

Active Living Research

Using Evidence to Prevent Childhood Obesity
and Create Active Communities

ARTICLE SUMMARY

February 2013

Why Parents Allow Their Children to Walk to School

Introduction

Walking to school can help increase physical activity and prevent obesity in children. There is a growing understanding of how distance to school and other factors such as sidewalk quality, traffic and existence of crosswalks (often referred to as environmental factors) impact whether children walk to school or not. However, less is understood about how attitudes related to walking and perceptions of environments play a role in this. We examined the perceptions of walkability, attitudes toward walking and physical activity, and safety concerns about walking to/from school, among parents in Austin, Texas.

Methods

We surveyed parents of 1,202 children. The majority of students were Hispanic and from lower-income households. We selected pairs of students who lived in the same or similar home locations so that each pair (601 pairs) would have similar distances to school and comparable neighborhood environments.

Key Findings

Parents who perceived that the school was close enough to home, the existence of parks and the overall convenience of walking to school, were more likely to let their child walk to school. In contrast, parents were more likely to drive their children to school when they: perceived that roads were busy with traffic and that sidewalks were less well-maintained on the route to school; feared their child could be hit by a car or be abducted or hurt by a stranger; or perceived that driving their child to school to be easier or faster than walking.

Implications

Parents who walked their children to school had significantly more positive perceptions of walkability, reported walking more with their children, and enjoyed doing so more, than parents who drove children to school. These findings point to the need for programs and trainings that promote pedestrian safety and help parents have a more positive view of walking to school.

SOURCE

Lee, C., et al. (2013). Beyond Distance: Children's School Travel Mode Choice. *Annals of Behavioral Medicine*, 45(1 Suppl): S55-S67.

Open access to the full text article is available at:

<http://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s12160-012-9432-z>

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