

Dear Fellow Parent,

As proud chairs of the Buddy Walk and parents we encourage you to sign up for one of the MDSC's Buddy Walks -- the Central Massachusetts walk, Buddy Walk & Harvest Fair on September 15th or the MDSC Buddy Walk and Family Festival on October 13th.



As a parent of a child with Down syndrome, you have done an amazing job advocating on his/her behalf in your community. **We know that school communities** play such an important role in your child's life; here families with children of all abilities partner with educators and specialists to maximize learning, form lasting friendships, and come together to build strong communities. Because of this, we would like to greatly increase the participation of school communities in the MDSC walks.

The MDSC Public Awareness Committee created a marketing initiative this year to celebrate and spread the word about the power of friendship, while recognizing friendship's incredible value for our loved ones with Down syndrome, #FriendshipMatters. The campaign strives to bring attention to just how critical true acceptance and inclusion are to our loved ones with Down syndrome. Using this campaign as a springboard, we encourage you to connect with your child's school as the friendships created there are a central part of your child's success.

### **Getting Started**

Encourage your child's teacher, special ed teacher, classmates, administrators, and others from their school to get involved in the buddy walk program! Share information about joining your team or starting their own team to support your child in the school district.

Before you meet with staff, create your own talking points on why you think it is so essential to have the support of the school especially given how much we know that #FriendshipMatters.

Below are ways in which we feel your child's school can get involved and show their support for forming lasting friendships and raising awareness and inclusion!

### **Ways to Get Involved:**

1. Encourage your child's classmates and other students to join your team and walk with your child and their friends at the Buddy Walk;
2. Ask the child's classroom or group of teachers/administrators to form a team that represent the entire school;
3. Have your child's school promote the walk on their school website, social media platforms, newsletters and other communications that go home to families;
4. Request the school to host an in-school fundraising campaign to support your child's team.

Help us spread the word about the MDSC and #FriendshipMatters in your local schools to promote the acceptance and inclusion of individuals with Down syndrome.

If you would like to connect with one of us to discuss this program in greater depth our emails are below.

Thank you for all that you have done and best of luck involving our schools more deeply in our work.

Sincerely,

Mark and Sara DeWeerd, Chairs of the Buddy Walk & Harvest Fair  
Anthony and Danielle DeCotis, Chairs of the Buddy Walk & Family Festival

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