



PRESS RELEASE
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Va. First Lady Celebrates Walk to School Day at Crestview Elementary
350 children will walk to school with J.R. Tucker marching band on Oct. 5

RICHMOND- **First Lady of Virginia Maureen McDonnell** will celebrate **International Walk to School Day** on **Wednesday Oct. 5** with more than **350 children** from **Crestview Elementary School** in Henrico County. Mrs. McDonnell and the children will be joined by **Virginia Secretary of Health and Human Resources Dr. Bill Hazel, Virginia Secretary of Transportation Sean Connaughton, State Health Commissioner Dr. Karen Remley**, and the J.R. Tucker High School marching band on their half-mile walk from Christ United Methodist Church to Crestview Elementary beginning at 7:50 a.m.

Funded by a grant from Richmond-based nonprofit Prevention Connections, the Walk to School Day event aims to promote increased physical activity among schoolchildren.

"We hope this event will inspire communities across Virginia to participate in the national Safe Routes to School program," says Danny Saggese, chairman of Prevention Connections. "The number of children who walk and bike to school has decreased by 73 percent over the last 40 years, and we need to turn that around."

As of 2009, 13 percent of children ages 5 to 14 walked or bicycled to school, compared to 48 percent of students in 1969, according to the U.S. Department of Transportation's (DOT) 2009 National Household Travel Survey (NHTS).

Held in connection with Virginia's second annual Weight of the State childhood obesity prevention conference, the event is sponsored by Prevention Connections, the Virginia Foundation for Healthy Youth (VFHY), Henrico County Public Schools, the Virginia Safe Routes to School Network, Virginia Department of Health (VDH), and the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT). Ridge, Longdale and Maybeury elementary schools in Henrico will also be observing International Walk to School Day, along with 40 other elementary and middle schools throughout the commonwealth.

Following the walk to school, Crestview Elementary will hold student activities throughout the day emphasizing good nutrition and physical activity. "As part of our school's Continuous Improvement Plan, one of our goals for the year is to promote healthy life choices, which in turn improves student academic achievement. In the past, we have found that students who participate in physical activity return to the classroom more focused and ready to learn," says Crestview Principal Karen Rawlyk.

[VDOT's Safe Routes to School program](#) assists localities and schools in the development of plans, activities and infrastructure improvements to make walking and bicycling to school a safe and appealing transportation option for students. Funding for these activities, including sidewalks and other infrastructure projects, is available through VDOT. Prevention Connections promotes the SRTS program by providing technical assistance and financial incentives for schools to create safe walking and biking routes. More information about Prevention Connections' Safe Routes to School mini-grants can be found at www.preventionconnections.org/funding.shtml. Information about VDOT's Safe Routes to School grants can be found at www.virginiadot.org/saferoutes.

Obesity remains the second leading cause of preventable deaths in the United States, behind tobacco use. More than 60 percent of Virginia adults are obese or overweight, and it is estimated that as many as one in three children in Virginia are also obese or overweight. Childhood obesity can lead to serious health problems once only seen in adults, including type 2 diabetes, heart disease and sleep apnea.

International Walk to School Day began in 1997 as a method of encouraging safer, improved streets, healthy exercise habits and clean air. For more information about International Walk to School Day, including a list of participating schools, go to www.walktoschool.org. For more information about Safe Routes to School, please visit the National Center for Safe Routes to School at www.saferoutesinfo.org or the Virginia Department of Transportation's Safe Routes to School page at www.virginiadot.org/saferoutes.

About Prevention Connections:

Prevention Connections (PC) is committed to the prevention and reduction of tobacco use and obesity — the two leading causes of preventable deaths in the United States — through education, intervention, policy development and community outreach to improve the health of individuals and communities.

A 501(c)(3) nonprofit, Prevention Connections was founded in 2003 and is a sister organization of the Virginia Foundation for Healthy Youth, sharing directors with the foundation. Virginia First Lady Maureen McDonnell serves as an honorary member of Prevention Connections' Board of Directors.

Prevention Connections' initiatives have included co-hosting the first statewide childhood obesity prevention conference, which was chaired by McDonnell, and hosting a statewide strategic planning conference for smoking cessation involving leaders in the Virginia healthcare and insurance industries. Prevention Connections also aids Title I schools to reduce childhood obesity by increasing activity and improving nutrition through its school vending machines and Safe Routes to School mini-grant programs.

For more information about Prevention Connections, please visit our website at preventionconnections.org.

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Media Alert: First Lady of Virginia Celebrates Walk to School Day with Children at Crestview Elementary in Henrico County

When: Wednesday, Oct. 5. Walk begins promptly at 7:50 a.m.

Where: Walk begins at 7:50 a.m. at Christ United Methodist Church, 6818 W. Grace St., and ends at Crestview Elementary School, 1901 Charles St.

What: First Lady of Virginia Maureen McDonnell, other state dignitaries and 350 students from Henrico's Crestview Elementary School will celebrate International Walk to School Day on Oct. 5. Organized and funded by a grant from Prevention Connections, the event will promote the Safe Routes to School (SRTS) program, which helps reduce and prevent childhood obesity by increasing physical activity among schoolchildren. The J.R. Tucker High School Marching Band will also participate in the event, which is being held in connection with Virginia's second annual Weight of the State childhood obesity prevention conference. Three other Henrico elementary schools are also holding Walk to School Day events: Ridge, Longdale and Maybeury. Forty schools across Virginia will observe Walk to School Day.

Other Guests: Virginia Secretary of Health and Human Resources Dr. Bill Hazel, Virginia Secretary of Transportation Sean Connaughton, Virginia Health Commissioner Dr. Karen Remley, Virginia Foundation for Healthy Youth Executive Director Marty Kilgore

Sponsored by: Prevention Connections, Virginia Foundation for Healthy Youth, Virginia Safe Routes to School Network, Henrico County Public Schools, Virginia Department of Transportation

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