



# TIPSHEET

## WALKING SCHOOL BUS



### WHAT IS A WALKING SCHOOL BUS?

A walking school bus is an organized or ad hoc group of students with adult leaders that walk to and from school together. Walking school buses operate much like school buses, with adults who “drive” and “make stops” along a defined route to pick up students. This is a great way for busy parents, who cannot always walk with their children, to feel comfortable with their children walking to school, and it helps to address safety concerns along the route. Students benefit from being active before and after school, and improving their safe walking skills.



### How do I set up a Walking School Bus?

First decide what kind of walking school bus fits your community. Walking school buses can be simple or elaborate. Here are some different examples:

- Families in a neighborhood meet up once a week to walk to school together.
- Adult walking-leaders meet at predetermined spots to pick up students en route to school.
- Families meet at a designated location (like the library, a church, a grocery store, etc.) and walk together to school.
- Trained adult volunteers stop at each participating student’s home to “pick them up” along an established route to school.
- A group of adults “relay” the walking school bus along its route. Each adult leads a portion of the walk, then hands off to the next adult at a prearranged location.
- Local law enforcement officers lead walking school buses, targeting chronic tardy or absent students.

#### *Pick a safe route:*

- Choose a route with sidewalks or well-established paths that are wide enough for 2 or 3 students to walk sociably and with enough lighting for early morning travel.
- Minimize street crossings. Avoid busy, high-speed, or multi-lane roads.
- Avoid routes with potential problems like loose dogs, missing sidewalk connections, bad lighting, vacant buildings, or criminal activity.



### *Provide adequate adult supervision:*

- The Centers for Disease Control recommends one adult for every three children ages 4-6; one adult for every six children ages 7-9; and fewer adults for children aged 10 and older.

### *Decide how often "the bus" will run:*

- Walking school buses can operate every day, once a week, once a month, or just a few times a year.
- Given the positive benefits to students and parents, be prepared to operate the walking school bus more frequently.

### *Decide on Walking School Bus Policies for certain conditions, including:*

- What to do if a child is absent.
- Late arrival along the "bus" route.
- Appropriate behavior while participating in the walking school bus.
- School delays and inclement weather.
- How to handle "bus driver" absences.
- How to ensure good communication among participants, regardless of whether it's operating or not.

### *Safety Considerations:*

- Review pedestrian safety behaviors and the walking school bus rules to all participating students prior to your first day of walking, and regularly for new participants – both students and adults.
- Review traffic signs and signals.
- Always be a safety role-model and look left, right, and left again and also behind you and in front of you for turning cars. Walk and don't run across the street.
- Wear appropriate clothing for walking in the dark or wear reflective safety vests.



### *Keep it going!*

- Encourage students to name their walking school bus or their designated routes.
- Hold themed walking school bus events such as pajama day, color day, or superhero day.
- Provide incentives, such as book bag charms, stickers, and healthy snacks.
- Track student and adult participation. Reward students for miles/days walked by recognizing them at school assemblies or during the school's morning announcements.
- Recognize and thank adult volunteers, with small gifts, such as handmade cards from students, or recognition in the school's newsletters.
- Continue to train new walking school bus "drivers" to replace anyone leaving the next school year.
- Offer walking school bus information in back to school packets and during back to school night.

 **Keep it going!**

#### Resources:

[http://guide.saferoutesinfo.org/walking\\_school\\_bus/index.cfm](http://guide.saferoutesinfo.org/walking_school_bus/index.cfm)

[http://apps.saferoutesinfo.org/training/walking\\_school\\_bus/modules.cfm](http://apps.saferoutesinfo.org/training/walking_school_bus/modules.cfm)