrian and bicycle corridors, and in many cases, students attending schools far from their homes. Walk + Bike to School Day can help students, parents, educators, and community leaders reverse this trend by identifying and working to solve many of these barriers.

Walk + Bike to School Day can serve as a kickoff event for sustained efforts to get children walking and biking to school on a regular basis and to teach kids and families how to safely navigate their community once again. It will promote healthy and active living, and push for the prioritization of our resources to build bicycle and pedestrian routes that are safe and enjoyable for the whole family.

Visit [www.walknbike.org](http://www.walknbike.org) to learn more about Walk + Bike in Oregon and to register your school. The first 250 schools to register will receive an organizer kit with resources and small prizes to give away as incentives. Oregon's Walk + Bike program also coordinates the Walk + Bike to School Challenge Month each May. Go online to learn more about activities and events taking place throughout the year.

*Oregon Walk + Bike to School Day is organized by the Bicycle Transportation Alliance and the Oregon Walk + Bike to School Committee. Members include: Oregon Department of Transportation, Portland Bureau of Transportation, Oregon Department of Human Services, Kaiser Permanente, and Safe Routes to School Coordinators from across Oregon.*

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