



## **Kids Walk Across Arkansas** **Program**

### **The Audience**

*Kids Walk Across Arkansas* is designed for use with 1<sup>st</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> graders, but could be adapted for middle school students.

### **The Design**

*Kids Walk Across Arkansas* is an 4-week program that encourages children to participate in regular physical activity. This community-based program--designed to be directed by teachers, 4-H leaders, etc --will help active children remain active and help less active children experience new and different physical activities that could be incorporated into lifelong participation. At the core of *Kids Walk Across Arkansas* is an incentive program. The leader encourages the youth to participate in 1 hour of moderate or vigorous physical activity outside of school-time at least 5 days per week and provides the children with a sheet to document their participation. **Parental involvement is also a key to this program.** Participants will document their physical activity and have their parent or guardian provide a signature to verify that the activity was completed. Further, the children can 'double' the amount of physical activity they report...if they do the activity with a family member. By including parents and siblings, the awareness and participation of physical activity will be increased within the entire family. Participants who achieve the weekly goal of physical activity will receive a fun, inexpensive, reward. The completed sheets will be collected by leaders and turned into the county extension office at the end of the 4 weeks. *Kids Walk Across Arkansas* is NOT A COMPETITION between individuals. It is designed to allow all participants to set goals for their own personal achievement

### **Activity Sheets**

Each individual who wants to participate in *Kids Walk Across Arkansas* will receive a personal activity sheet from her or his leader. The participant will have a parent or guardian validate the amounts of physical activity they participate in each day. Participants can turn in the sheet for a toe token or other incentive item when parents have initialed all 10 spaces and signed the card. A maximum of 2 hours of physical activity can be earned each day. Participants can earn up to 8 tokens during the 4-week period. Participants can earn double time if they are active with their parents or siblings. The doubling of time will not allow the participants to exceed the 2-hour daily limit (example: If mom walks with student for 30 minutes, the students earns 1 hour of activity time). Leaders should distribute the first sheets when participants return the parental release form.

### **Approved Activities**

The benefits of an active lifestyle for children are based on participation in physical activity that is primarily aerobic in nature. Things like walking and running. Although the

program title is *Kids Walk Across Arkansas*, students are not restricted to walking. Any amount of time that a student is engaged in physical activity outside of school will count towards their time sheet. Individuals can also break physical activity up into time increments (minimum of 10 minutes) to achieve their daily goals. Any aerobic activity is acceptable and some examples are: running, bicycling, swimming, rollerblading, aerobic exercises--dance, yoga, and team sports--basketball, soccer, and wrestling. Leaders will probably run into some questions about acceptable physical activities and in the end it may boil down to a judgment call. Our suggestion is to err on the side of approval. Any activity that gets a student up and moving around is going to be beneficial.

### **Registration**

Participants must sign up with the activity leader. To be eligible for the program individuals need to be healthy and able to participate in physical activity. If you have individuals who are unhealthy you may consider providing revised rules so that they can still participate--as long as participation will not make a condition worse--consulting with the child's physician and the individual's parents is a must in questionable health situations. Participants are required to turn in a signed parental release form. Schools should encourage all able-bodied students to participate in *Kids Walk Across Arkansas*. There is no cost for participants to be involved in the program.

### **Incentives**

The principal incentive for *Kids Walk Across Arkansas* is the personal achievement of better physical fitness. There can never be too much praise and encouragement for children who fulfill their weekly goals. Physical activity and proper nutrition will pave the way for a healthy lifestyle for years to come. Beyond fitness, the participants can become more motivated to strive for their goal if there is an incentive for them to achieve. Remember that the reward should fit the desired action and that the idea is not to 'win' but to instill the behavior of physical activity in the lives of today's youth. Toe tokens have been a popular incentive prize for young children. The tokens are small plastic feet outlines that can fit on a shoelace or key chain. Other incentives could be solicited from local businesses and organizations.

Another successful incentive for many group physical activity programs is an end-of-the-program celebration. A group activity with healthy food and music will bring the participants together to reward them for their accomplishments.

University of Arkansas, United States Department of Agriculture, County Governments Cooperating

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