

Walking school bus heads to Wellesley PS

Pilot project to encourage kids to walk to the school embraced by community, so it'll roll out full-time in September

▶ LIZ BEVAN

WITH THE GOALS OF getting more kids walking to school every day, Wellesley Public School has just completed a trial run of the Trottibus program. It's the only school in the district to test the program out.

Started in Quebec five years ago by the Canadian Cancer Society, the Trottibus program organizes a sort of walking school bus, with a starting point on a route to school, and picking up more kids along the way.

Volunteers walk with the kids, and make sure they get to the school yard in time for class. The trial run in Wellesley was a huge success, says vice-principal Andy Beddoe.

"I think it went very well. There was a lot of enthusiasm," he said after the first walk to school on Tuesday morning, adding that there are still a few kinks to be worked out. "You could tell that parents and students weren't really sure what to expect, so it was good to see them out there and figuring out what was going on."

The goal is to have the Trottibus program running every school day in September, and Beddoe encourages parents to sign up their kids. This past week, there were two routes in action. The first starting from Village Road and Nithbank Road, and the second at Molesworth Road and Schweitzer Crescent.

Beddoe says the idea is to get kids moving with less cars around the school in the mornings.

"The Canadian Cancer Society is involved in this, so, obviously, their take on it is that through active lifestyles, the chances of having cancer are reduced – the fitness and health benefits. It is social too. Sometimes getting out of



Wellesley PS vice-principal Andy Beddoe meets students at the starting point for one of the Trottibus routes on Tuesday morning. Kids are encouraged to join the bus along the route to walk to school instead of parents driving.

[LIZ BEVAN / THE OBSERVER]

the house in the morning is such a struggle, then there will be this nice little time to get in the zone," he said. "Students are more alert when they get to school on the academic side of things – they will be

more alert in class. There is also that extra pair of eyes on the children, monitoring them. Kids get to learn about how to be a pedestrian and road safety in a social setting. It is about building relationships, too.

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There will be fewer cars on the road, fewer parked cars on the streets with kids running between them. There are a lot of benefits."

Right now, for Beddoe and staff, it is all about getting the word out about the program to as many parents as possible. He says that one concern has been safety, but the volunteers and staff have that covered.

"Our planning department with our school board, as well as people from the township and then also Waterloo Public Health, they are always looking for safe active routes to

school," he said. "It is one of those things that we want to make sure is safe for our students, so we have spent a lot of time monitoring, especially in our parking lot, but also the number of vehicles on the road close to the school. Especially out in front of the school, we had parents parking on both sides of the road on Village; it was dangerous, so we asked the township to put up a sign that said [parking on] just one side."

More information about the Trottibus program can be found online at www.trottibus.ca.

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