

Appendix A: Sample Letter to Parents

Date _____

Dear Parents or Guardians:

Your child will be participating in the Walk Smart, Virginia! pedometer program designed to help your child build skills that empowers him/her to make smarter activity choices for a healthier future. The basic goal of this initiative is to get students to move more and sit less in their daily routines. It is my hope that a few changes in physical activity habits and the awareness of the importance of active living can make a difference in your child's health now and in the future.

Today's youth are bombarded by choices that challenge their ability to make wise decisions about being active. There is a lot of research that shows increased physical activity has a positive effect on academic achievement, including increased concentration and reduced disruptive behavior. In addition, research also indicates that aerobic conditioning may help to improve memory and exercise may strengthen particular areas of the brain. Childhood obesity is a physical, mental, and emotional health issue. In addition to adult diseases such as heart disease, diabetes and hypertension, overweight children are also at risk for developing depression, mood swings, symptoms that mock Attention Deficit Disorder, increases in allergies, joint problems, severe headaches, and breathing difficulties.

Unfortunately, today there are nearly twice as many overweight children and almost three times as many overweight adolescents as there were in 1980. Type 2 diabetes in adolescents increased ten-fold between 1982 and 1994; and, the Center for Disease Control (CDC) warns, one in three United States children born in 2000 will become diabetic unless they start eating less and exercising more.

Your child will be loaned a pedometer which is a small device worn on the waistband or belt. It measures the vertical movement of the body as each step is taken. This up and down movement is converted into the number of steps your child has taken and how many minutes your child has moved. Your child will wear a pedometer during his/her waking hours (at home, at school, and on weekends). At the same time each day and with your help, your child will record his/her total daily steps onto a log or a Web-based collection system. On the Walk Smart, Virginia! Web site, www.walksmartvirginia.com, your child will also be able to set goals, enter the number of steps walked on a map of Virginia, and review Virginia history, geography, government and recreation information along the route. The Web site also includes a steps-to-miles converter, a body-mass index calculator and links to nutrition and physical activity Web sites.

Using a pedometer, your child will have a reliable way of measuring physical activity and setting achievable goals to maintain or become more active. The pedometer is being loaned to your child in a manner similar to the method used for lending textbooks; in this way, Walk Smart, Virginia! will be a sustainable program and will offer a long-term resource for our community. If the pedometer is lost or damaged, your child will be expected to replace the pedometer for a \$10.00 fee.

Please sign the section below indicating your understanding of the terms of this loan agreement.

Parent or Guardian's Signature

Date

We appreciate your support of our physical education program. If you have any questions about the Walk Smart, Virginia! program, or if I can be of any further assistance, please contact me at _____.

Sincerely,