



McWillie Elementary: Peace & Unity Walk

After many years of planning Walk to School Day events, McWillie Elementary in Jackson, Mississippi decided it was time to promote more than just walking. The hope behind the Peace & Unity Theme was to remind others that the world is bigger than just what you see on TV or in the media. Organizers wanted to remind their community that children do not see color, they only see love. Children from all different backgrounds participated in the walk, along with teachers and parents and reminded us all that the world needs more peace and unity.



To celebrate International Walk to School Day in October, 2016, over 400 students at McWillie Elementary school gathered shortly after school began to walk together around the block surrounding the school.

In order to plan the event, the PTA worked in partnership with McWillie Principal, Dr. Sara Harper and Mrs. Tracy Frazier. They worked with the City of Jackson to make arrangements to block off the street and publicized the event through the school's social media page, word of mouth and flyers promoting the event were sent home with every child. The team worked with the Mississippi Department of Health to secure donations of bottled water and contacted the Jackson Police Department to arrange for officers to walk with the children and reminded the students the positive role that police officers can play in a child's life. McWillie Elementary is also the only Montessori school in the Jackson Public School System, which brings with it a diverse group of

students but also the challenge of students attending the school from outside the surrounding neighborhood. Unlike typical neighborhood schools that might hold a Walk to School event, McWillie navigated this issue by gathering the students together shortly after their arrival. Prior to the Peace and Unity Walk, the students worked with teachers to make signs that said, "Love", "Peace", "One race" and other encouraging messages to hold during the walk. In order to set the tone for the true meaning of the walk, organizers invited a Baptist reverend, an Imam from a local mosque and a Catholic priest to perform a litany over the intercom as students recited the litany responses in their respective classrooms. Dr. Robert Luckett, a McWillie parent and Director of the Margaret Walker Center at Jackson State University led the walk and reminded children about the importance of coming together as a human race, friendship and accepting differences. Meanwhile, PTA volunteers set up a coffee and water station for parents to attend the litany presentation. After a short group stretch, the diverse student body walked along parents, teachers, police officers and volunteers, as Vee Caldwell told us, *"It was a beautiful sight to see"*.

Tips and Advice from PTA President Vee Caldwell

"If you are worried that you don't have enough resources to pull an event like this off, remember that you don't have to have monetary resources - all it takes is an idea and vision!" She encourages other communities to work with volunteers, utilize your partners, get buy-in from the principal and teachers and even ask friends to help. The most important thing is to use events like this to bring people together!



For this article, Bike Walk Mississippi spoke to Peace & Unity Walk organizer, Revetia Caldwell, McWillie's PTA President and recent recipient of the PTA "School of Excellence" award.