

# Florida Safe Routes to School Walking School Bus Program



**The Walking School Bus -  
A fun and safer way for  
children to get to school.**

## Program Handbook

A Florida Department of Transportation Safety Office Program



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The Walking School Bus – A fun and safer way for children to get to school.



# About the Florida Safe Routes to School Walking School Bus Program

The Florida Safe Routes to School Walking School Bus Program is a statewide training program that teaches adults (parents, school staff, volunteers, etc.) how to implement a walking school bus program in their community. The program is funded by the Florida Department of Transportation - Safety Office and is housed in the College of Health and Human Performance at the University of Florida.

With fewer children walking and bicycling to school, and an increase in overweight and obese children, Safe Routes to School programs have been developed to encourage safer, active transportation to and/or from school. A walking school bus (WSB), which is a group of children walking to/from school under adult supervision, provides physical activity, teaches pedestrian safety skills, and provides supervision to help reduce concerns about children traveling to/from school. With increased school transportation budget cuts, many districts have eliminated courtesy bussing. As a result, the number of students walking/bicycling to and/or from school and those driven by parents has steadily increased. To help reduce traffic congestion around schools, walking school buses offer a practical travel option for those living near school. Many different types of walking school buses have been successful, and each school's WSB program may differ depending on the neighborhood, volunteers, traffic, and school policies.

The Florida Safe Routes to School Walking School Bus Program provides free training where adults learn about walking school buses, how to plan a route, and how to teach pedestrian safety behaviors. The Program also provides sample forms and promotional safety items for programs. The most up-to-date sample forms can be found on our website: <http://safety.hhp.ufl.edu>

## What is a Walking School Bus?

A walking school bus is a group of children walking to and/or from school with adult supervision. Some neighborhoods may already have informal walking school buses where children and parents walk to or from school at the same time. Walking school buses do not replace or change traditional school bus routes, but offer an alternative way for children to travel to and/or from school when bussing may not be available. Walking school buses can operate each day, but due to constraints such as after-school programs and parent/volunteer schedules, some may only operate in mornings, afternoons, or a limited number of times per week.

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## Types of Walking School Buses

Walking school buses can be formal or informal, and the structure is flexible so programs can be adapted for each school and community.

An informal walking school bus may simply involve parents walking neighborhood children to and/or from school without a designated route or specific schedule. The same parents may walk with the children each day, or parents may take turns depending on their schedules. Informal walking school buses don't require many resources and can largely be facilitated by parents on their own.

A formal walking school bus is more organized and has a specified route with designated pick-up or drop-off times similar to a traditional school bus. To provide predictability for families, formal walking school buses should follow a regular schedule. This type of walking school bus usually has a coordinator at each school (or active school administration), trained volunteers who lead the walking school buses, usually require parental consent, and keep record of children who participate.

Additionally, there are two general models of walking school buses that schools may implement. The first model is similar to a traditional school bus in that a bus leader starts at one location and picks up/drops off children at "bus stops" along the route to and/or from school. The second model uses a designated location off school grounds, such as a park, where children are dropped-off/picked-up. Some walking school buses using this model allow children to walk from the designated location to school with volunteers along the route, while some may wait for all the children to arrive and walk as a group. This model helps to reduce traffic congestion around the school and allows children who live further away to participate in a walking school bus. If the location has parking, parents may also park and walk with their children.

## Which type is the best for your school?

The type of the walking school bus each school may use depends on a number of factors such as:

- Interest among students and parents
- Number of parents/volunteers available
- Safety of environment and route to school
- Goals of the program (school-wide, specific neighborhood, frequency)
- Resources such as recruiting material, safety incentives items for students, training for volunteers, and resources to keep the program going
- School involvement

Regardless of the type of walking school bus chosen, all walking school buses must have a planned route to/from school, adequate adult supervision, and all participants practicing safer pedestrian behaviors.

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# Benefits

Walking school buses offer many benefits to children, parents, and the community.

## Social benefits

- Allows children to gain a sense of independence
- Social opportunities for children, parents and volunteers to make friends and get to know the neighborhood
- Parents and children can spend more time together

## Economic benefits

- Walking to school instead of driving reduces fuel costs
- Walking school buses may be faster than waiting in a long (up to an hour wait at some schools) line to pick-up/drop-off children
- With walking as a viable form of transportation, less money is spent on bussing

## Environmental benefits

- With less children being driven to school and traffic congestion decreasing around schools, the overall air quality can improve for staff and students

## Safety Benefits

- Walking in a group can increase safety and helps reduce the number of vehicles on the road
- Children are able to learn about pedestrian and other roadway safety through adult guidance and supervision
- With less vehicles coming to schools, the school grounds become safer
- Safety in numbers, reduced bullying with a leader

## Physical/Health Benefits

- Walking provides children with physical activity and helps prepare them for learning
- Children and adults can develop healthy habits and learn that walking is a viable transportation and physical activity option



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# Getting the Walking School Bus Rolling

Each walking school bus will be unique depending on the needs of the children, parents, school, and surrounding environment. Before starting a walking school bus, it is important to identify whether it is possible to have one at the school. This depends on things such as traffic and walking conditions, the distance children live from school, and interest in the program from both families and the schools. Starting a walking school bus can be difficult; it requires organization, careful planning, and commitment from volunteer leaders.

## Form the Team (committee of interested persons)

Key members of the walking school bus team are typically parents, school staff, safety professionals, and other interested community members. These individuals will help develop policies, map routes, recruit and train volunteers, and promote the walking school bus. Each school should have at least one walking school bus coordinator who oversees the walking school bus. While the coordinator could be a teacher or other school staff, a responsible parent volunteer is often more feasible.

The committee will decide what type of walking school bus is possible for their school and community (formal vs. informal, traditional vs. drop-off/pick-up location). Once this is decided, the committee can communicate with parents about the walking school bus plan in order to determine interest and potential volunteers.

## Determine interest and support (families, school, etc.)

Once it has been decided that a walking school bus is possible at your school, it is important to contact parents and potential partners to determine if there is enough interest and support for a walking school bus. An email or letter can be sent to parents asking whether they would be interested in having their child/children participate, as well as if they would be willing to volunteer. Depending on the model of school bus chosen, a pre-determined route may also be included. Additionally, parents can be recruited and informed of the walking school bus through school events, PTA meetings, and school newsletters.

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# Planning the Route

The number and location of interested families and volunteers will help determine the number and type of walking school bus routes as well as how often they will operate. Depending on the location(s) of those interested, each school may have multiple routes where children are “picked up” along the way, or it may be better to have a general drop-off/pick-up location like a park where children can meet and walk to school together.

**Regarding Walking School Buses, the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention recommend: one adult per three children (ages 4-6) and one adult per six children (ages 7-9).**

Using the location of interested families and volunteers, the walking school bus coordinator can begin planning potential routes. Regardless of the type of walking school bus chosen, the most important consideration is planning a safer route to/from school. Coordinators and the committee can use school district student transportation services, local knowledge, law enforcement agencies, and mapping programs (e.g., Google Maps, MapQuest, Map My Walk, etc.) to help create a route. While using mapping programs to create a route can be convenient, it is essential to actually walk the route to determine whether it is appropriate and safe for the walking school bus. Whenever possible, involve local law enforcement and/or traffic safety specialists to help plan a route or determine if a route is safe for a walking school bus.

In addition to using the Walkability Checklist (see page 23), assess your potential route by considering the following:

- Do you have room to walk? Are there good sidewalks or side paths?
- Is it easy to cross the street? Are there crossing guards? Crosswalks?
- How do drivers typically behave? Is traffic a problem?
- Does the environment feel safe?
- Is the meeting spot for the drop-off/pick-up location safe?

*Note: Walk the route without children while you are determining whether it is safe. If unsafe conditions exist, making it unsafe to walk, the walking school bus program should not begin until these issues have been addressed. However, if children are already walking/biking in these areas due to necessity, a walking school bus may help reduce risks by providing adult supervision.*

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## Determine the Schedule

Based on the interest and availability of children and volunteers, you can determine how frequently the walking school bus will operate (daily, weekly, monthly, etc.) and whether it will be mornings and/or afternoons. If the walking school bus is just beginning, it may be simpler to start with walking once per week with a themed day like “Walking Wednesdays.” Once you have decided on a route, double check for any potential problems, and walk with a child to help confirm the time needed to walk. If the walking school bus picks children up along the way to school, it is important to designate times children need to be at the “stop.” If the walking school bus uses the pick-up/drop-off general location, designate a time for the earliest and latest pick-up/drop-off for parents.

## Communication with Families and Recruiting Participants

Communication with families is an ongoing and important process. In order for children to participate, parents must fill out a registration form with emergency contact information as well as a liability/activity release form or permission slip. Included in the packet, parents should also receive information detailing:

- When the walking school bus will begin.
- Where and at what days/times the child will join the walking school bus.
- The route map
- The policy for late arrival
- What to do if their child will not attend on a given day
- Safer pedestrian behaviors to discuss with their child
- Behavioral expectations and rules while participating in the walking school bus
- School delay and inclement weather policy
- Contact information for the coordinator and route volunteers

After all the families have registered, schedule a meeting for parents, volunteers, and others involved to meet, discuss the program, and address any concerns they may have. A meeting will also provide an opportunity to discuss the benefits and goals of the program, as well as go over the policies, procedures, and behavioral expectations.

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# Training for Volunteers

Safety of all walking school bus participants is the most important consideration. Before participating, all volunteers should attend a documented training. Training topics may vary depending on the school and community, but at a minimum should include:

- Policies and Procedures
- Pedestrian safety education and skills
- Route information

In addition to in-class training, it is important for volunteers to learn route-specific considerations by walking the route.

Each volunteer should receive:

- Map marked with “stops” and times
- Roster or list of participants
- Contact information for parents, the school, other volunteers, and the coordinator
- Supplies such as safety vests and signs
- Policies, procedures, and necessary forms

## Plan a Kickoff Event

After participants are signed-up and volunteers trained, the walking school bus is ready to begin. If planning has occurred before or near the beginning of the school year, consider planning your kickoff event in October with International Walk to School Day. You can promote the kickoff through a newsletter, posters at school, announcement through PTA, school website, etc. It is important to constantly evaluate your walking school bus program for improvement and possibly allow for more participation.



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# Walking School Bus Safety

## Safe Route

Walking school bus routes need to be carefully planned to provide a safer route for all participants.

When evaluating your route, consider the following:

- Make sure the route has sidewalks or side paths whenever possible.
- Avoid high-speed, multi-lane, and high-traffic streets whenever possible.
- Minimize street crossings, and use cross walks, signalized intersections, and crossing guards whenever available.
- Avoid routes that have poor lighting, potential criminal activity, loose dogs, etc.

Use the Walkability Checklist (see page 23) for a more detailed evaluation of the route. Using the checklist will help identify potential problems with the route and possible solutions to make the route safer. It may also be helpful to involve law enforcement, traffic safety specialists, traffic engineers, and school transportation staff to help create and evaluate the route.

## Supervision

Regarding Walking School Buses, the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends:

- One adult per three children for children ages 4 to 6.
- One adult for six children for children ages 7 to 9.
- Fewer adults may be necessary for children ages 10 and older.

The type of walking school bus used will help determine the number of adult volunteers needed. For example, a free-flowing drop-off/pick-up location (e.g., park) with adults stationed along the route may require less volunteers than a walking school bus that has stops along a route. When using the type of walking school bus that makes “stops” along a route, it is preferred to have one volunteer in the front, and one in the back. This helps set the pace of the group and keep children from falling behind.

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# Walking School Bus Safety (continued)

## Pedestrian Safety and Skills

The walking school bus provides an opportunity for children to learn and practice safe pedestrian behaviors. Before the walking school bus begins, it is encouraged for children to be taught the rules of the walking school bus through the school, a meeting, and/or by their parents. Children who do not follow the rules and instructions of the walking school bus volunteers will be reported and may not be allowed to participate any further.

Some of the safety rules and pedestrian skills that should be covered are:

- Walk along the street safely
- Walk, do not run
- Use sidewalks and side paths when possible. If there are none, walk facing traffic and as far off the road as is safe
- Watch out for vehicles pulling out of/turning into driveways and side streets
- Pay attention and do not be distracted while walking (phones, gaming devices, reading, etc.)
- Cross the street safely
- Look left-right-left and continue looking while crossing the street
- Walk, don't run while crossing the street
- Use signalized intersections, crosswalks, and/or crossing guards when possible
- Obey traffic signs and signals
- If you must cross midblock, stop at the curb, wait until no traffic is near, look left-right-left and continue looking while crossing
- Be aware of visual barriers (parked cars, trees, fences, etc.) that may block your view. It is important to stop at the edge to see around visual barrier before scanning and beginning the cross
- Failing to follow the instructions of the adult volunteer and horseplay while walking will not be tolerated



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## Bicycle Trains

A bicycle train is a group of children bicycling to school with adult supervision. While a bicycle train is similar to a walking school bus, it requires different considerations and is usually best suited for older elementary and middle school-aged children. Just like walking school buses, bicycle trains can be formal or informal, and can operate monthly, weekly, or more often. They can use a traditional model where children are picked up along the way, or they can use the drop-off/pick-up location design. One advantage of a bicycle train is that it allows children who live too far to walk the option to participate.



Safely riding a bicycle requires knowledge of road rules and bicycling skills, and all participants should have practice and training before joining a bicycle train program. Children can receive training from the bicycle train leaders, a community bicycle safety event (bike rodeo, skills clinic, etc.), and/or from a school-based bicycle education program. Since riding a bicycle involves more considerations while going to/from school, it is generally recommended to have more supervision with one adult for every three to six children. It's a good idea to have two leaders; one at the front and a sweeper for the end of the line.

Similar to walking school buses, bicycle train programs must use careful consideration when planning the route to/from school. Bicycle trains may use a combination of sidewalks, shared-use paths, bike lanes, and roadways depending on which is the best choice for that route. Wherever the bicycle train operates, it is best to choose a route with minimal traffic and plenty of space for the riders to ride single file.

## Things to consider:

- All riders (including adults) must wear a helmet. Florida law requires all riders under 16 years of age to wear an approved, properly fitted and securely fastened bicycle helmet.
- Riders must ride single file, leaving space between each rider.
- Riders must use hand signals (slowing, stopping, left turns, right turns).
- Riders must ride on the right side of the road (going with traffic).
- At large intersections, riders must get off the bicycle and walk it across.
- Riders should wear a brightly colored and/or reflective vest (can be provided by bicycle train leader).
- Sidewalk vs. roadway routes should be determined based on each route and safety. Some sidewalks are not conducive for bicycle riding.

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# Sample Policies and Procedures

The walking school bus can be a great way for children to get to/from school, increase physical activity, and learn safe pedestrian behaviors and skills. When planning the walking school bus, it is important to consider issues that may arise and develop documented policies and procedures to address the issues.

Some examples of issues that may arise are:

- What should a volunteer do if they cannot make it, or they need a substitute?
- What should a parent do if the child can't participate on any given day?
- Will the walking school bus operate in bad weather?
- How long will the walking school bus wait for a late child?
- How do volunteers handle children who do not listen or have behavioral problems?

It is important to have these policies and procedures documented and shared with all participants (parents, volunteers, school officials, etc.). Below are some sample policies.

## Volunteer policy

All volunteers must complete the Volunteer Application, pass a background check, and go through the Walking School Bus training. Volunteers will be given contact information for the parents, school, and coordinator as well as relevant forms (attendance, incident, etc.) and policies/rules to carry during the route.

Additionally, volunteers should have a communication device (phone, walkie-talkie), route map, bright and/or reflective vests, and any other equipment agreed on.

## Tracking Policy

Volunteers will keep track of children that participate each day using the Student Attendance Form (see sample forms on website). The completed attendance form can be turned in to the school and/or coordinator each day, week, or any other approved interval. This could also be used by the school to track for dismissal.

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## Late Policy

If a child is unable to walk to/from school, the parents should contact the volunteer leader. The volunteer(s) will note this on the attendance form. If a child fails to show up, and no notice was given, the walking school bus should wait 1-2 minutes before proceeding. When arriving to school, the volunteer or the coordinator should call the family to confirm the child did not walk that day.

## Absence

If a volunteer needs to cancel, if possible, they should give at least a 24-hour notice to an alternate leader and then contact the walking school bus coordinator if none available. The coordinator can then call the parents so they can set up alternative transportation. It is helpful to have back-up/substitute volunteers in case the normal volunteer(s) cannot make it. If you have back-up/substitute volunteers, they can be contacted first to assist so the walking school bus can operate as usual.

If a child is unable to participate on any given day, the parents should contact the volunteer leaders.

## Cancellation

There are a number of reasons why a walking school bus may be cancelled such as volunteers being unable to participate, inclement weather, unsafe conditions, etc.

In the event a walking school bus needs to be cancelled, the walking school bus coordinator must make the decision and inform the volunteers. Depending on the chain of command each walking school bus uses, the coordinator or volunteer(s) will then contact the parents. It is important to contact the parents as early as possible so they can find alternative transportation.



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## Sample Policies and Procedures (continued)

### Weather

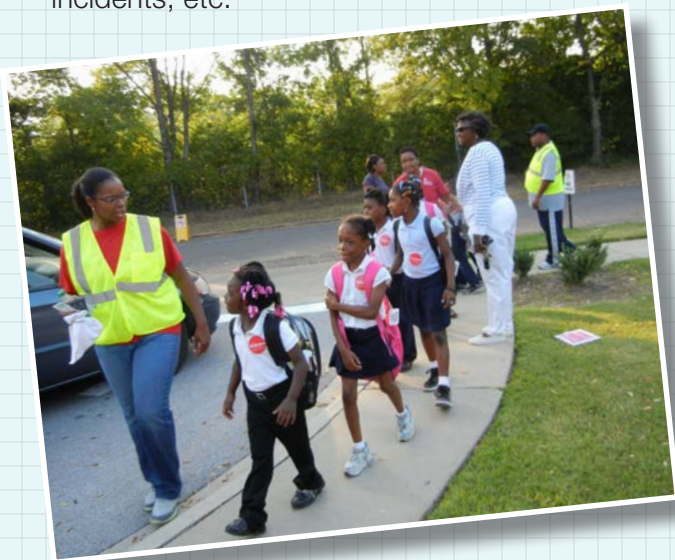
Each walking school bus can determine their own weather policies (heat, cold, rain, severe weather, etc.). Walking school buses that operate rain or shine are rarely cancelled and can provide consistency and predictability for participating families. Volunteers and children should dress appropriately for the weather and carry an umbrella or rain poncho if necessary. If the walking school bus will be cancelled due to rain or other weather types, it should be clearly stated to all participating parties.

For example, a walking school bus coordinator can cancel the walking school bus if:

- Temperature is below \_\_\_\_\_
- It is raining hard enough to wet the children's clothes.
- There is severe weather in the area.
- The coordinator will contact (phone, text, or other approved method) all volunteers before \_\_\_\_\_, and volunteers will contact the families before \_\_\_\_\_. If the walking school bus is a drop-off location off school grounds, the volunteer(s) can go to the location to notify any parents who may have not received the message.

### Communication (parents, volunteers, school)

It is essential for there to be clear, consistent communication between the coordinator, parents, and school for the walking school bus to operate effectively. Depending on the approved method, coordinators or volunteers may communicate with parents and schools about cancellations, incidents, etc.



All volunteers must have contact information as well as an approved method to communicate (phone, walkie-talkie, etc.). Some walking school buses use a phone-tree method, while other use text messages, emails, a website, or any combination of these. The main goal is to have a clearly defined and open channel of communication between parents and the walking school bus coordinator and volunteers.

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## Injuries

While walking school buses are intended to reduce risks while children walk to/from school by providing adult supervision, there are still risks associated with being a pedestrian. Risks include, but are not limited to, injury as a result of vehicle crashes, falling down, overexertion, effects of weather, and carelessness. In the event of a medical emergency, the walking school bus leader should contact 911 (or other appropriate Emergency Medical Service contact number) and notify the school. In the event of a medical emergency, the walking school bus leader should contact 911 (or other appropriate Emergency Medical Service contact number) and notify the school and Walking School Bus Coordinator.

If a child is injured while participating in the walking school bus, the leader may administer care for minor scrapes or cuts using a first aid kit. For non-emergency injuries, more severe than minor scrapes and cuts, the child should be taken to the school nurse. Regardless of the type of injury, an injury report form must be completed and given to the Walking School Bus coordinator and the school.

## Behavioral Issues

For their safety, students must follow all instructions given by their Walking School Bus leader and other adult volunteers. Students who do not follow instructions or the rules (e.g., no running, pedestrian laws, where to stop or cross, etc.) will be reported and may no longer be able to participate in the Walking School Bus program. To document any misbehavior, the Walking School Bus leader should fill out an incident report form and give to the Walking School Bus coordinator and the school. Additionally, parents should be notified of this misbehavior since any future incidents may result in suspension from the program.



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# Common Questions and Concerns about the Walking School Bus

## **How flexible is participating in the Walking School Bus?**

One benefit of the Walking School Bus program is that it can be a flexible transportation option for children. Not every child can participate each time due to things such as appointments, after-school activities, and unforeseen instances like waking up late, being ill, etc. It is best to confirm which days/times the child can participate when registering them for the walking school bus program, but communication is key when there are any changes in the child's participation. If there is an emergency, or a child cannot participate on any given day, the parent should contact the walking school bus coordinator and school to note these changes as early as possible.

## **How safe is the route to school?**

Each route is developed by considering factors such as traffic, number of street crossings, vehicle speed, neighborhood safety, etc. Children will be supervised by adult volunteers who have received training regarding policies, procedures, and pedestrian safety. While participating, children will also be taught to practice pedestrian safety skills. Some children may be walking to school already, so having a supervised walking school bus is intended to increase safety. For parents who are concerned about safety, it is recommended that they participate and walk with the children to gain a better understanding of the program.

## **Can my child participate if we live too far to walk to school?**

Depending on the walking school bus(es) your school uses, children who live far from school can still participate. If the walking school bus is using the drop-off/pick-up location method, parents can drop off their children to participate regardless of how far away they live. If the walking school bus is more like a traditional bus that picks children up at "stops," the parents may be able to drop their child off at an approved, secure drop point depending on the policy.



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### **Can my child participate, even if I am not able to be a walking school bus volunteer?**

Not all parents can participate, but the more parent volunteers, the more sustainable a program may be. If you are unable to walk, your child will be supervised by other school district-approved, adult volunteers. Walking with your child on occasion is welcomed, but if you would like to participate regularly, it is best to be a school district-approved volunteer.

### **What if my child is ill or the weather is bad?**

If your child is ill or unable to participate for any reason, contact the walking school bus coordinator and/or leader depending on the policy. Some walking school buses operate rain or shine, but this is up to each program. Children should dress appropriately for the season and carry a poncho or umbrella just in case. If the weather is severe (too cold, heavy rain, lightning, etc.), the walking school bus may be cancelled.

### **What happens if a walking school bus leader is unable to make it?**

Depending on how early the leader knows they will not be able to make it, a substitute/back-up leader may be available to lead the walking school bus as scheduled. If the leader needs to cancel last minute, and no substitute leader is available, they will contact the coordinator who will notify the families so alternative plans can be made. In some cases, the leader may contact the families directly. This is another reason how more volunteers participating can help sustain a program and keep it going if one volunteer is unable to make it.

### **What if my child has a heavy backpack or needs to carry other large objects (books, projects, musical instruments, etc.)?**

Since children must often carry heavy backpacks and other objects, many walking school buses use a wagon or cart to help transport these items.



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# Keeping the Walking School Bus Rolling

- This bus runs off enthusiasm rather than gas
- Hold special events or theme days
- Reward frequent walkers with small incentives (charms, stickers, etc.)
- Invite local celebrities to walk
- Communicate with other walking school buses to share experiences
- Keep the routes safe and up to date
- Conduct regular walks to identify areas for improvement
- Recognize volunteers with certificates or awards
- Sponsor a “thank you” breakfast or luncheon for walking school bus volunteers

## Make a Walking School Bus

A fun activity is to transform a garden cart into a Walking School Bus. Garden carts can be purchased at any hardware store or online. Use large pieces of cardboard to make the shape of a school bus and glue it to your garden cart. (A refrigerator box works well.) The garden cart is great to take on the walk. It draws attention to the walking school bus, and the younger students can put their heavy backpacks in the cart during the walk. It is also a good place to store safety and incentive items between walks.



## The Golden Shoe Award

Kids and parents love contests with a prize. With some spray paint and an old running shoe you can get kids excited about walking to school! Keep track of how many students walk from each classroom and pass the “golden shoe” around. Try a school-wide contest or even get a nearby school to compete for the shoe. Make sure you use pedometers to track your steps. Set goals like The 25/50/100 Mile Club, Marathon Club, etc. to encourage participation.

## Give Your Walk a Catchy Theme

- Marvelous Moving Mondays
- Talk and Trek Tuesdays
- Walking Wednesdays
- Thoughtful / Thrilling / Theatrical Thursdays
- Finally Fridays / Fuel Free Fridays / Fabulous Fitness Fridays

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## Dress up on Special Occasions

- Hat day, Sneaker day, School colors day, Sports team day
- Rainy weather? Have a Rubber Boot Parade or an Umbrella Train.

## Play Games

- Alphabet Walk: the first child finds something on the walk that starts with an A, the second looks for something that starts with a B and so on
- Nature Day – appreciate, discuss aspects of nature

## Raise the Profile of Your Bus

- Create a mascot as your hero
- Invite the mayor, the principal, a veteran, or a local celebrity to your walk
- Highlight special stories about the WSB in your school newsletter, on the school website or in the local paper

## Thank Your Bus Drivers & Administrative Staff

- Acknowledge your volunteers with certificates or awards such as “Best WSB Caboose” or “Most Energetic Walker”
- Thank the schools potentially certificates that they can display
- Thank key administration at schools also



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## How walkable is your community?

### Take a walk with a child and decide for yourselves.

Everyone benefits from walking. These benefits include: improved fitness, cleaner air, reduced risks of certain health problems, and a greater sense of community. But walking needs to be safe and easy. Take a walk with your child and use this checklist to decide if your neighborhood is a friendly place to walk. Take heart if you find problems, there are ways you can make things better.

### Getting started:

First, you'll need to pick a place to walk, like the route to school, a friend's house or just somewhere fun to go. The second step involves the checklist. Read over the checklist before you go, and as you walk, note the locations of things you would like to change. At the end of your walk, give each question a rating. Then add up the numbers to see how you rated your walk overall. After you've rated your walk and identified any problem areas, the next step is to figure out what you can do to improve your community's score. You'll find both immediate answers and long-term solutions under "Improving Your Community's Score..."

### Take a walk and use this checklist to rate your neighborhood's walkability.

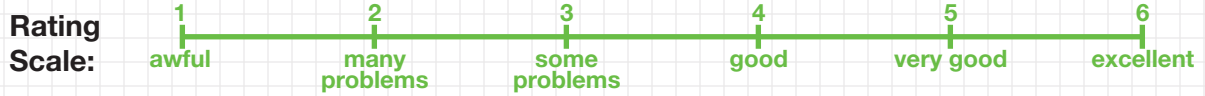


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# Walkability Checklist

Location of Walk: \_\_\_\_\_



## 1. Did you have room to walk?

- Yes  Some problems:
- Sidewalks or paths started and stopped
  - Sidewalks were broken or cracked
  - Sidewalks were blocked with poles, signs, shrubbery, dumpsters, etc.
  - No sidewalks, paths, or shoulders
  - Too much traffic
  - Something else \_\_\_\_\_

Rating: (circle one) Locations of problems:  
 1 2 3 4 5 \_\_\_\_\_

## 4. Was it easy to follow safety rules? Could you and your child...

- Yes  No
- Cross at crosswalks or where you could see and be seen by drivers?
  - Stop and look left, right and then left again before crossing streets?
  - Walk on sidewalks or shoulders facing traffic where there were no sidewalks?
  - Cross with the light?

Rating: (circle one) Locations of problems:  
 1 2 3 4 5 \_\_\_\_\_

## 2. Was it easy to cross streets?

- Yes  Some problems:
- Road was too wide
  - Traffic signals made us wait too long or did not give us enough time to cross
  - Needed striped crosswalks or traffic signals
  - Parked cars blocked our view of traffic
  - Trees or plants blocked our view of traffic
  - Needed curb ramps or ramps needed repair
  - Something else \_\_\_\_\_

Rating: (circle one) Locations of problems:  
 1 2 3 4 5 \_\_\_\_\_

## 5. Was your walk pleasant?

- Yes  Some problems:
- Needed more grass, flowers, or trees
  - Scary dogs
  - Scary people
  - Not well lighted
  - Dirty, lots of litter or trash
  - Dirty air due to automobile exhaust
  - Something else \_\_\_\_\_

Rating: (circle one) Locations of problems:  
 1 2 3 4 5 \_\_\_\_\_

## 3. Did drivers behave well?

- Yes  Some problems: Drivers ...
- Backed out of driveways without looking
  - Did not yield to people crossing the street
  - Turned into people crossing the street
  - Drove too fast
  - Sped up to make it through traffic lights or drove through traffic lights?
  - Something else \_\_\_\_\_

Rating: (circle one) Locations of problems:  
 1 2 3 4 5 \_\_\_\_\_

## How does your neighborhood stack up? Add up your ratings and decide.

- 1. \_\_\_\_\_ **26-30** Celebrate! You have a great neighborhood for walking.
- 2. \_\_\_\_\_ **21-25** Celebrate a little. Your neighborhood is pretty good.
- 3. \_\_\_\_\_ **16-20** Okay, but it needs work.
- 4. \_\_\_\_\_ **11-15** It needs lots of work. You deserve better than that.
- 5-10** It's a disaster for walking!

Total: \_\_\_\_\_

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# Improving your community's score

## 1. Did you have room to walk?

Sidewalks or paths started and stopped  
Sidewalks broken or cracked  
Sidewalks blocked  
No sidewalks, paths or shoulders  
Too much traffic

### What you and your child can do immediately

- pick another route for now
- tell local traffic engineering or public works department about specific problems and provide a copy of the checklist

### What you and your community can do with more time

- speak up at board meetings
- write or petition city for walkways and gather neighborhood signatures
- make media aware of problem
- work with a local transportation engineer

## 2. Was it easy to cross streets?

Road too wide  
Traffic signals made us wait too long or did not give us enough time to cross  
Crosswalks/traffic signals needed  
View of traffic blocked by parked cars, trees, or plants  
Needed curb ramps or ramps needed repair

- pick another route for now
- share problems and checklist with local traffic engineering or public works department
- trim your trees or bushes that block the street and ask your neighbors to do the same
- leave nice notes on problem cars asking owners not to park there

- push for crosswalks/signals/ parking changes/ curb ramps at city meetings
- report to traffic engineer where parked cars are safety hazards
- report illegally parked cars to the police
- request that the public works department trim trees or plants
- make media aware of problem

## 3. Did drivers behave well?

Backed without looking  
Did not yield  
Turned into walkers  
Drove too fast  
Sped up to make traffic lights or drove through red lights

- pick another route for now
- set an example: slow down and be considerate of others
- encourage your neighbors to do the same
- report unsafe driving to the police

- petition for more enforcement
- request protected turns
- ask city planners and traffic engineers for traffic calming ideas
- ask schools about getting crossing guards at key locations
- organize a neighborhood speed watch program

## 4. Could you follow safety rules?

Cross at crosswalks or where you could see and be seen  
Stop and look left, right, left before crossing  
Walk on sidewalks or shoulders facing traffic  
Cross with the light

- educate yourself and your child about safe walking
- organize parents in your neighborhood to walk children to school

- encourage schools to teach walking safely
- help schools start safe walking programs
- encourage corporate support for flex schedules so parents can walk children to school

## 5. Was your walk pleasant?

Needs grass, flowers, trees  
Scary dogs  
Scary people  
Not well lit  
Dirty, litter  
Lots of traffic

- point out areas to avoid to your child; agree on safe routes
- ask neighbors to keep dogs leashed or fenced
- report scary dogs to the animal control department
- report scary people to the police
- report lighting needs to the police or appropriate public works department
- take a walk with a trash bag
- plant trees, flowers in your yard
- select alternative route with less traffic

- request increased police enforcement
- start a crime watch program in your neighborhood
- organize a community clean-up day
- sponsor a neighborhood beautification or tree-planting day
- begin an adopt-a-street program
- initiate support to provide routes with less traffic to schools in your community (reduced traffic during am and pm school commute times)

## A Quick Health Check

Could not go as far or as fast as we wanted  
Were tired, short of breath or had sore feet or muscles  
Was the sun really hot?  
Was it hot and hazy?

- start with short walks and work up to 30 minutes of walking most days
- invite a friend or child along
- walk along shaded routes where possible
- use sunscreen of SPF 15 or higher, wear a hat and sunglasses
- try not to walk during the hottest time of day

- get media to do a story about the health benefits of walking
- call parks and recreation department about community walks
- encourage corporate support for employee walking programs
- plant shade trees along routes
- have a sun safety seminar for kids
- have kids learn about unhealthy ozone days and the Air Quality Index (AQI)

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## Need some guidance? These resources might help...

### Walking Information

#### **Pedestrian and Bicycle Information Center (PBIC)**

UNC Highway Safety Research Center, Chapel Hill, NC

[www.pedbikeinfo.org](http://www.pedbikeinfo.org)

[www.walkinginfo.org](http://www.walkinginfo.org)

#### **National Center for Safe Routes to School**, Chapel Hill, NC

[www.saferoutesinfo.org](http://www.saferoutesinfo.org)

#### **For More Information about Who Can Help Address Community Problems**

[www.walkinginfo.org/problems/help.cfm](http://www.walkinginfo.org/problems/help.cfm)

#### **State Bicycle & Pedestrian Coordinators**

<http://www.walkinginfo.org/assistance/contacts.cfm>

### Federal Policy, Guidance and Funding Sources for Walking Facilities

#### **Federal Highway Administration Bicycle and Pedestrian Program**

Office of Natural and Human Environment, Washington, DC

[www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/bikeped/index.htm](http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/bikeped/index.htm)

### Pedestrian Safety

#### **Federal Highway Administration**

Pedestrian and Bicycle Safety Team Office Of Safety, Washington, DC

[http://safety.fhwa.dot.gov/ped\\_bike/](http://safety.fhwa.dot.gov/ped_bike/)

#### **National Highway Traffic Safety Administration**

Traffic Safety Programs, Washington, DC

[www.nhtsa.dot.gov/people/injury/pedbimot/pedSAFE](http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/people/injury/pedbimot/pedSAFE)

### Sidewalk Accessibility Information

**US Access Board**, Washington, DC

Phone: (800) 872-2253; (800) 993-2822 (TTY)

[www.access-board.gov](http://www.access-board.gov)



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# Resources

## **Florida Safe Routes to School Walking School Bus Project – Program info and sample forms**

<http://safety.hhp.ufl.edu>

## **Florida's Pedestrian and Bicycling Safety Resource Center**

<http://www.pedbikesrc.ce.ufl.edu/pedbike/default.asp>

## **National Center for Safe Routes to School**

<http://saferoutesinfo.org>

## **Pedestrian and Bicycle Information Center**

<http://www.pedbikeinfo.org/>

## **Safe Routes to School National Partnership**

<http://saferoutespartnership.org/>

## **Safe Routes to School Walking School Bus Information**

[http://guide.saferoutesinfo.org/walking\\_school\\_bus/](http://guide.saferoutesinfo.org/walking_school_bus/)

## **Safe Routes to School Walking School Bus Guide**

[http://guide.saferoutesinfo.org/walking\\_school\\_bus/pdf/wsb\\_guide.pdf](http://guide.saferoutesinfo.org/walking_school_bus/pdf/wsb_guide.pdf)

## **Safe Routes to School Guide: Teaching Children to Walk Safely**

[http://guide.saferoutesinfo.org/graduated\\_walking/pdf/TeachingChildrenToWalkSafely.pdf](http://guide.saferoutesinfo.org/graduated_walking/pdf/TeachingChildrenToWalkSafely.pdf)

## **Safe Routes to School Walkability Checklist – How walkable is your community?**

<http://www.saferoutesinfo.org/sites/default/files/walkabilitychecklist.pdf>

## **Walk/Bike to School Day**

<http://www.walkbiketoschool.org/>

<http://www.iwalktoschool.org/>

## **Walking School Bus Training Modules**

[http://apps.saferoutesinfo.org/training/walking\\_school\\_bus/modules.cfm](http://apps.saferoutesinfo.org/training/walking_school_bus/modules.cfm)

## **Incentives Program**

[www.Fitnessfinders.com](http://www.Fitnessfinders.com)

<http://www.fitnessfinders.net/SearchResults.asp?Search=walking+school+bus&Submit=Search>

<http://www.fitnessfinders.net/SearchResults.asp?Search=chains&Submit=Search>

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**Florida Safe Routes to School  
Walking School Bus Program**

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