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Salt Lake City Mayor Ralph Becker greets children at "Walk More in Four" event at Washington Elementary School.

Kids urged to walk to school

By Amy K. Stewart
Deseret News

Mom Erica Padilla walks her kids to Washington Elementary School in Salt Lake City School District every day — whether the mayor proclaims it a special day or not.

She spends the three-block walk talking to her children about their homework, friends and sports.

"It's good for our bodies, and I like to talk to my children," Padilla said, through an interpreter.

Salt Lake City Mayor Ralph Becker, in conjunction with the Utah Department of Transportation, kicked off a statewide safe walking and biking challenge for back to school last week.

"Walking to school helps promote good health," Becker said.

The challenge, called "Walk More in Four," encourages all Utah students to walk or bike to and from school at least three days a week for four weeks in September.

The kids can chart their progress for a chance to win prizes donated by local Utah companies, including bikes, helmets, scooters, backpacks and water bottles.

Becker said he used to walk to school as a kid but said it seems today's students don't do that as much. Which is too bad, he said, because "not only is it healthy and something good for the environment, but it's also a great time to spend with your kids."

The Utah Health Department and its exercise and nutrition program, Gold Medal Schools, backs the "Walk More in Four" challenge.

UDOT also promotes the "Student Neighborhood Access Program" or "SNAP," which is an implementation of the federally funded Safe Routes to School program.

SNAP provides resources to assist schools in planning, education and encouragement activities to increase the number of Utah children walking and biking to school. Many schools host bike rodeos.

Other schools have a SNAP school safety assembly with music and audience involvement.

Under Utah law, every elementary school, middle and junior high school is responsible for developing and implementing a safe routing plan, or SNAP plan. High schools are also encouraged to create a plan.

"We want to make sure we have safe routes so parents feel comfortable with their kids walking to school, where there might be concerns," Becker said.

Mom Sandra Ramirez said she always walks her second-grade daughter, Laisy, 7, to school. It's about a 10-minute walk to school.

"It's good exercise," Laisy said. "I want to be healthy."

Robert Brandon said he walked his fifth-grade granddaughter, Danielle



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Brandi Barrett, Cheyenne Arnold, Christina Lopez and Anthony Torres walk to school.

Thorson, 10, to school Wednesday because the mayor said to. But that will be a one-time deal even though they live two blocks away. "I like to drive," he said.

For more information on the challenge, go to www.udot.utah.gov/SNAP.

Last Wednesday's efforts were statewide with mayors in seven cities besides Salt Lake: Mayor Matthew Godfrey, Ogden, Polk Elementary; Mayor Daniel McArthur, St. George, Sunset Elementary; Mayor Lewis Billings, Provo, Lakeview Elementary; Mayor William Applegarth, Riverton, Foothills Elementary; Mayor Dana Williams, Park City, McPolin Elementary; Mayor Randy Watts, Logan, Adams Elementary; and Mayor Gerald Sherratt, Cedar City, South Elementary.

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