FIRE UP YOUR FEET!

Walking School Bus

When children walk to school, it has a positive impact on the entire community. By getting people out and about, walking school buses can foster a sense of community pride in both children and adults, which can lead to safer, more active neighborhoods. Children get to practice safe pedestrian skills, have fun, increase socialization time with friends, and they arrive at school alert and ready to learn. Volunteers have the opportunity to increase their own physical activity and become more involved in their neighborhood while allowing other parents extra time in the mornings. As people witness walking school buses, they begin to see walking as a social norm, which motivates the community to invest in infrastructure that supports walkability.

What is a Walking School Bus?

A walking school bus is an organized group of children that walks together to and from school with the supervision of an adult. It is like a carpool, but without the car and traffic and with the added benefits of increased physical activity and socialization with friends and neighbors.

Implementing a Walking School Bus Program

Starting a walking school bus is not a difficult process, but it does require dedication, organization and open communication between all that are involved. Take the time to create a detailed plan and address any concerns before you implement the walking school bus. Recognize that each walking school bus is unique and that success depends on discovering what works best for your neighborhood.

Identify and Inform All Interested Parties

Reach out to parents, PTA, teachers, school administrators, community members and neighborhood assoications. Schedule meetings to discuss all the goals and benefits of the program, as well as any concerns that participants may have.

Take advantage of the Fire Up Your Feet resources, such as the backpack stuffer, to reach out to parents. These can be effective ways to discover who is interested in participating, as well as get the word out that you need help escorting children to school.

Map Routes

Map out the locations of households that will participate. Organize safe and convenient routes based on the locations of participating homes. Volunteers and parents should conduct numerous walks along the routes prior to implementation of the program to ensure children's safety.

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Route Planning Checklist

✓ Make sure the route is convenient and has sidewalks and safe pathways wherever possible.

✓ Make sure the route uses crosswalks and minimizes street crossings.

✓ Avoid busy roads, streets with high traffic, poor lighting, areas with criminal activity or houses that may have loose dogs.

For more information about safe walking routes, see the *Walkability Checklist* resource.

Identify and Train Volunteers

Identify volunteers that can participate on a regular basis. Consider approaching local law enforcement to assist in training volunteers in pedestrian safety (see the *Involving Law Enforcement* resource).

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends one adult per three children ages 4 to 6; one adult per six children ages 7 to 9; fewer adults may be necessary for children ten years and older (www.cdc.gov/kidswalk).

Create a Schedule

Work out a schedule among the volunteers to determine who can walk with the students and when-both in the mornings and afternoons. Decide on the regularity of the program. Will this happen every day or on a regular schedule every week or month? (For example, you may decide to have a Walking School Bus every Fridays and call it "Fire Up Your Feet Fridays.") Set departure times for every "stop" on the route. Contact local media outlets to inform them of the new walking school bus program. On the first day of the program, ask neighbors to "cheer on" the children along their route and set up an event at the school congratulating them for walking to school.

Additional Resources

- www.cdc.gov/kidswalk
- www.walktoschool.org
- www.pedbikeinfo.org
- www.walkingschoolbus.org