



## Michigan Safe Routes to School in Action... Bike to School Day



On May 4th 2016 thousands of students across Michigan strapped on their helmets and participated in the fifth annual National Bike to School Day (BtSD). Despite some less than ideal weather, students all over the state were determined, joyful, and ready to rock.

A series of postcards and emails sent in late winter remind all schools in Michigan that it's time to think about and register for BtSD. Once registered, schools receive a packet of information on how to plan a successful event, booklets on bicycle safety,

and stickers for participants along with a certificate signed by the governor. Like Walk to School Day, Bike to School Day is intended to celebrate biking to school, and to build awareness, interest and momentum for Safe Routes to School programs.

Beginning in 2015, MFF strategically planned to pair BtSD with ACES (All Children Exercise Simultaneously) Day since both occur on the same day and to leverage marketing of both events. A poster contest was created, and the prize of a new bike has been donated each year by the ACES partner, State Farm Insurance. Students from all over the state were invited to submit an original poster capturing this year's theme: *Make your own adventure, get out and get active!* Over 100 students sent in original pieces of artwork. This year to highlight both BtSD and ACES Day at the same time, MFF approached East Lansing's MacDonald Middle School to see if they would be willing to allow their students to ride from the school to Michigan State University's Spartan Stadium for the ACES event. While East Lansing has generally not been supportive of student bicycling, parents and some teachers have been anxious to teach students about bicycle safety and proper riding, and permission was granted.

The scene at MacDonald Middle School is hard to recapture in words. As the sky threatened to spill at any moment, student after student rode up on their beloved cruisers or pulled mountain bikes out of the backs of cars and raced them through the school entrance. Gym teacher and health champion, Terri Cregg, ushered students into the gym where a host of parent and





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teacher volunteers, including ride organizer and expert cyclist Thomas Baumann, slapped make-shift nametags on all the bikes so students would not get confused in the pack. The plan was simple: the 200+ MacDonald students would celebrate BtSD by riding en masse to the Michigan State University Duffy Dougherty building, where they'd participate in *All Children Exercise Simultaneously Day* with 800 K-8th school students. SRTS Grants Manager, Katie Johnson and Operations Coordinator, Mariama Lockington got a chance to join the fun, and by 8:30am had positioned themselves toward the back of the bike train at MacDonald to support students along the way. By 8:45am the East Lansing police escorts were in place and the ride was on!

Of course the moment students pulled out of MacDonald's campus it started to rain, but this did not dampen the spirits of anyone. Two sets of 8<sup>th</sup> grade boys riding tandems cheered as they wobbled to find their balance in the pack and eventually synced up; another set of boys had adorned their helmets with spikey-Mohawk inspired covers and zoomed ahead to the front; a group of 7<sup>th</sup> grade girls sporting impeccably decorated pastel-colored cruiser bikes glided by laughing and singing. As the group made its way down Burcham Drive, groups of elementary students from a nearby campus gathered with their parents to cheer the middle school students on. One very small girl at the sidelines jumped up and down clapping her hands yelling: "THIS IS THE MOST AMAZING THING I'VE EVER SEEN!" as the 200+ bikes whizzed by. And it was an amazing sight to see. The pack wound its way through residential neighborhoods and eventually crossed Grand River, heading into the MSU campus where cars honked in support as students made it to the end of their 2.2 mile ride and parked their bikes outside of the facility.

In the end, the students had a blast and besides a few flat tires, a wayward pedal, and some general exhaustion on the way back, all the MacDonald students made it back to school safe and sound with a very successful first Bike to School Day under their belts! Congratulations to all who made this event possible, and to Terri Cregg who hopes to keep the SRTS momentum going by organizing a Bike Rodeo in the near future.

Held on the Wednesday of the first full week in May, BtSD began with a bang in Michigan, and has been growing ever since. In 2016 Michigan was third nationally in the number of schools participating. With a small investment, the reach has been tremendous.

Total Investment: <\$3,000 annually

2012:	46
2013:	89
2014:	150
2015:	203
2016:	205

