

FIVE STEP GUIDE TO WALKING SCHOOL BUS



change **X**

WELCOME

“Welcome to the Walking School Bus Guide! Here you’ll find all the information you need to set up a Walking School Bus in your area. Depending on the size of your community and the number of kids involved , it will be slightly different for everyone. We hope you enjoy giving the kids in your area a healthier and more fun way to get to school!”



Introduction to the Idea

What is Walking School Bus?

A Walking School Bus is a group of children walking to school with adult supervision. It’s very simple and that’s part of its beauty. It’s all about families taking turns walking their children to school, with a structured route and meeting points, a timetable and a regularly rotated schedule of volunteers.

Typically, a Walking School Bus is comprised of two volunteer parents, one to “drive” and one to “conduct” a group of school children. They then follow a set route to school, collecting pupils at “bus stops” along the way. The flexibility of the walking school bus makes it appealing to communities of all sizes with varying needs. Safety concerns are often the primary reason that parents are reluctant to allow their children to walk to school. Providing adult supervision may help reduce those worries for families who live within walking distance of school.

Why is it important?

Studies show that fewer children are walking and biking to school. At the same time, more children are at risk of obesity than ever before. Changing behaviors of children and parents requires creative solutions that are safe and fun. Implementing a walking school bus can be both!

- It provides a safe and environmentally friendly way for children to travel to school.
- Children learn good road sense and it encourages children to start the “walking” habit. Hopefully, this habit stays with them for the rest of their lives!
- Improved fitness through daily exercise.
- It’s fun, promotes social development and encourages independence.
- Rotating parents builds new relationships and allows parents to not walk their children to school every day.
- 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 and pollution.

The Background

Walking School Bus is a simple concept that is growing in popularity across the United States and parts of Europe. In cities across the country, local groups provide guidance and support to communities who wish to implement the initiative, as it has proven benefits for children and for the community as a whole. National organizations, such as the Safe Routes to School Partnerships, also promote Walking School Bus because of the many benefits of the model. They are encouraged because walking to school produces less traffic in the mornings and fewer emissions in the school area. Many groups also advocate for activities such as Walking School Buses because of the health benefits, both physical and psychological, associated with more exercise during the school day.

STARTING A WALKING SCHOOL BUS

EVERYTHING YOU NEED

TIME



It will take 4/5 hours to initially set this up and then parents can take turns accompanying children to school each day.

PEOPLE



You'll need a team of approx. 5 people to help you start your Walking School Bus. Spreading the word helps encourage new groups start.

FUNDING



Funding is needed for reflective vests or other safety materials or required road fixes, plus fliers and meeting costs.

Who typically starts a Walking School Bus?

Someone who:

- is a parent or teacher.
- wants to give kids a healthier and more fun way to get to school.
- is a good organizer.

5 Step Summary

- 1 Gauge interest and support of parents
- 2 Suggest and test routes
- 3 Recruit volunteers
- 4 Recruit passengers
- 5 Set off

Support and Additional Resources

Support from ChangeX: Call us at 612-232-6626. Email: hello@changex.org

STEP 1: COMPLETE YOUR 30 DAY CHALLENGE



The 30 Day Jumpstart Challenge has been designed to get your project off to the strongest possible start by building momentum in the first month. Once you have completed your challenge your first funding payment will be unlocked.

- Learn more about the idea you're starting**
This '5 Step Guide' includes all you need to know about the specifics of starting your project.
- Schedule a Call**
Pick a time that works for you to talk to a ChangeX team member about what's involved in your chosen project as well as to ensure that you understand the Guidelines & rules associated with the Challenge.
- Find 5 interested people**
You already have your own project page on changex.org. Use the site to share the project with others and recruit neighbors, friends, or other folks with an interest to be your first supporters.
- Set up a casual kick-off meeting**
Host a meeting with your team at your home, at a community center or in a coffee shop and come up with an action plan. You can use your page on changex.org to set up an event and invite people.
- Share a team photo and your plan of action**
Upload a team photo taken at your first team meeting to changex.org. In addition, provide us with a narrative on what you will spend the funding on, what your next steps as a group will be, and how you hope the project will ultimately benefit your community.

STEP 2: RECRUIT VOLUNTEERS AND SUPPORTERS

To get started, first determine what level of interest exists at your child's school. Will you be setting up a program that reaches most children at the school or will you be joining with one other family on your block to take your kids and theirs each day?



To determine the scope, start by contacting folks who may want to get involved:

- 1. Parent and students** – These are the folks at the core of a Walking School Bus. Recruit them informally through the school's newsletter, creating flyers, or announcing the initiative at a PTA meeting.
- 2. Principal and other school administrators:** Getting buy-in from the top can help build enthusiasm and get the word out. Schedule a meeting with the school principal or other administrator to keep them in the loop and ask their advice on who else to talk to.
- 3. Other community leaders:** Are there people in your neighborhood who advocate for more stop lights or crosswalks? Who do you know that cares about walkable neighborhoods? Invite them in and ask them to help!
- 4. Local businesses:** Getting a couple of local businesses to give coupons or free prizes can help kick-off your Walking School Bus in a fun way that gets students talking.

STEP 3: CHOOSE THE ROUTE OR ROUTES

Keep in mind that the number of people interested will help determine the route or routes for the Walking School Bus(es).

- Map out where the most interested people live and determine the safest walking route for each group.
- Look for crosswalks, street lights, and other safety features that will help ensure a safe walk. Stay away from busy streets.
- Even if it means choosing a route that's a bit longer, staying safe is the most important factor in determining how best to get to school.
- It's important that an adult walks the route without children before the kids join.

ROUTE CHECKLIST

When picking a route, answer these four questions:

1. Do you have room to walk?

Are there sidewalks and paths?
Is there too much traffic?

2. Is it easy to cross the street?

3. Do drivers behave well?

Do they yield to walkers?
Do they speed?

4. Does the environment feel safe?

Are there loose dogs?
Is there criminal activity?

STEP 4: CONFIRM LEADERS, VOLUNTEERS, SCHEDULE

Walking School Buses work best if there's a leader for each bus route. This helps centralize communication and gives parent volunteers someone to check in with or ask questions of. If possible, try to recruit a leader for each route. Each leader can then find volunteer "drivers" for the bus route they're supporting.

Get route leaders together and explain how the initiative works. It's helpful for them to know each other so they can support each other as questions arise. As the organizer, your role is to coordinate details: get names, addresses, email addresses, phone numbers and availability (which days? Morning or afternoon?) from each leader and ask them to get them from the volunteer drivers on their routes. Keeping all of this information in a google doc or other centralized location will be helpful to all involved.

If possible, have each leader set up the rotation and assign drivers to routes. Remember that the Walking School Bus may grow over time, so if you start out only doing it once or twice a week, that's ok!

TIP:

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommend one adult for every six children. If children are age 10 or older, fewer adults may be needed. If children are ages 4 to 6, one adult per three children is recommended.



STEP 5: RECRUIT PASSENGERS AND TAKE OFF!

Inform parents about the chosen route, the starting date and the bus timetable. The bus should run on a strict timetable and not wait at the bus stop for latecomers. Parents should ensure that they are waiting at the bus stop to drop off and pick up children on the way home unless permission has been given for them to travel home unsupervised.

Parents need to remember that they are responsible for their child's safety on the way to and from the designated bus stops. Parents should be given bus user guidelines and consent forms. Parents should give written consent for children to use the bus and inform the school of their child's usual travel pattern, i.e. the days they will be using the bus going to/from school. It is the responsibility of the parents to let the driver know of any changes

to this pattern. Parents are signing to indicate that they are permitting their children to participate in the Walking School Bus and that they have talked with their children about the need to behave safely and follow any instructions given by adults in charge of the bus. A child who endangers themselves or who misbehaves may be reported to the parent. The parents of a child who continuously misbehaves will be asked to withdraw the child from the Walking School Bus.

Walking School Bus recommends that volunteers and participating children wear fluorescent vests with reflective strips when travelling to and from school. Many groups have fun making signs that drivers and students carry along the route.



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