

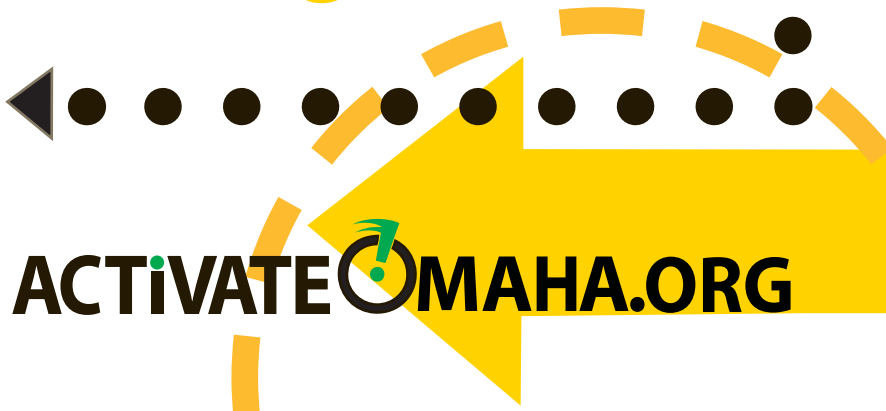
school

walking



bus

**Walking
School Bus
Guidelines
for Organizers**



ACTIVATE  **OMAHA.ORG**

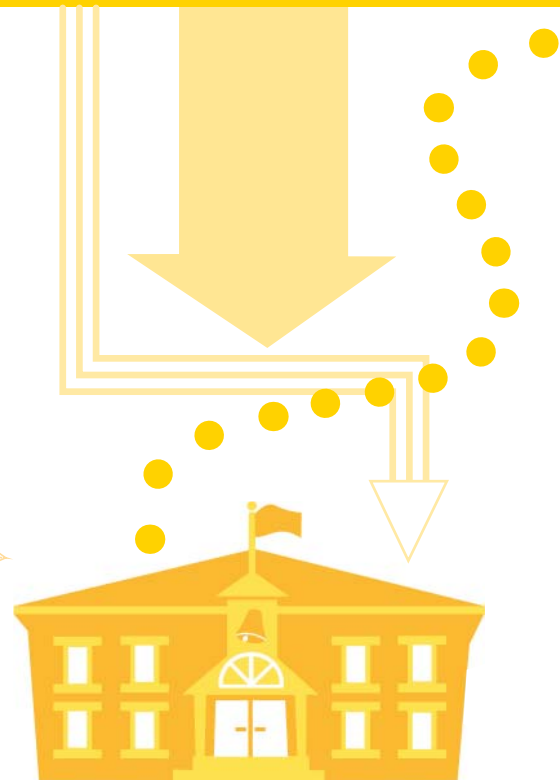
What is a Walking School Bus (WSB)?

A walking school bus is a group of children walking to school with one or more adults.

Sound simple? It is, and that's part of the beauty of the walking school bus. It can be as informal as two families taking turns walking their children to school to as structured as a route with meeting points, a timetable and a regularly rotated schedule of trained volunteers.

When beginning a walking school bus, remember that the program can always grow. It often makes sense to start with a small bus and see how it works. Pick a single neighborhood that has a group of parents and children who are interested. It's like a carpool—without the car—with the added benefits of exercise and visits with friends and neighbors. For an informal bus:

1. Invite families who live nearby to walk.
2. Pick a route and take a test walk.
3. Decide how often the group will walk together.
4. Have fun!



Studies show that fewer children are walking and biking to school, and more children are at risk of becoming overweight and obese. Changing behaviors of children and parents require creative solutions that are safe and fun. Implementing a walking school bus can be both.

Obesity and Walking to School

Fewer children walk or bicycle to school than did so a generation ago.

- In 2001, 16% of students between the ages of 5 and 15 walked or bicycled to or from school.
- In 1969, 42% of students walked or bicycled to school. (CDC)

In 2006, over 17% of children aged 6 to 11 years old were overweight.

- Between 1976 and 2004 the percentage of overweight children aged 6 to 11 years old almost tripled. (JAMA)

Benefits of Walking to School

- Improved health and fitness
- Better behavior and focus in class
- Less traffic congestion around schools
- Less air pollution around schools
- Social opportunity for kids and adults
- Highly visible program in the community
- Interaction with a caring adult

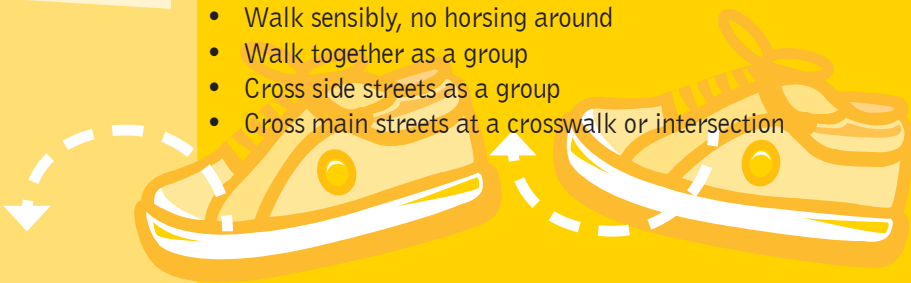
Why Develop A Walking School Bus?

Walking School Bus is a safe and fun.

Parents often cite safety issues as one of the primary reasons they are reluctant to allow their children to walk to school. Providing adult supervision may help reduce those worries for families who live within walking or bicycling distance to school.

Safety

- Be visible – Walking School Bus leader should wear Walking School Bus t-shirt or bright reflective vest, or carry WSB sign
- Walk, Don't Run
- Stay on the sidewalk
- Walk sensibly, no horsing around
- Walk together as a group
- Cross side streets as a group
- Cross main streets at a crosswalk or intersection



Building your WSB Team

The Walking School Bus Team should include a core team of individuals who are dedicated to improving the safety of walking and bicycling routes to school and advocates for physical activity.

The team could consist of parents, teachers, students, PTA members, and community members.

The team should meet periodically to discuss development of the program. Monthly meetings are usually necessary when starting the program. Meeting times and location is decided upon by team members. Any convenient location near the school or even at the school is usually the best location.

The team works together to recruit volunteers, develop the expectations of volunteering for the WSB program, as well as provide volunteer training.

The team should also develop details of the program. Some suggestions for details include:

- Start and finish date of the WSB program
- Weather policies
- Cancellation process
- List and phone number of volunteers
- Back-up plan if a leader can not lead a bus
- WSB phone

**Go
Team
Go!**



Making the Route to School Safe

When picking a route, answer these four questions:

1. Do you have room to walk?
 - a. Are there sidewalks and paths?
 - b. Is there too much traffic?
2. Is it easy to cross the street?
3. Do drivers behave well?
 - a. Do they yield to walkers?
 - b. Do they speed?
4. Does the environment feel safe?
 - a. Are there loose dogs?
 - b. Is there criminal activity?

A walkability checklist can be used to note any problems on the routes. One can be downloaded from <http://www.walktoschool.org/eventideas/checklists.cfm>

This is a great opportunity to involve the students. Have them fill in the checklists and note any locations which would discourage walking. Make it fun and educational by involving Scout Troops, After School Clubs, or make it a classroom activity.

Ideas for

Making Your Walking School Bus Fun

- Have the kids create a name for their route (i.e.: The Dodge Street Dash)
- Create mascots
- Celebrate special days
- Have a theme day where everyone wears a given color or funny hat.
- Promote a school function
- Celebrate a given holiday
- Have the group choose a safety song or slogan
- Children may wish to make up poems or chants
- Have students design a logo or posters indicating their Walk to School Bus days and meetings.
- Play I Spy or 20 Questions along the route to school

Walking School Bus Guidelines for Organizers

1. Map the route the walking bus will take.
 - Choose the safest route with the fewest and safest streets to cross.
 - Pick places where there are sidewalks or paths separated from traffic if possible.
 - Understand the traffic signs and signals related to pedestrians.
2. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommend 1 adult for every 6 children. One adult can walk with more kids who are over 10 years of age. For 4-6 year olds, 1 adult for every 3 children is advised.
3. Have parents walk with their children and/or sign consent forms.
4. Go over basic safety rules with the children.
5. Make sure the students know you are in charge. Have a plan for dealing with disruptive students.
6. Plan how to cross streets depending on the number of children and the type of street.
 - Avoid busy, high-speed or multi-lane roads.
 - Think about how to cross, such as two by two or four across.
 - Give children exiting the street room to enter the sidewalk area.
7. Wear bright colors and use retroreflective materials.
Walk leaders and children can wear fluorescent vests. In bad weather, visibility is even more important.
8. Children are not miniature adults.
 - They often act before thinking.
 - They have one-third narrower side vision.
 - They can't judge speed.
 - They are shorter than adults and can't see over cars and bushes.
9. Remember that adults are role models for children's behaviors.
10. The rewards can be great. Walking school buses help create lifelong safety skills. Children may even become safer drivers who will watch out for walkers and bicyclists.

Promoting the Program

- Kick off the program with a Walk-to-School Day special event
- Have students make posters for event and post them around school
- Brochures/registration form
- Back-to-school/Parent-teacher conference night
- Announcement in school newsletter and Friday folders
- Backpack fliers
- Direct mailing to families
- Presentation at P.T.A. meeting
- Incentives

Promoting, Recruiting and Training Program

Recruiting

- Parent volunteers
- College students - especially students in health-related field
- Community volunteers - especially seniors
- PE teachers or Wellness Coordinators
- Church and civic groups
- City volunteer programs

Training

- Safety code
- Policies and responsibilities
- Make it FUN
- Criminal background checks

Policies & Responsibilities

The development of policies and responsibilities for your Walking School Bus team will help keep everyone on task and know how to response to certain circumstances. Suggestions for policies and responsibilities of the WSB team could include:

Following the safety rules

- Determine the consequences for children not following safety rules.

Establish start/finish dates and times of your WSB program.

Cancellations and schedule changes

- Bad weather – establish weather guidelines for your WSB, such as do not walk if temperature is below 25 degrees, severe weather warnings, raining hard enough to soak clothing.
- Have a back-up plan if a scheduled leader can not lead due to illness or conflict. Try to trade with another leader or call WSB coordinator.
- If a child can not walk due to illness or other reason – if your WSB team keeps track of all walkers, have child's family call the WSB coordinator with absenteeism, the coordinator then calls the appropriate WSB leader. If child does not show, the WSB leader should call the family from school at end of walk.

Tracking Participation – some schools may be interested in how many students are participating in the WSB program. Tracking participation can lead to funding sources for the program and show the success of the program. Tracking reports can consist of:

- Recording the number of Walking School Buses, some schools may have more than one WSB to accommodate the students which live in different directions surrounding the school.
- Recording the number of walkers in each Walking School Bus.
- Recording the number of days per week the WSB is operated.
- Other evaluation forms can be downloaded from the Safe Routes to School website.

International Walk to School Day



- International Walk to School Day is an international one-day event which is celebrated in over 30 countries. Parents, school staff and community leaders walk to school with students. Walk to School Day is a great way to emphasize the safety and health benefits of walking to school. Walk to School Day also highlights how fun walking to school can be.
- International Walk to School Day is during the first week in October. However, a walk to school day event can be scheduled anytime.
- The most common and safe route within the school walking area is ideal for any walk to school events.
- Ideas: Walking School Bus, Bike Trains, Alternative Drop-Off, Walking Wednesdays, Celebrations, Class Competitions, Contests.
- Invite Guest Walkers - Kids love to walk to school with role models, such as law enforcement officers, firefighters, city officials, college students, athletes or even a big brother or sister. Have fun with the event and invite a school mascot to greet the walkers as they arrive at school.
- Register Your Event - Be counted with millions of participants in the International Walk to School Day event. Register your event at: <http://www.walktoschool.org/>

“Too far to walk.”

Some schools may have a majority of their students commuting by bus or are driven because they live far away, so an alternative drop-off location for Walking School Bus is an ideal solution. Buses or private vehicles can stop a few blocks ($\frac{1}{4}$ or $\frac{1}{2}$ mile) from school in a parking lot or park that has been chosen by the WSB team. Students arriving at the alternative drop-off are greeted by adult volunteers who walk the children the remaining way to school. A good alternative drop-off location should have enough space for buses and other vehicles to park and safely drop off students.

“I ride the bus.”

Ask your school Principal if it would be possible to have an alternative drop area for busses. Or, start a school walking club that meets before school so that everyone can join in the fun.

“It’s too cold.”

Operate your walking school busses in the fall and spring. The first and last quarters of the school year provide great walking weather!

Overcoming Barriers



Walking School Bus Contacts

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Additional Resources

National Center for Safe Routes to School

<http://www.saferoutesinfo.org/>

Safe Routes to School Nebraska

<http://www.saferoutesne.com>

International Walk to School

<http://www.walktoschool.org/>



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