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Stepping to school

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Children giggled loudly as they rounded the corner of 26th and Isabelle avenues in San Mateo heading north just enough to see parents and their kids walking toward the stop sign.

"It's a parade!" one little boy said to the other as they ran back to the corner and patiently waited to join the festivities.

Walking to school is nothing new, but yesterday hundreds of children participated by taking "walking buses" to class. Beresford Elementary School in San Mateo created four walking bus routes to celebrate International Walk to School Day. The day, which was adopted in all 50 states by 2002, promotes safe routes to school which in turn hopes to create a healthier and greener lifestyle. Similar routes were created in Redwood City, San Carlos, Millbrae, Pacifica, Daly City, Brisbane, Hillsborough, Burlingame, Menlo Park and East Palo Alto.



Heather Murtagh/Daily Journal
Parent Ann-Marie Wiese leads a group of children and parents on Walking Bus Route 1, one of four leading to Beresford Elementary School in San Mateo on International Walk to School Day Wednesday.

There is a group of about 18 individuals who regularly walk down Isabelle Avenue to school, said one of the event coordinators Marie LaCour. Yesterday, however, she said that number was more than doubled. Children made signs asking drivers to stop for the children walking.

"Walk to school. Walk to school," little 2-year-old Brody chanted while he held his sign.

His 5-year-old sister Lily had a matching sign, although hers was decorated with hearts rather than Halloween stickers.

Ali Jones, Brody and Lily's mom, explained that they walk to school normally but rarely are there this many parents and children involved.

"The more the merrier," she said. "It really helps me as a mom too. Sometimes I need to get [Brody] to school so I walk [Lily] to the corner. There are other parents she can walk with so I know she's safe."

Ann-Marie Wiese, who helped lead the Isabelle route Wednesday morning, also counts on neighbors to help walk her daughter to school. Wiese works Monday through Thursday and normally joins the foot-driven caravan on Fridays. Her husband could take drop her daughter off at school but the little girl prefers the morning exercise.

Children overwhelmingly expressed happiness over the ability to walk with friends to school. And the muffin before class wasn't a bad addition either.

The Sandpiper Elementary community, in Redwood Shores, kicked off its walking bus program also yesterday.

Event co-chairs Frances Fong and Winnie Cheang reported about 60 percent of the school, 498 students, participated. The school is offering backpack charms as incentives to walk or bike to school throughout the year.

Sandpiper is promoting the walking bus as part of their larger green program.

Children at Baywood Elementary School were joined in their trek by county Supervisor Carole Groom while Supervisor Rose Jacobs Gibson walked with Redwood City students. All participating schools will be given a certificate of appreciation at an upcoming board meeting.

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