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# WALKING SCHOOL BUS GUIDEBOOK





## Introduction to a Walking School Bus

This guide will provide you with all the information you need to set up a Walking School Bus program at your school. Depending on the size of your school community and the number of students involved, it will be slightly different for everyone. We hope you enjoy providing the students at your school with a healthier and more fun way to get to school each day!

## What is a Walking School Bus?

A Walking School Bus is a group of children walking to school with adult supervision. It's very simple and that is part of the beauty. The flexibility of a Walking School Bus makes it appealing to communities of all sizes and with varying needs. Safety concerns are often the primary reason that parents are hesitant to allow their children to walk to school. Providing adult supervision may help reduce those worries for families who live within walking distance.

## Why is it important?

Studies show that fewer children are walking and biking to school, and chronic absenteeism has increased since the pandemic. Addressing these changing behaviors among children and parents requires creative solutions that are both safe and engaging. Implementing a Walking School Bus can help keep children active while also providing a dependable way for them to travel to school.

- It provides a safe and environmentally friendly way for children to travel to school.
- Children start a good "walking" habit that hopefully stays with them for the rest of their lives.
- Improves fitness through daily exercise.
- It's fun, promotes social development and encourages independence.
- Studies show children are more alert and focused after walking to school versus riding in a car or on the bus.
- Fewer cars means reduced traffic congestion and pollution.

# START A WALKING SCHOOL BUS

## Step 1: Gauge interest & support from parents

To get started, first determine what level of interest exists at your school. Do you want to set up a program that reaches most children within the school or will you be focused on one area? To determine the scope, contact folks who may want to get involved. Families are at the core of a Walking School Bus. Recruit them informally through the school's back to school night, newsletter, flyers, etc. An interest form may help clarify how they plan to participate in the Walking School Bus.

## Step 2: Select a Program Coordinator to manage your Walking School Bus program

Example coordinators might include teachers, principals, PTO/PTA members, paraprofessionals, parents. Non staff member coordinators will be required to complete Coordinator/Volunteer Route Leader Application.

## Step 3: Determine your walking route(s)

The number of people interested will help to determine the route(s) for the Walking School Bus. East Central Wisconsin Safe Routes to School staff can help you map out where most interested people live and determine the possible route(s). Route leaders walk along a designated route picking up each student at their house, or designated intersection near their house. The other potential option would be to meet at one designated location and everyone walks together. Examples might include a local park or church located close to your school.

## Step 4: Recruit/Confirm Route Leaders

Walking School Bus programs work best if there is a leader for each route. It may be helpful to get the route leaders together and explain how the program works. It's helpful for them to know each other so they can support each other as questions arise.

- Volunteer Route Leaders are required to complete the Coordinator/Volunteer Route Leader Application Form and a background check.
- Schools can develop their own policy and procedures and will inform Volunteer Route Leaders.
- Provide route leaders with toolkits and materials to track student participation (provided by Safe Routes to School staff).



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## Step 5: Send home walking route information and schedule

Inform parents about the chosen route(s), the starting date, which day(s) of the week you will be walking, pick-up times and locations, and get kiddos registered. All students that are utilizing the Walking School Bus must have a signed Expectations, Consent and Registration Form.

## Step 6: Required Paperwork

All participating routes need to complete a Daily Tracking Sheet every time they walk. The coordinator is expected to submit required paperwork according to the timeline set in the MOU to receive funding for the program.

- If your WSB walks 5-14 times your program will receive \$250 of funding.
- If your WSB walks 15+ times your program will receive \$500 of funding.


\*The total number of days walked for each walking route counts towards the total number of walking days (i.e. if two routes walk on the same day that counts as two days walked).



## Contact Us

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