

ACTIVATING AURORA: Ditch the Excuses

By Ron Weese

'Ditch the Excuses,' says ParticipACTION; our Canadian 'thought leaders' on physical activity, when speaking about getting kids to walk to school.

As back-to-school is upon us, a lot of habits return as routines are re-established. Getting up earlier, making breakfasts and lunches, homework, getting the kids to school, after-school plans, and weekends full of activity all seem hectic and maybe stressful to some. The walk-to-school 'movement' is something to consider as kids head back. There was a time when getting to school was partly the responsibility of the student. They had to get up early enough to get their breakfast, gather their 'stuff' and schedule enough time to walk to school and be there before opening bell. It built time-management into their day as well as responsibility. It allowed them to meet with friends and talk and walk on the way to school. It built friendships and social opportunities. It also added about 2,000 healthy steps per day.

That was a generation ago. Statistics show that walk-to-school has almost been eradicated in the last twenty years and with it went healthy social, emotional and physical activity that we ought to care about.

Ok, parents tell us that things have changed. Lives are busier. Dual jobs-not enough time in the morning. Traffic is congested and it isn't safe. The neighbourhood isn't safe-they may be kidnapped!

ParticipACTION recently published their views on the topic and it challenges parents to 'ditch the excuses.' Let's see if any of these resonate with you.

There Isn't Enough Time!

Can you wake up earlier? Get things, lunches, clothes, etc. organized the night before? Eliminate screen time distractions that eat time?

It's Too Far!

Google Maps will tell you exactly how far it is to school and you can make it an interesting outing to do a 'test walk' with the kids. Time it so everyone knows when and where to go. If you like, watch this short video of how children in other countries manage harsh conditions in order to get to school. www.youtube.com/watch?v=eIsQ0B43Q9Y. It will make your kids' walk-to-school seem like a cake-walk.

Traffic is Dangerous!

We, the parents, are the traffic congestion problem. And our York Regional Police friends tell us that the greatest safety risk around schools is just before the bell as parents roll through stop signs, use fire lanes, park erratically and even speed in school zones to get their kids to school on time. The thing is that if more kids walked there would be less traffic! Secondly, even if you parked and walked a block or two, that would relieve school congestion. Let's make the school zone truly a safe place.

Stranger Danger!

In 2015 the RCMP reported that statistically the chance of a child being abducted by a stranger is one in 14 million. No one is advocating putting any child in harm's way, but some logic and common sense should prevail. Buddy systems (walking with friends www.billybuddy.ca) will help our kids feel confident and competent in neighbourhoods, and isn't that a solid lesson in life? Isn't that a skill to develop with your child in your own neighbourhood? And isn't it a great message; that our neighbourhoods are a safe place to live and play? The York Regional Police tell us that statistics show our neighbourhoods are safe, so let's be confident and enjoy living in this Community.

Our Activate Aurora Schools all include the development of Travel Plans through the York Region Public Health Department, the Town of Aurora and the Healthy Schools initiatives within each school. We know that progress can occur when parents and the school work cooperatively and as a team to build healthy schools. It is everyone's goal.

'The journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step,' said the Chinese Philosopher, Lao Tzu. Is it time for your kids to start that journey?

To learn more about Activate Aurora's Safe Healthy Walk-To-School Program and how to help develop walk-to-school strategies in your school, please contact us at www.activateaurora.com.