

Walking School Bus

A Guide for Parents
and Teachers





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The information for this guide was taken from the websites of Go for Green, the State of Western Australia, and Road Safe Auckland. For more information contact the Saskatchewan Prevention Institute at 655-2512 or info@preventioninstitute.sk.ca

What is a Walking School Bus?

A Walking School Bus is a group of children (passengers) and adults (drivers and conductors) who walk to and from school along a designated, safe route. The “bus” picks up students and drops them off in the reverse order in the afternoon.

The program can be developed to fit the needs of the participants; as informal as two families taking turns walking their children to school or as formal as a route with designated stops, a timetable, and a regularly rotated schedule of parents/volunteers. As well, the “bus” can go as seldom or as often as the parents want to “drive” it and the children want to “ride it”. This means that it can be used as little as once a week. It is best to start small and increase the schedule over time.

The Walking School Bus decreases traffic congestion around the school (every child that travels by the “bus” can mean one less vehicle on the road), and provides a safe, active, and environmentally friendly trip for children to and from school.



Benefits of a Walking School Bus

- **Exercise and health benefits** – increases the amount of physical activity children participate in during the day; convenient way to get exercise and improve health; decreases risk of obesity, osteoporosis, depression and diabetes; builds positive self-image
- **Safety** – children will be part of a large, visible, supervised group when walking to school; decreases the amount of traffic around schools
- **Road sense** – children learn pedestrian skills and will be better equipped to deal with traffic when on their own
- **Socializing** – children have the chance to talk and make new friends, fostering a sense of community and self-confidence
- **Environmental** – helps reduce the amount of traffic around schools; reduces air pollution and improves air quality; decreases overdependence on vehicles
- **Easy breathing** – the fresh air will wake children up and help them focus on schoolwork in the morning, improving concentration and learning
- **Building Sense of Community** - parents have a chance to socialize with other parents in their neighbourhoods; increases community awareness and involvement
- **Economic** - decreases costs associated with vehicle use

How to Start a Walking School Bus

The first step to organizing a Walking School Bus is to find an enthusiastic leader or coordinator. This can be a teacher or a parent but should be someone involved in the school. The next step is to determine the interest level of the parents in the school.

There are three main methods to choose from to determine interest.

- 1 One at a time** – Find a group of families living in the same neighbourhood that wish to organize a Walking School Bus for their kids. This method usually results in one bus, at least initially, but can expand from there.
- 2 Interested persons meeting** – Invite all interested parents to a meeting through an advertisement in the school newsletter. The meeting is used to sort out various routes, schedules, and volunteers. This method may result in more than one route (depending on interest, where the people live, and how many will volunteer to be “drivers”). It requires more effort at the meeting itself to organize groups of parents who live in similar areas and volunteer “drivers”.
- 3 Survey the school** – Survey the school community to gauge interest, sort responses into various routes, and organize meeting as in option # 2. This method tends to generate the most interest as it does not rely on people attending an initial meeting. It requires the most preparation and organization.

Surveying the School

If you choose to survey the school to determine interest, the first step is to conduct a survey collecting the information needed to start a Walking School Bus. A sample survey is provided on pages 7 and 8 to use or adapt as needed. The survey can be distributed on its own, with the school newsletter, or at any information sessions or events that are happening.

Collecting the Information

Once the surveys are completed, the information can be compiled to find out where there is the most interest. Potential “passengers” and “drivers” can be plotted on a map of the area. This should show which general areas can have a Walking School Bus route set up.

Remember that parent volunteers are essential for the success of any walking school bus. This can mean that you may have to pick an area with the highest concentration of parent volunteers rather than the areas with the most children.

There will always be initial difficulties with any new walking school bus route. It may be best to start with only one route even if there is interest in more. Once that first route is working well then others can be added.

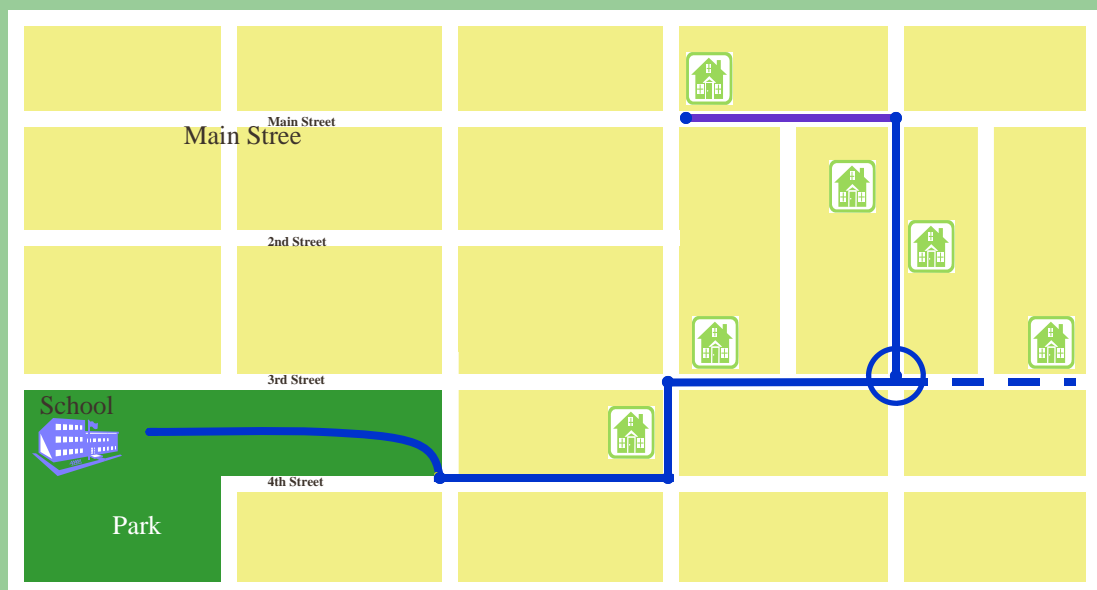
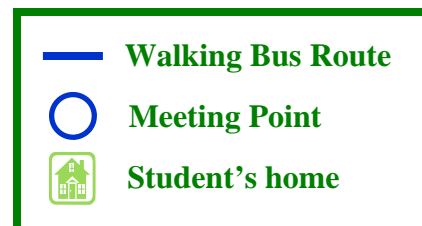
Identify the Route

Once the general area for a route has been determined, it is important to assess the area for hazards to pedestrians. There must be safe places to cross the road. Driveways where you cannot see a car exiting are also a problem. Potential hazards will need to be identified in order to find the best route.

Obtain a map with enough detail to allow the precise location of each child and volunteer to be shown. Using a different color pen for the children and volunteers will be useful.

Taking into consideration the location of the children and volunteers, establish where the bus will stop and estimate how long the route is going to take. Concrete times for the pick ups and total amount of time needed will be set during the test walk. Students can either be picked up in front of their homes or meeting points can be set out. It would be the parents' responsibility to ensure their child reached the meeting point safely.

Routes can be determined by a person, a committee, or through a meeting held with the participating families. If a meeting is held, sort the families into their route groups so they can decide route, schedule, driver roster, and contact person for their route.



Do a Test Walk

Do a trial run of the walk, both before and after school. It is best to include as many of the participants as possible.

Decide what time the “bus” will be leaving the first house. Note the total time for the route and specific times that the children are picked up. Remember to add some extra time for latecomers in the morning.

For the walk home, decide the pick-up time and meeting place. When determining the pick-up time, include enough time to make sure that all students will have time to reach the meeting place. Again, note the total time for the route and the specific times the children are dropped off.

This information is needed to fill out a timetable that will be distributed to the “passengers” and their parents.

Set Up a Roster of Drivers

Once the route and the number of children on the route is decided, the next step is to find out which parents can volunteer to “drive the bus” on which days. When working out a roster, take into consideration that it is recommended that there is at least one adult for every eight children.

When there is more than one adult, it is best that one acts as the ‘driver’ and the other acts as the ‘conductor’ at the end of the group of children.

Set the Rules

Before beginning the walking school bus some rules should be discussed and agreed upon. These should include areas such as responsibilities of the “driver” and parent/caregiver, expectations for behaviour of the children, and what to do in inclement weather.

These rules will ensure that the adult volunteers understand their role and the children will be as safe as possible.

It is important to make sure that any rules comply with school policies. Consider involving the principal or school board trustees in the process. A list of issues to take into consideration when determining the rules of your Walking School Bus is on page 6.

Set up a list of volunteers that are able to “drive the bus” if the scheduled parent is unable to participate that day. This list should be available to all parents.

Increase Visibility

Be Noticeable

Many Walking School Buses have the participants wear something that identifies that they belong to that bus. These can be bright or reflective vests, sashes, hats, or armbands. This also assists with safety, making the bus as visible to traffic as possible. Approach local businesses or other organizations for funding to purchase these identifiers.

Notify Residents Along the Route

It can also be a good idea to notify residents along the route that there will be a walking school bus on their streets. This may increase the caution they use while driving. Putting a flyer in their mailboxes is one way to notify them.

Hold a Media Event

Invite local media to attend your kick-off. Invite partners such as school official, police, and businesses who provided some funding or local politicians to walk along with the bus for the event. This will provide a photo opportunity for the media and increase the likelihood of the media attending.



Name Your Bus

Have the students pick a name for the bus. A corresponding drawing or clip art can also be picked and used on rosters, identifying clothing, or bag tags. This gives each bus its own identity and increases a sense of ownership.

Have Fun with Your Bus

Once your bus is going consider different activities to both keep the interest high and let new families know about the bus. These activities also let the participants have some fun. Some options are:

- Hold theme days: have everyone wear a certain color clothing or piece of clothing. The themes can also be existing holidays such as Christmas, Easter, Halloween, or Valentine's Day.
- Participate in national or international events such as International Walk to School Day on October 4, World Health Day on April 7, and Clean Air Day on June 7
- Reward your volunteers: acknowledge the fact that the bus could not keep going without the volunteers.

Issues to Consider When Setting the Rules

General Information

There must always be an adult leading the bus. There should be an adult for every eight children. If there are two or more adults, one should lead the bus and one should be at the back with any others in the middle. If possible, it is best to have two adults even if there is less than 8 children. Having a driver and a conductor will ensure that there are no stragglers. The smallest and slowest children should be up front with the driver. A decision must be made regarding what to do when a child is not at the pick up point or is not met by a parent at the drop off point.

Road Safety

Children should walk along the sidewalk away from the curb. It is preferable to walk in pairs to let other pedestrians pass safely. When crossing the street, always cross at a corner. Make sure all the children are assembled in a group, away from the curb, before crossing. Assess the street to make sure it is safe to cross. It is best to cross as a group rather than a long line. Once safely on the other side reform in your walking formation. If the bus is crossing at lights, make sure the light is long enough for the entire group to reach the other side. If any vehicle stops to let the bus cross make sure that other drivers know that you are crossing and have stopped as well. Other vehicles going around a stopped vehicle can be very dangerous to pedestrians. If there is ever any reason the set route cannot be used such as road construction consider temporarily changing the route for the duration.

Inclement Weather

Guidelines based on when the bus should run based on the weather should be set. For instance, if it is colder than a predetermined temperature then the bus would automatically not run. If a child will not be walking due to the weather, the parent is responsible for contacting the driver of the bus for that day.

Parent Responsibility

Parents are responsible for the safety of their children while getting to the spot where they will be picked up and going home from the spot they are dropped off. If their children are not going to be using the bus that day the bus driver must be given enough notice. Parents should discuss road safety with their children before they start using the bus including how to safely cross streets and to walk in a group.

Children's Responsibilities

The children should always listen to the bus driver and obey their instructions, especially when crossing the street. If they miss the bus in the morning but it is still in sight they could walk quickly to join up. If the bus is out of sight, they must return home so their parents can arrange for them to get to school. If they are left behind at school they must inform the school office or another predetermined person.

Parental Consent

It can be a good idea to have written parental consent before a child is allowed to use the walking school bus. The consent can include emergency contact information and a details of when the child is going to be using the bus.

Walking School Bus Survey

A Walking School Bus is a group of children (passengers) and adults (drivers and conductors) who walk to and from school along a designated, safe route. The “bus” picks up students and drops them off in the reverse order in the afternoon. The program can be developed to fit the needs of the participants; as informal as two families taking turns walking their children to school or as formal as a route with designated stops, a timetable, and a regularly rotated schedule of parents/volunteers. As well, it can go as seldom or as often as the parents want to “drive” it and the children want to “ride it”. This means that it can be used as little as once a week. It is best to start small and increase the schedule over time. The Walking School Bus decreases traffic congestion around the school (every child that travels by the “bus” can mean one less vehicle on the road), and provides a safe, active, and environmentally friendly trip for children to and from school.

1. Are you interested in your children using a Walking School Bus?

- Yes ⇨ if yes, please go to question 2
 No ⇨ if no, please go to question 10

2. Please provide the names and ages of the children who would use the Walking School Bus.

Name	Age

3. Please provide your address and phone number.

Address: _____

Phone Number: _____

4. Fill in when your child would use the Walking School Bus during a normal week.

Day	To School (write children’s names)	From School (write children’s names)
Monday		
Tuesday		
Wednesday		
Thursday		
Friday		

5. The Walking School Bus can only be a success if there are adult volunteers to operate the bus. Would someone in your household be willing to volunteer to drive the bus?

Yes No

If yes, please write the names and a contact phone numbers of the volunteers below.

-

	Name	Phone Number
1st		
2nd		
3rd		

6. Please check the number of times you or this adult would be willing to volunteer (if there is more than one volunteer check in the separate columns).

Number of times	1st Adult	2nd Adult	3rd Adult
One morning or afternoon every two weeks			
One morning or afternoon every week			
Two mornings or afternoons a week			
Three mornings or afternoons a week			
Four mornings or afternoons a week			
Five mornings or afternoons a week			
Do not know			

7. Would you or this adult prefer to drive the bus:

	1st Adult	2nd Adult	3rd Adult
In the morning			
In the afternoon			
No preference			

8. On what days can you or this adult drive the bus:

	1st Adult	2nd Adult	3rd Adult
Monday			
Tuesday			
Wednesday			
Thursday			
Friday			

9. How does your child/children usually travel to and from school each day (please check)? Check one for each child.

Walking with an adult	
Walking by themselves	
Walking with siblings or friends	
By bicycle	
By bus	
Driven in a car pool	
Driven by a parent	
Other (please specify):	

Thank you for taking the time to fill out this survey.
Please return it to your child's school by: _____

Supporting Agencies

Saskatoon Health Region

Saskatoon Health



Region *in motion* encourages children and youth to be physically active for health benefits by providing physical activity resources for teachers, parents and students. *In motion* supports and promotes the use of active transportation and encourage school communities and parents to consider organizing a Walking School Bus as a means to improve both health and the environment. For more information call (306) 655-3648 or visit www.in-motion.ca.

City of Saskatoon

The City of Saskatoon believes in the safety and health of our children and promotes and supports both the *Walk a child to School*



Program and the *Walking School Bus program*. Both programs encourage parents and caregivers to walk the route their children take to school to teach them about pedestrian safety, to walk their children to school rather than drive to avoid traffic congestion and to model safe behavior by teaching their child to cross only at pedestrian crosswalks or at the corners not in between parked cars. For further information on both programs visit the website at www.city.saskatoon.sk.ca.

Saskatchewan in motion

Saskatchewan *in motion* is a province wide movement aimed at increasing physical activity to achieve health, social, environmental and economic benefits. Saskatchewan *in motion* is also a movement that includes communities, schools, workplaces and leaders. Our goal is to become one of the top three most physically active provinces in Canada. Communities are encouraged to take an active role by creating conditions to support physical activity where we live, learn, work and play. Programs such as Walking School Bus and Safe Routes to schools provide an opportunity for communities and schools to work together to promote health and environmental benefits. For more information visit www.saskatchewaninmotion.ca.

Road Map 2020

Working for a Sustainable Saskatoon, Inc. has established an Active Transportation Project to promote a pedestrian and cycling-friendly Saskatoon. One of our initiatives is to establish a Walking School Bus pilot involving both schools in the Silverspring community in Saskatoon. For further information, please contact Louise Jones at ljones@roadmap2020.ca or visit the web site at www.roadmap2020.ca.

Related Resources and Websites

SGI - has resources and a video lending library that that includes pedestrian safety.

Brochures and Posters

Tel: 1-800-667-8015 ext. 1237

E-mail: droussel@sgi.sk.ca

Videos

Tel: 1-800-667-8015 ext. 6042

E-mail: mcollinson@sgi.sk.ca

www.sgi.sk.ca

SGI and the Acquired Brain Injury Partnership Project (ABI) -

offers a Community Grant funding program that could help offset some of the costs involved in getting a walking school bus set up. Grant criteria and applications are available on SGI's website at www.sgi.sk.ca.

ABI Education and Prevention

Coordinators - work in the area of injury prevention and have pedestrian safety resources.

South ABI Team (306) 766-5760

Central ABI Team (306) 655-8433

North Central ABI Team (306) 765-6501

www.health.gov.sk.ca/ps_acquired_brain_injury

Go for Green - encourages outdoor physical activity that protects, enhances, or restores the natural environment. Go for Green offers a national program, Active and Safe Routes to School. www.goforgreen.ca

Safe Routes to School: Practice and Promise

- National Highway Traffic Safety

Administration

www.nhtsa.dot.gov



For more information contact:



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