

Establishing a Walking School Bus Program: Things to Consider

1. When do you want to roll out the program?
 - a. Full program on first day of school?
 - b. Partial program on first day of school (with just one or 2 schools, and one or 2 routes at each school), with goal to build the program to include all schools and all interested families?
2. Determine interest:
 - a. How many families are interested in participating? How well can you gauge this interest over the summer (do you have extensive contact with families in the summer?)
 - b. How many volunteers can you line up?
 - c. Is there volunteer interest from non parent groups: senior citizens, advocacy groups?
 - d. Are all schools interested?
 - e. Are there particular schools or particular routes that are critical and should be included as part of the startup?
 - f. Can the police department provide assistance? Specifically, they could assist with providing safety training to volunteers, and possibly with route determination.
3. Set up routes:
 - a. Where do interested families live?
 - b. How many drivers/route leaders are you likely to have? (note, expectation would be that route leaders also serve as drivers.)
 - c. Will you have meeting points, or will the children be met at their homes?
 - d. Design the routes to be as safe as possible. Consider:
 - i. Street crossings
 - ii. Locations of crossing guards
 - iii. Traffic volumes and speeds on roads
 - iv. Condition of sidewalks
 - v. Neighborhood conditions (loose dogs, vacant lots, etc.)
 - e. Test walk the routes (could be done by parent volunteers with kids)
 - f. Mark the routes? Some programs sign the routes.
 - g. Create route schedule (when will pick up occur at each stop?)
4. Line up volunteers for each route
 - a. Useful to have a team leader for each route (can assign the drivers)
 - b. Create schedule for drivers: might be necessary to have several “drivers” for each route, depending upon availability of drivers (ie, a different driver by day of week or by morning vs afternoon).
 - c. Need about 1 driver per 6 children, though for age 10 and up, can have more children per driver
5. Develop guidelines and rules. Consider:
 - a. What does the driver do in these situations:
 - i. Disruptive children, inappropriate behavior
 - ii. A child leaves the group
 - iii. A child does not show up for the bus (how long should driver wait?)
 - iv. The driver cannot make it (can they call a backup, should they call the school?)

- v. There is an emergency (some programs provide a first aid kit and first aid training to drivers)
 - vi. Additional children who are not on the official bus passenger list, join the bus
 - vii. School is delayed
 - b. What does the parent do if their child will not be on the bus
 - i. Contact driver?
 - ii. Contact school?
 - c. On the trip home, will the driver deliver the children to a parent, or will they just be dropped at the meeting place? Will parental consent be needed to drop a child at the stop when a parent is not there? Do you want to identify “safe Houses” – places children could go if the parent is not at the stop to pick them up?
 - d. How does driver keep track of who will be on bus?
 - i. Route list can be provided on daily basis
 - ii. Driver can tick off on the list who has been picked up, this can be dropped at school. The driver can mark the list to indicate if a child will not return home on the bus.
 - iii. Modified list can be provided by school to each driver for the drive home
 - e. What happens in inclement weather?
 - i. In all likelihood, the walking bus will be needed as much (or more so) when the weather is inclement
 - ii. Some communities have provided color coded ponchos or umbrellas to walking school bus “passengers” (this works well if the routes are color coded.)
 - f. What if kids want to walk just one direction?
- 6. Sign up walkers
 - a. Consider how you will do this before school is in session
 - b. Have parent sign consent form
 - c. Provide guidelines/rules and route schedule and stop locations to parents
- 7. Train Volunteers
 - a. Provide any equipment. Possible items
 - i. Reflective vests? (some programs provide one vest per route, the vest is kept at the last stop on the route overnight, the driver drops the vest in the school after getting the kids to school in the morning, the afternoon driver picks up the vest in the school and drops it at the last stop on the route. This works well with variation in drivers by day of week.)
 - ii. First aid kits
 - iii. Whistles
 - iv. Identification tag
 - b. Hand out resources:
 - i. Route map and schedule
 - ii. Guidelines/rules
 - c. Discuss pedestrian safety
 - d. Explain the rules/guidelines