

# New Bedford Public Schools Celebrate Walk & Bike to School Day



Today, Wednesday, May 7, 2014, students at elementary schools throughout New Bedford including the Charles Ashley, Ellen R. Hathaway, Carlos Pacheco, John Avery Parker, Betsy B. Winslow Elementary Schools and others, celebrated the annual "Massachusetts Walk/Bike to School Day." The celebration is aimed at encouraging students across Massachusetts to walk or bike to school as well as to raise public awareness about the importance of safe roads and environments that allow students to travel to and from school safely.

Students at several New Bedford Elementary Schools walked and biked to school today along with parents, teachers and community leaders. The spotlight school for the 2014 Annual Walk/Bike to School was the Charles Ashley Elementary School, located on Ashley Boulevard in New Bedford's north end, across

from Brooklawn Park.



Mayor Mitchell and Ashley School students exercise before the school day begins.

Beginning at 7:30 A.M. with kids, parents and community leaders including Mayor Jon Mitchell, Superintendent Dr. Pia Durkin, Principal Karen Meyer, Safe Routes to School State-wide Coordinator, Erin Reed and the Mass in Motion New Bedford Team gathered at the intersection of Brooklawn and Sowle Street near the softball fields. They walked and biked together to the Ashley School at approximately 7:45 A.M.

Today was the kick-off for Ashley's "walking school" which included over 30 children and a handful of parents walking to school. A walking school bus is simply a group of children walking to school with one or more adults. The goal is to increase the number of kids walking to school by providing a safe and supervised manner. Ashley School plans to convene their walking school bus daily until the end of the school so any interested child is encouraged to join the group and walk!

In addition to the walking school bus, Ashley students have opportunities for physical activity each morning before

school, including walking and dancing. Also, every Wednesday all students participate in 10 minutes of guided exercises like jumping jacks and stretches. Today, Mayor Mitchell enthusiastically joined in as the entire school participated in this activity outside by the playground.

“Walk and Bike to School Day events like the one held today raise awareness of the need to support safer routes for walking and bicycling in our community,” said Mayor Mitchell. “Walk and Bike to School Day also emphasizes the importance of issues such as increasing physical activity among children, pedestrian safety, traffic congestion and concern for the environment. These events help build connections between families, schools and the broader community,” he continued.

Walk and Bike to School Day is a collaboration of the Massachusetts Department of Public Health’s Mass in Motion Program and the Massachusetts Department of Transportation’s Safe Routes to School Program, which is federally funded by the Federal Highway Division. The program is designed to create safer streets, promote physical activity, and build sustainable environments in over 170 communities throughout Massachusetts. Mass in Motion works with communities across the Commonwealth to promote healthy eating and active living for youth and adults.

“When children walk or bike to school they get a great form of exercise first thing in the morning, so they arrive energetic and ready to learn,” says Mass in Motion New Bedford’s Coordinator, Kim Ferreira. “It’s best if kids can get at least an hour of physical activity a day, so walking to school starts them out on the right foot .”

“Even if you’re not participating in the event today, if you drive by any school on your way to work in the morning, it’s important to remember to slow down and be vigilant. The other half of the equation is promoting safe driving, as well,” says Ferreira.

The Safe Routes to School campaign works with cities and other organizations to build infrastructure such as bike paths and sidewalks, and to deliver education and awareness to drivers about driving without distractions, slowing down, and respecting pedestrians and cyclists.

For additional local information, please contact Kim Ferreira at (508) 789-4969.

**For additional information, please visit these websites:**

- Mass in Motion [www.mass.gov/massinmotion](http://www.mass.gov/massinmotion)
- Massachusetts Safe Routes to School [www.mass.gov/massdot/saferoutes](http://www.mass.gov/massdot/saferoutes)
- Walk to School Day in the USA [www.walkbiketoschool.org](http://www.walkbiketoschool.org)
- National Center for Safe Routes to School [www.saferoutesinfo.org](http://www.saferoutesinfo.org)