



Walking School Bus

Action: The Walking School Bus provides a safe and environmentally-friendly way for students to travel to and from school, without creating emissions. A parent or volunteer leads the group to the school safely, saving energy, reducing emissions and giving students fresh air and exercise.

Materials:

- A large map of the neighbourhood
- Highlighters and markers
- Addresses of students wishing to take the Walking School Bus
- Items to identify people who are on the Walking School Bus (e.g. hats, scarves, reflective arm bands, etc.)

Best time of year for the project:

This project is intended to be semester or year long. You may want to consider launching it during “Walk to School” month in October (for more details visit: www.saferoutestoschool.ca/iwalk.asp).

Time commitment:

- Planning: It may take a couple of months to organize a committee, obtain approvals, organize volunteers and plan the routes.
- Implementation: Minimal time required to schedule Walking School Bus supervisors.
- Maintenance: Minimal time required to continue scheduling Walking School Bus activities, add new students to the route etc.

Background:

Many parents do not feel their neighbourhoods are safe enough to allow their children to walk to school on their own, despite their close proximity to the school. This results in crowded school parking lots and bus loops while parents drop off and pick up their children each day.

This action project will give students the opportunity to:

- Explore the concept of energy
- Get to school in a safe, social, active and environmentally-friendly way.
- Examine the ways in which energy consumption causes pollution
- Participate in and lead others in energy saving actions
- Educate other students, parents and teachers about air pollution



Fast facts:

- 50 per cent of urban students in Canada are driven to school.
- Transportation accounts for 25 per cent of all energy consumed in Canada.
- A Walking School Bus helps eliminate cars travelling on the roads as well as idling vehicles.
- Physical activity builds self esteem and promotes good health.
- The majority of Canadian children do not walk to school.
- Walking to school allows children to socialize with members of the community.

Getting started

- Form a Walking School Bus team and explore problems and solutions:
 - Conduct a traffic survey during drop-off and pick-up times
 - Consider safety concerns and pick a safe route
- Present your findings to the school's parent council and school staff
- Establish a committee to help organize if coordinating more than one Walking School Bus route.
- Involve community partners.
- Promote the program to the parents, students and the community by sending home a letter and hanging posters in and out of school.
- Meet with interested families:
 - Introduce them to the program and explain their involvement
 - Discuss existing informal walk to school groups
 - Create a map of homes to identify potential routes
 - Highlight routes on maps to give to "bus drivers"
 - Give "bus drivers" contact lists with home and work numbers
 - Set a start date for the program to begin
 - Select an identifier for all participants (armbands, hats, etc.)
 - Have students choose a name for their bus
 - All buses should have a designated meeting place
 - Clearly mark the "safe routes" to school
- Create guidelines that everyone can agree on.
- Do a test run and include as many participants as possible.
- Start your Walking School Bus program and celebrate!

Maintaining interest in the project:

- Provide updates on the program in school publications and during school announcements.
- Create signs to identify Walking School Bus stops along each route.
- Reward students who participate in the Walking School Bus program at the end of each semester/year.
- Have theme weeks for Walking School Bus walkers (i.e. wear something red week, wear a funky hat week) to help draw community attention to the program.



Helpful Hints:

- Post signs where students are to meet to get dropped off and picked up.
- Have clearly assigned routes that have been approved for the Walking School Bus.
- Remember that safety is the goal of the project. Ensure routes are well lit and in highly visible areas.
- Have the volunteer supervising the school bus wear clearly identifying features such as a construction zone safety vest and arm band with the school name.
- Link your project to International Walk to School Week. Register with Go for Green's Active and Safe Routes to School program.
- Talk to local police. They may have information on common areas for traffic congestion, accidents or other information that would be helpful to planning your route.
- Pay attention to speed limits. Cross in designated school zones where possible.
- Be flexible. Students may be driven to a meeting point of the Walking School Bus and walk from there.
- Keep your routes the same throughout the year.
- Include other energy efficient methods of travel. The active route may include riding a bike or scooter, skipping, or rollerblading.

Troubleshooting

What if no one wants to participate?

Remember it may take a while for change to happen. Don't get discouraged. This is where information on the benefits of a Walking School Bus will be useful.

What if people think the Walking School Bus is unsafe?

This is where good planning and consultation will play a key role. Many parents feel that their vehicle is the safest place for their children. It is up to your initiative to show the Walking School Bus can be an active, social, safe and environmentally-friendly alternative for getting to school.

What if no one wants to walk in winter?

There is no doubt that Canadian winters can be cold. Motivate your walkers with games and incentives. One school handed out food colouring to students to mark the path of their bus to and from school... by the end of the week the snow pathway was a brilliant mix of colours and designs! Another school built a part of a snow person each morning when arriving at school, by the end of the week they had a full snow person. By the end of the month, a snow family!

What if we don't have enough money for a good campaign?

For great tips on how to fundraise, check out the [Fun Fundraising tips](#).