

Implementing a Walking School Bus

What is a Walking School Bus?

A walking school bus involves a group of children walking to school with one or more trained volunteers. Traditionally, schools have used adult volunteers; however, some schools in Waterloo Region have trained older students as walking school bus leaders.

The “bus” follows the same route every day picking up children along the way at specific “bus stops” as designated by the school. How a walking school bus is organized is unique to each school. It can be as informal or formal as needed.

Before Starting a Walking School Bus:

Assess:

- How many students and families would be interested in participating?
- Are there any safety concerns related to the neighbourhood and roads within it?
- How far away from the school could the walking school bus start?

Plan:

- When will the walking school bus operate?
Be sure to consider weather, start times, etc.
- What if an adult or student volunteer is ill or away?
- Identify relevant school policies and procedures and if additional ones are needed
- Obtain support from school council and staff
- Develop any forms that may be needed (e.g., consent, registration, etc.)

Prepare:

- Develop or revise policies identified during planning phase
*Be sure to include procedures for leaders to follow should something happen.
For example what if...*
 - *Someone falls and injures self during walk*
 - *Someone forgets lunch, backpack or project*
 - *Someone starts a fight or displays bullying behaviour*
 - *Someone wanders away from the group and does not come back*
- Recruit and train volunteers
- Recruit students and families to join the walking school bus
- Plan the Walking School Bus route(s) based on where students live
- Develop a schedule for walking school bus leaders
- Develop a phone list for each walking school bus route
Be sure to include all participating families and volunteers
- Communicate with crossing guards
- Arrange for other supports if needed
For example: some schools have used wagons to help carry backpacks, projects and musical instruments
- Develop a communication plan and materials to help maintain participation
- Develop evaluation and feedback tools

For more detailed information and sample resources, please refer to the links on the next page.

Benefits of Walking to School

- Increased independence
- Enhanced mental wellbeing
- Increased self-esteem
- Increased physical fitness
- Increased energy level
- Decreased traffic around the school
- Decreased air pollution



Added Benefits of a Walking School Bus

- Increased time with friends
- Increased sense of community
- Increased leadership skills
- Fun environment for everyone

Where to find more information

Walking School Bus Guides and other Resources

- National Centre for Safe Routes to School (U.S.) www.walkingschoolbus.org
 - The Walking School Bus Program: A Primer and First Steps (online training) http://apps.saferoutesinfo.org/training/walking_school_bus/
- Frederick County: Walking School Bus Information and Training Outline <http://www.fcps.org/Page/298>

Pedestrian Safety

- Walk Smart Bike Smart DVD - A copy is available to borrow from the Region of Waterloo Public Health Resource Centre. (Please call 519-883-2256 to borrow.)
- Pedestrian and Bicycle Information Centre (U.S.) – Walking School Bus: Guidelines for talking to children about pedestrian safety <http://www.walkingschoolbus.org/safety.pdf>
- Pedestrian Safer Journey (curriculum resources for teachers) http://www.pedbikeinfo.org/pedsaferjourney/mi_res.html
- Walkability Checklist (U.S.) <http://katana.hsrb.unc.edu/cms/downloads/walkabilitychecklist.pdf>

Other Active & Safe Routes to School Resources

- Safe Routes to School: School Travel Planning Toolkit <http://www.saferoutestoschool.ca/school-travel-planning>

Alternate formats of this document are available upon request. Please contact the Region of Waterloo at (519) 575-4400 or TTY (519) 575-4608 to request an alternate format.

