

# Safe Routes to School Guide

## Encouragement



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# Overview

**E**ncouragement strategies are about having fun; they generate excitement and interest in walking and bicycling. Special events, mileage clubs, contests and ongoing activities all provide ways for parents and children to discover, or rediscover, that walking and bicycling are do-able and a lot of fun.

Encouragement is one of the complementary strategies that Safe Routes to School (SRTS) programs use to increase the number of children who walk and bicycle to school safely. In particular, encouragement and education strategies are closely intertwined, working together to promote walking and bicycling by rewarding participation and educating children and adults about safety and the benefits of bicycling and walking.

Encouragement activities also play an important role moving the overall SRTS program forward because they build interest and enthusiasm, which can buoy support for changes that might require more time and resources, such as constructing a new sidewalk.

In brief, encouragement activities:

- Can be quick and easy to start.
- Can be done with little funding.
- Can be organized by parents, students, teachers or community volunteers.
- Focus on fun and enjoyment.
- Jumpstart a community's interest in walking and bicycling.
- Show quick success and generate enthusiasm for other strategies that may require a greater investment of time and resources.
- Can foster safe walking, bicycling and physical activity behaviors that will be useful throughout children's lives.
- Offer teachable moments to reinforce safe walking and bicycling behaviors.

There are many encouragement strategies that will be described in this chapter, such as Walk to School Days, when the whole school is invited to take one day off

from their usual routine to join in the parade of children walking and bicycling to school. Walking school buses and bicycle trains are organized efforts that group children with adults for safety and for fun while contests help to encourage students to walk or bicycle by offering rewards and recognition.

The ideas described in this chapter are just a sample of what a community can create. Divided into three categories, each category in this chapter includes a description, a summary of how to conduct the activity and examples of how real-life communities are “putting it into practice.”



Families walking to Saluda School in Saluda, North Carolina.



Walking to Putnam Heights Elementary School in Eau Claire, Wisconsin.

## Planning Encouragement Efforts That Fit the Community

Answering the following questions can help a community plan encouragement activities that are the right size and reach the intended audience. An assessment of school walking routes along with surveys or informal discussions with parents, school personnel and students are ways to gather this information.

- **Is it safe to walk or bicycle to school?**

If conditions are safe for all, encouragement strategies can begin immediately. At any given school there may be one or more routes that are safe for walking and bicycling, while other routes may need improvements. Families that live along safe routes should be encouraged to use them while making safety improvements to the unsafe routes. At the same time, walking activities can be held on school grounds in areas that have unsafe routes to school. Holding a walk before, during or after the school day that takes children around the school campus can help get them excited about more walking and ready to use safe routes once they are in place.

- **Are there children who live near enough to school to walk or bicycle but do not currently do so? If yes, why are they not walking or bicycling?**

Encouragement strategies can help address the barriers. For example, would parents allow their children to walk or bicycle if they were in groups or accompanied by adults?

- **Do many children live too far from school to walk or bicycle?**

Most encouragement strategies can include children that live beyond walking and bicycling distance, such as by establishing park and walk locations so that families can walk part of the trip to school.

- **What is the degree of interest and volunteer involvement?**

This will determine the initial size of the program. Should activities start small or is there enough interest, resources, and staff or volunteers to kick off a larger effort?

The encouragement activities that are chosen will be influenced by the number of children that are able to walk and bicycle from home and whether there is a desire to include children who live too far or have unsafe routes. For every activity a plan to measure the impact should be created so that volunteers and partners can find out how their work is making a difference.

# Special Events

A special event is usually a one-day activity to celebrate walking and bicycling to school. Most often, families walk or bicycle from home or from a group meeting area. Signs, balloons and banners can be used to create an air of excitement and celebration. When they arrive at the school, participants might be greeted by the school principal or a school mascot and receive snacks and small gifts like stickers. A press conference, songs, flag salute or other group activity round out the event.

Volunteers help plan the event, walk with children and give out items at the school. These events offer the added benefits of bringing visibility to Safe Routes to School (SRTS) and related issues as well as educating families and the broader community about the benefits and joy of walking and bicycling safely to school. They may be held once a year, such as International Walk to School Day, or several times during the year.



Justin Booth

International Walk to School Day at Early Childhood Center 61, Buffalo, New York.



Jewel Johnson

International Walk to School Day at Edgecombe Elementary, Baltimore, Maryland.

## Strategy: Special Event

### Description

- Specially designated day when families walk or bicycle to school.
- May include a group walk from a designated meeting point, healthy snacks, giveaways for children, an assembly, media coverage and/or the use of walkability and bikeability checklists.

### Advantages

- Less labor intensive than ongoing activities.
- Opportunity to engage broader community, including politicians and other community leaders, and bring visibility for Safe Routes to School.
- Opportunity to gain media coverage.

### Considerations

- Requires providing a route, or routes, that will be safe for all participants which may not be a route from their homes.
- Limited ability to promote daily walking to school.

### Quick steps for a special event

1. Find partners including parents, school personnel, law enforcement and community members.
2. Plan the celebration, including a safe route and any needed volunteers and incentives.
3. For International Walk to School events in the United States, register at [www.walktoschool.org/register](http://www.walktoschool.org/register).
4. Promote the event.
5. Have fun.

See [www.walktoschool.org/getstarted/index.cfm](http://www.walktoschool.org/getstarted/index.cfm) for tools, activities and detailed information.

## International Walk to School Events

International Walk to School Day, held in October each year, joins children and adults from around the world to celebrate walking and bicycling to school.

This event can be a fun way to kick off an SRTS program. In fact, many participating communities use the event to work towards creating safe environments that support walking and bicycling every day. A survey of U.S. Walk to School Coordinators in 2002 found that 43 percent were working towards making permanent changes in conjunction with their event, and that percentage is on the rise.<sup>1, 2</sup> In 2005, over one-half of registered events were part of ongoing activities at the school to promote bicycling and walking.<sup>3</sup>

Since it began in the United States in 1997, participation, both within the United States and in other countries, has grown every year. The event's popularity led to the establishment of October as International Walk to School Month, giving communities the flexibility to celebrate on a single day, week or throughout the month. Information about how to register for and plan a local event can be found at [www.walktoschool.org](http://www.walktoschool.org). Also see the 2005 International Walk to School Report at [www.walktoschool.org/resources/reports.cfm](http://www.walktoschool.org/resources/reports.cfm).



Jen Cole



Anne Le Reverend

Walking to Vallecito School in San Rafael, California.

## Walkability and Bikeability Checklists

Walkability and bikeability checklists are designed for use by parents, children, school officials and other community members to assess the safety conditions of the route to school. They are often used during special events to get children and adults to think about what is good and what needs to be improved along the school route. Results are summarized and shared with decision makers and media to help gain support for needed improvements. Easy to use tools like the Walkability and Bikeability checklists are good ways for the public to identify the issues that need to be addressed. See the Engineering chapter for information about other assessment tools.

Download the Walkability Checklist at [www.walkinginfo.org/walkingchecklist.cfm](http://www.walkinginfo.org/walkingchecklist.cfm) and the Bikeability Checklist at [www.bicyclinginfo.org/cps/checklist.cfm](http://www.bicyclinginfo.org/cps/checklist.cfm).

### Walkability Checklist

#### How walkable is your community?

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

Everyone benefits from walking. These benefits include improved fitness, clean air, reduced risks of certain health problems, and a greater sense of community. The walking route 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 home 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 rate 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 walk. You'll find both immediate actions and long-term solutions under "Improving Your Community's Walk..." on the third page.



## Putting It Into Practice: International Walk to School Day

Hinsdale Consolidated School District, Hinsdale, IL

A few years ago, Hinsdale parents, school administration and community leaders were concerned about the increasing traffic congestion and the decreasing number of walkers around their seven neighborhood schools. Through collaboration with schools, villages and other governing bodies, their first Walk to School event was held.

The first year's celebration was promoted with the slogans, "Feel the Power of the Fourth" and "May the Fourth be With You", and signs with Yoda from Star Wars on them. The Star Wars theme was used to remind participants of the October 4th Walk to School date. As part of the day, participants were asked to complete walkability checklists in order to learn more about safety concerns along walk routes. Students and their families along with caregivers, law enforcement officers, firefighters, local, state and federal political leaders, teachers and staff, all wearing walk to school buttons, arrived at school on foot. A short flag pole ceremony and recognition of dignitaries and supporters wrapped up the event.

The Walk to School celebration described here as well as those held in subsequent years brought visibility to pedestrian safety concerns, which helped build support for a planned network of sidewalks, with the focus on providing walkways to schools, parks, and other locations generating pedestrian traffic. Other school based activities, including classroom lessons, mileage clubs and incentives have been initiated to meet the interest in promoting walking.<sup>4</sup>

### Other Special Events

Many communities choose to have more than one Walk to School Day during the year, and some expand their event to include bicyclists, parents and drivers. "Walk and Roll to School Day" is a popular theme for many, but some places choose a separate day to celebrate bicycling including Earth Day, Trail Day, Car Free Day, Bicycle-to-Work Day and Bike Month. Traffic Safety Day, another event theme, provides an opportunity to include education for drivers. See the Education chapter for more information on safety days.



Mesa, Arizona

## Putting It Into Practice: Cycle Saturation Project

St John's Catholic Primary School, Rotherhithe, United Kingdom

St. John's Primary School has taken up bicycling with great enthusiasm as a result of a £20,000 (approximately \$34,000) local project funded by Rotherhithe Community Council. The funds have been used for bicycle training, bicycle events and bicycle racks to encourage bicycling to school as an alternative to riding in a motor vehicle.

Southwark Cyclists ([www.southwarkcyclists.org.uk](http://www.southwarkcyclists.org.uk)), the project coordinators, selected St. John's school because of the principal's support and the students' enthusiasm, 84 percent of whom expressed a desire to bicycle to school. The key reason for the school's involvement was concerns about the traffic congestion during pick-up and drop-off times.

The Cycle Saturation project, managed on a day-to-day basis by SEA/RENUE ([www.sustainable-energy.org.uk](http://www.sustainable-energy.org.uk)), built on the students' desires to bicycle to school by providing bicycle training for all interested students. Cycle Training UK ([www.cycletraining.co.uk](http://www.cycletraining.co.uk)) provided the instructors to train students, parents and teachers and conducted maintenance workshops to ensure that the students' bicycles were well-maintained. The project also added new bicycle racks because the existing ones were full every day.

The school also planned a series of events to complement the training, beginning in April with an event that included bicycle games. In June, all children and adults who bicycled that month were invited to a Bicycle Breakfast. The events were capped by a Bike Week bicycling celebration. With the help of Southwark Cyclists, these events were held jointly with a neighboring school where bicycling was already very popular. For the following school year, a bicycle club was planned in order to build on the momentum of the project and ensure that the bicycle racks stay full in the future.

## Putting It Into Practice: Monthly Walk and Roll to School Days

Mason Elementary, Duluth, GA

When the Safe Routes to School project started at suburban Mason Elementary School, just a handful of the 1,200 students walked to school and only one bicycled. So when the first "Walk and Roll to School Day" was planned, organizers weren't sure the event would be much of a success. Organizers reported that over 100 kids walked with the Walking School Bus, 50 joined the Bicycle Train, lots of parents came out and the enthusiasm for the now-monthly Walk and Roll to School Days hasn't let up since.

To keep it interesting, each monthly Walk and Roll event at Mason had a special theme. In November, with growing darkness, the theme was "Be Safe, Be Seen." In January it was "A Polar Bear Walk and Roll" to encourage walking and bicycling in cold weather. Children were greeted with hot chocolate and a giant painted polar bear. In February, the theme focused on healthy hearts; in March, kids were encouraged to "Be One Less Car." At the end of the school year, the theme was a retrospective of the year's Walk and Roll events including a picture album and a banner decorated with students' personal reflections on walking and bicycling to school. One fifth grader tearfully lamented moving on to middle school because she would miss these special days.

Organizers reported that the Walk and Roll events at Mason have planted the seeds for daily walking and bicycling. The new bicycle racks are often full, walking and bicycling has become "cool" to do, and the "coolest" kids try to hide their excitement on Walk and Roll Days. "What's the big deal?" they said, "We do this every day!"

# Mileage Clubs and Contests

Mileage clubs and contests encourage children either to begin walking and bicycling to school or to increase their current amount of physical activity by making it fun and rewarding. Generally children track the amount of miles they walk or bicycle and get a small gift or a chance to win a prize after a certain mileage goal is reached.

Mileage clubs and contests are usually designed in one of three ways:

1. On an individual basis where every child logs miles walked or bicycled and has a chance to win.
2. As a classroom competition where a classroom's collective miles are compared against other classes.
3. As a competition among schools.

Winners are rewarded with prizes including medals, certificates or trophies.

These activities are very flexible. Depending on the school, the competition aspect can be emphasized or not, and the rewards can be elaborate or simple. In rural areas or other places where the route to school is unsafe or difficult to walk or bicycle, the activity can be modified by providing credit for distance walked and bicycled at home, to and from a bus stop, or during the school day on campus.

Mileage clubs and contests usually involve incentives like prizes or small gifts. In order to be most effective, incentives need to be provided in concert with other strategies over a period of time, not just given once.<sup>5, 6, 7, 8</sup>



In Marin County, California, prizes were awarded for frequent walker/rider contest winners.



Students walking the track in Fayetteville, North Carolina.

## Strategy: Mileage Clubs or Contests

### Description

Children are rewarded for walking and bicycling, usually based on reaching certain distances or walking or bicycling a certain number of times.

### Advantages

- Can provide quick reinforcement for walking and bicycling.
- Children like incentives.
- Can include all students.
- Can include walking and bicycling beyond the trip to school.

### Considerations

- Needs a coordinator.
- Requires record-keeping.
- Should be age appropriate and simple in design.

### Quick steps to a mileage club or contest

1. Identify coordinator and (if necessary) obtain school's support.
2. Decide where children can accrue mileage (on the way to school, at home, on the school campus).
3. Create system for logging and tracking mileage or number of times walked/bicycled.
4. Decide on incentives.
5. Promote.
6. Kick off.
7. Recognize and reward participation.
8. Track participation.
9. Make changes as needed.

## Putting It Into Practice: "Passport to Health"

Lytchett Matravers Primary School, Dorset, England

In October 2004, Lytchett Matravers Primary School in Dorset, England, launched a walking incentive initiative called "Passport to Health." Involving more than 400 children, the initiative was designed to reduce traffic around the school and to improve the health and fitness of children and parents.

As part of the initiative, children are given a "passport" that is stamped each time they walk to and from school. The number of stamps received depends on the distance walked. The school produced a map of the local area on which every road was color-coded into zones, so that children who come to school by motor vehicle can be dropped off within a specific zone and still earn stamps for their passports. The school has also marked out a walking route around the playground, so children traveling to school by bus can participate by walking measured distances within the playground at certain times of the day. Children exchange the earned passport stamps for small prizes.

Since the initiative's introduction, organizers have measured an 18 percent reduction in motor vehicle use around the school, as well as a 16 percent increase in walking and bicycling rates. Children and a group of staff members are now responsible for managing the initiative on a daily basis. Lytchett Matravers is working with other schools in the area that want to develop similar passport schemes.



Robert Smith

Earning passport stamps at Lytchett Matravers Primary School in Dorset, England.

## Putting It Into Practice: "Go for Gold" Buckinghamshire, United Kingdom

"Go for Gold" is an informal walking initiative developed to encourage children to walk to school with the added benefits of helping to reduce traffic congestion and pollution and to promote healthier lifestyles.

Children who choose to register for the activity are issued a "passport" that is marked with a sticker for every walk to school. Organizers designated drop-off and parking areas so children who live farther away have the chance to walk at least part of the way. When a student walks to school ten times, he or she receives a colored star, and different colors are awarded for successive milestones, with gold the highest ranking. Incentives are awarded according to the number of stars a student has collected.

Go for Gold is simple and inexpensive, and schools participating in the initiative have seen a significant decrease in motor vehicle use. One school reduced motor vehicle use from 62 percent in 2000 to 26 percent in 2001 with 80 percent of children participating. The reduction has been maintained at 26 percent through 2003. The Go for Gold initiative has been replicated in other school districts in the UK. In 2002, the Go for Gold initiative received the International Walk to School Award for its impressive accomplishments.



## Putting It Into Practice: Frequent Walker/Rider Program Lincoln Elementary School, Elmhurst, IL

In an effort to increase physical activity and health awareness as well as to reduce traffic congestion, the Lincoln Elementary PTA developed a Frequent Walker/Rider Program in 2003 to encourage children to walk or bicycle to school on a regular basis. Walk to School Days are scheduled for the third Tuesday of each month and are published on the school calendar.

On each Walk to School Day, parent volunteers and teachers meet children at the four primary school corners to punch students' Frequent Walker/Rider Punchcards. As incentives for participation, walkers and bicycle riders receive small prizes, and the school holds a year-end event to recognize children who have participated on the majority of the Walk to School Days.

The Frequent Walker/Rider Program led to an increase in the number of walkers and bicycle riders on the Walk to School Days as well as on a daily basis. Lincoln Elementary has approximately 500 children who live within a mile and a half of the school, and overall participation in the warmer months was between 90 percent and 95 percent. In colder months, participation falls only slightly (to between 80 percent and 90 percent) on the scheduled days. The activities have become part of the school's culture, and Lincoln children look forward to participating each year.



## Putting It Into Practice: The IWALK Club Ontario, Canada

The IWALK Club was initiated in 2004 by Green Communities' Active & Safe Routes to School (ASRTS) in Ontario, Canada, as a strategy to encourage families to walk to school more regularly using the motivation of increasing daily physical activity. The Club makes walking and other forms of active travel fun by using incentives and rewards for students and by introducing in-school activities. The IWALK Club has several goals:

1. Reduce motor vehicle trips to the school.
2. Encourage walking and other active travel.
3. Reduce pollution and climate change emissions.
4. Promote healthier lifestyle choices for students and their families.



Schools register for the IWALK Club online and complete a short questionnaire which serves as a baseline for each school. Students are provided with an IWALK Club card and every time they walk to school or participate in a related in-school activity, like a kilometer club or walking club, they receive a stamp in their card. Every tenth stamp is a golden sneaker sticker. Five golden sneaker stickers equal 50 walks, upon which the student receives a certificate of achievement. Schools can add their own incentives, like an extra recess for class achievement or the awarding of a Golden Shoe Award.

Curriculum-linked classroom activity ideas are provided with the IWALK Club package along with a funky poster map of the world to encourage classes to "walk around the world" by walking to school or in school. All classroom resources are linked to the Ontario curriculum and cover several subject areas including science, math, geography, history, art, writing, music and physical education. The classroom resources cover the issues on the importance of daily physical activity; the impacts of air quality and climate change on human and environmental health; community design, land use planning and transportation; healthy, active bodies for healthy, active minds; and traffic safety and awareness.

Green Communities conducts a follow-up evaluation with each registered school and compares it to the baseline information. Schools that show a measurable difference in participation are entered into a drawing for three grand prizes, awarded each year during International Walk to School Week.

To learn more about this program, download resources and view the registration form, visit the ASRTS program IWALK Club at <http://saferoutestoschool.ca/index.php?page=iwalkclub>.

## Putting It Into Practice: Snapshots From Several Communities

### Various Locations

There are many ways to design mileage clubs and contests. A few brief examples are provided here. Also see the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration Safe Routes to School Toolkit at [www.nhtsa.dot.gov/people/injury/pedimot/bike/Safe-Routes-2002](http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/people/injury/pedimot/bike/Safe-Routes-2002) and the Marin County Safe Routes to School site at <http://saferoutestoschools.org/events.html> for further detail and other ideas.

#### Collecting miles in Marin County

In Marin County, California, many activities motivate children to walk and bicycle to school. For example, Hall Middle School in Marin County developed the Golden Sneaker Award: a sneaker spray-painted gold and placed on a pedestal. Children keep track of each time they walk or bicycle to school and keep a classroom record. To include children who are unable to walk or bicycle to school, children are allowed to accrue miles on the weekend or during school recess. Each month the class with the most children walking and bicycling the greatest number of times receives the trophy and usually a celebration.



Proud students show off the Golden Sneaker Award at Hall Middle School in Larkspur, California.

Also in Marin County, children participate in "Frequent Rider Miles." Patterned after GO GERONIMO, an alternative transportation program in the San Geronimo Valley of Marin County, this activity rewards children who come to school walking, bicycling, by carpool or by bus by awarding points that are accrued and redeemed for prizes. This contest was successful in getting students to walk and bicycle on a regular basis.

#### Traveling across the land in Toronto

Tracking the miles walked and bicycled across land (and sometimes sea!) is another popular theme that offers added benefits such as promoting physical activity and integrating educational elements, such as geography, into the activity. Individual students, classes or schools track the distances they have walked or bicycled and add the miles together to travel across a map of their state, province, country or even a continent.

Students at Maurice Cody Public School in Toronto, Ontario, Canada, created their own Cross Canada Walking Tour. After crossing Canada, they crossed North America; by the end of the 2003 school year they had "walked" though Central America to the Panama Canal. Several other schools in Canada now use a map and classroom curriculum provided by Green Communities to track their progress and learn as they make their way across the country.

#### Tracking mileage

Several resources are available on the Internet to support a mileage tracking program.

- **Green Communities' Active & Safe Routes to School**  
Offers a variety of activities and resources for tracking walking and bicycling mileage.  
[www.saferoutestoschools.ca](http://www.saferoutestoschools.ca)
- **PE Central mileage log**  
[www.peclgit.org/logit.asp](http://www.peclgit.org/logit.asp)
- **America on the Move mileage tracking system**  
<http://aom.americaonthemove.org>
- **Go for Green "Walking Tour of Canada"**  
<http://asrts.goforgreen.ca>
- **Marin County Bicycle Coalition Walk and Bike Across America.**  
[www.saferoutestoschools.org/walk](http://www.saferoutestoschools.org/walk)

## Ongoing Activities

Ongoing walking and bicycling activities are defined here as activities that are held daily, weekly or several times per month throughout the school year. Walking school buses, bicycle trains, park and walk activities and routine on-campus walks all are ongoing encouragement activities. When planning, some schools choose more than one encouragement activity and include opportunities for children that cannot walk or bicycle the route to school from their home. See the end of this section for examples of how two schools created comprehensive, inclusive encouragement campaigns.

### Walking School Buses and Bicycle Trains

A walking school bus and bicycle train both consist of groups of students accompanied by adults that walk or bicycle a pre-planned route to school. Routes can originate from a particular neighborhood or, in order to include children who live too far to walk or bicycle, begin from a parking lot. They may operate daily, weekly or monthly. Often, they are started in order to address parents' concerns about traffic and personal safety while providing a chance for parents and children to socialize.

Walking school buses and bicycle trains can be loosely structured or highly organized. For example, walking buses or bicycle trains can be as simple as neighborhood families deciding to walk or bicycle together. More formal, organized walking school buses and bicycle have a coordinator who recruits volunteers and participants, creates a schedule and designs a walking route. While requiring more effort, more structured walking school buses and bicycle trains offer the opportunity to involve more children.



Students are excited about the walking school bus at the Morton Way Public School in Brampton, Ontario, Canada.



Metro Atlanta Safe Routes to School Program  
Students prepare to ride to B.B. Harris Elementary in Duluth, Georgia.

## Strategy: Walking School Bus or Bicycle Train

### Description

Group of children that walk or bicycle to school together accompanied by one or more adults.

### Advantages

- Can be loosely structured or highly organized (see “Quick steps” below).
- Can include a meeting point with a parking lot so children and parents who must drive can participate.

### Considerations

- Requires identifying appropriate routes.
- Requires parents to walk with children or use waivers to address liability concerns.
- More organized structure requires considerable planning.
- Bicycle train participants need to wear helmets.



A bicycle train in Mill Valley, California.

### Quick steps to a walking school bus or bicycle train

#### Loose, informal structure

1. Invite families who live nearby to walk or bicycle as a group.
2. Pick a route and take a test walk or ride.
3. Decide how often the group will travel together.
4. Start walking or bicycling.

#### Highly organized, more formal structure

1. Determine the amount of interest in a walking school bus or bicycle train. Contact potential participants and partners and identify a coordinator.
2. Identify the route(s).
3. Identify a sufficient number of adults to supervise walkers or bicyclists. (The Centers for Disease Control recommends one adult per three children for children ages 4 to 6 and one adult for six children for older elementary children ages 7 to 9.<sup>9</sup> For bicyclists, one adult per three to six children is advisable.)
4. Finalize logistical details including setting a time schedule, training volunteers and promoting participation.
5. Kick off the activity.
6. Track participation.
7. Make changes to the activity as needed.

See *The Walking School Bus: Combining Safety, Fun and the Walk to School* at [www.saferoutesinfo.org/guide/walking\\_school\\_bus/index.cfm](http://www.saferoutesinfo.org/guide/walking_school_bus/index.cfm) for more detailed guidance.

## Putting It Into Practice: Bike Trains at Mason Elementary

Duluth, GA

Planning their kick-off Walk and Roll to School Day, the Mason Safe Routes to School Team thought they'd include a bicycle train, but with only one student ever seen bicycling to school, they didn't actually expect more than a rider or two to pedal with the train that morning. To their great surprise, 45 children showed up with bicycles and helmets, eager to participate in Mason's first-ever bicycle train.

With that overwhelming start, the Mason bicycle train has become an integral part of the school's monthly "Walk and Roll to School Day" events. The train is staffed by volunteers from the local Gwinnett County Bicycle Users Group and a few Mason parents. The "engineer" leads the group, the "caboose" brings up the rear, and adults are interspersed between the children, with a typical ratio of one adult to four children. The train has two starting "stations" in the morning, and the two groups merge to form a large train that rides down the highly traveled road to the school. In the afternoon, the bicycle trains run back to their starting stations.

Prior to each monthly event, the Safe Routes Team sends each student home with a flier announcing the Walking School Bus and Bike Train schedule. The flier includes a permission slip, and students must return the permission slip signed by a parent in order to participate. This procedure helps clarify liability issues and assists in planning for the number of adults needed for the event. Children in kindergarten through second grade must have a parent accompany them. At the start of each ride, the train leaders are provided a list of participants.

Riders are asked to bring their own helmet and lock, but the bicycle train leaders always have extra helmets on hand. As the group gathers, the leaders distribute bright neon-green reflective safety vests, provided by the Georgia Department of Transportation. The vests provide high visibility for safety on the road and have become the signature of the Mason bike train.

A few years ago, bicycling to school was unheard of at Mason. The monthly well-supervised bicycle trains have shown families in the neighborhoods around the school that bicycling can be a transportation option and many have now incorporated bicycling into their own daily travel patterns.

## Putting It Into Practice: Walking School Bus

C.P. Smith Elementary School, Burlington, VT

C.P. Smith Elementary School's walking school bus has operated every Wednesday since March 2005 as part of a Safe Routes to School program.

While the neighborhood bordering the school has a fairly complete sidewalk system, some families were concerned about their children walking to school with the considerable traffic congestion along the route. In winter 2005, parents organized a meeting with other interested families to discuss their concerns and develop guidelines for a walking school bus. The group determined the bus's route, time of departure, meeting points and other details.

Now, every Wednesday morning the bus departs from a walk leader's house with a small group of children. For late arriving students, a closed garage door indicates that the bus has left the station. The group continues along a major roadway picking up children along the way. Some parents join in the walk while others escort their children to the stop and leave when the bus arrives. There is no written schedule, however, organizers plan to install signs along the route indicating stops and schedule.

Before the walking school bus began, approximately six children walked this route to school. Now on Walking Wednesdays there are between 25 and 40 children, and the traffic congestion along the route has all but disappeared.



Cold weather does not stop C.P. Smith's walking school bus.

## Putting It Into Practice: Structured Daily Walking School Bus

Natomas Park Elementary School, Sacramento, CA

At Natomas Park Elementary School in Sacramento, California, parents organize the walking school bus, which includes five routes based on where children live and a schedule with times for each stop. In order to participate, parents register their children ahead of time.

Walk leaders include parents and employees from a local business, which is a sponsor of the activity. Each volunteer must have a background check prior to participation. Training for volunteers, provided by the parent leader, includes first aid, CPR and pedestrian safety. While walking, volunteers wear vests and carry first aid kits.

To recognize the walkers' achievements, parent volunteers track the total number of miles walked during the school year and announce it at a year-end assembly. Walkers also receive T-shirts and certificates.

About 50 children participate and many more children are now seen walking to school. Organizers have recently expanded the activity to include remote sites where parents can drop off their children and adult volunteers walk with the children the rest of the way to school.



A walking school bus at Natomas Park Elementary School.

## Putting It Into Practice: Walking School Bus

### Olive Chapel Elementary School, Apex, NC

In 2004, the Olive Chapel Walk to School Coalition kicked-off a monthly walking school bus, giving families an opportunity to walk to school despite the construction that neighborhoods near the school had experienced in recent years.

“Neighborhood captains,” parents and children walk from six separate departure points to the school. One route meets in a parking lot so families who live too far to walk can participate. Reminders about the monthly walk are sent home on the previous Friday, and children who participate receive prizes.

Parent volunteers act as neighborhood captains. At the start of the school year, they receive safety training. During the walks, they wear green vests and use whistles to communicate to children when they need to stop. Because the activity is designed to be family-oriented, parents are required to walk with their children to school, but they are free to arrange among themselves to supervise each other’s children.

A volunteer parent and the school physical education teacher share leadership of this growing activity. Since it began, one route has had as many as 200 people who regularly walk.



Olive Chapel Elementary students walk to school.

## Putting It Into Practice: Informal Walking School Bus

### Ephesus Elementary School, Chapel Hill, NC

At Ephesus Elementary School, a loosely organized walking school bus gets families out the door. In the past few years, more families have started walking, bicycling and riding scooters to school. In various neighborhoods, parents and children meet and walk to school together. If a parent is unable to walk on a particular day, another parent is contacted to supervise and walk with the child. According to parents, one of the greatest benefits of walking to school is the chance to socialize and get to know other families.



Sara Latta

Ephesus Elementary School walkers on International Walk to School Day.

## Park and Walk

A pre-determined parking lot acts as the meeting area for families who drive and then park and walk the remaining distance to school. Some communities require parents to walk with their children to school while others have designated adult volunteers to walk groups of children from the parking area to school.

Park and walk campaigns have the potential to reduce traffic congestion around a school and encourage physical activity for parents and children. This strategy is especially helpful for including families who live too far from the school to walk or who do not have a safe route to school.



Karen Cranford

Walking to Kendallvue Elementary in Morrison, Colorado.

## Strategy: Park and Walk

### Description

Instead of driving to the school, families drive to a remote parking lot and walk the remainder of the trip.

### Advantages

- Includes families who live too far to walk or have an unsafe route.
- Encourages neighborhood involvement.
- Reduces traffic congestion at the school.

### Considerations

- Requires identifying a safe route from the parking area to the school.
- Requires working with the parking lots owner.

### Quick steps to a park and walk activity

1. Locate a parking lot within walking distance of the school. Work with lot owner to allow use.
2. Map a safe route to school from parking area.
3. Recruit volunteers if parents are not required to walk with their children.
4. Promote it.
5. Kick off.
6. Track participation.
7. Make changes to the activity as needed.

## Putting It Into Practice: Park and Walk With a Walking School Bus

Arborfield, Newland and Barkham C.E. Junior School, Arborfield, England

In order to ease congestion around Arborfield, Newland and Barkham C.E. Junior School, the school's council established a School Travel Plan in March 2004. The plan includes a walking school bus that leaves from a designated parking area where parent volunteers supervise the children's walk to school.

After the plan was created, organizers asked parents to register their children and also to volunteer to lead the walking school buses. A local organization gave permission for the school to use its parking lot as the designated area for parents to meet the walking school bus. Children who participated were required to register each day, wear a fluorescent jacket and leave the lot at the predetermined time guided by volunteers.

As an incentive for children, school officials regularly ask special guests, like Santa Claus in December, to join their walks to school. School officials report many benefits of their activities: walking school buses are free of capital costs, and they help ease congestion and pollution. The children enjoy the walk, make new friends and have the opportunity to see things around them that they might miss if they were driven to school.

See Park and Walk "The Walking Bus" at [www.arborfield.wokingham.sch.uk/walking%20bus.htm](http://www.arborfield.wokingham.sch.uk/walking%20bus.htm) for more information.<sup>10</sup>



Arborfield, Newland and Barkham C.E. Junior School Walking School Bus, Arborfield, England.

### On-campus Walking Activities

In rural areas or other places where it is unsafe or difficult to walk to school, communities can encourage walking on the school campus. For example, school officials can establish walking activities before or after school or during recess, physical education or health class. Walk routes on the school grounds provide all students an opportunity to walk a safe route and increase their physical activity. Ideas presented in the Mileage Clubs and Contests section also provide suggestions for incorporating routine walking into the school day.



Logging miles on the track at Trumansburg Elementary School, Trumansburg, New York.

## Strategy: On-campus Walking Activities

### Description

Walks are held on the school campus during the school day, such as during physical education classes or recess, or occur before or after school.

### Advantages

- Includes children that may otherwise not be able to participate in SRTS activities.

### Considerations

- Needs school or volunteer coordinator and support from administration.
- May require time in the school schedule.

### Quick steps to on-campus walking activities

1. Identify a coordinator and obtain school's support.
2. Determine the scope of the activity: Who will be involved? When will they walk? Where will they walk? For how long will they walk?
3. Set goals for walkers either by accumulated distance, amount of time or number of days walked.
4. Obtain incentives (optional).
5. Promote.
6. Kick off.
7. Track participation.
8. Make changes to the activity as needed.

## Putting It Into Practice: The Morning Mile

### Jenkins Elementary School, Scituate, MA

The "Morning Mile" at Jenkins Elementary was designed to give bus riding students an opportunity to enjoy the benefits of walking.

Parent volunteers, including men in the school's "Dad's Club," and Physical Education teachers created a half-mile loop around the school grounds for the children to walk during regular, all-school Morning Mile walks. The Dad's Club built wide timber stairways to provide pedestrian access to the playground and school. Teachers report that children had more enthusiasm for schoolwork and behaved better after venting some energy during the Morning Mile walks.



Children walking the Morning Mile at Jenkins Elementary School in Scituate, Massachusetts.

# Using More than One Encouragement Strategy

The following two schools used a combination of encouragement activities: creating weekly walks, park and walk locations, contests and walking school buses to make a comprehensive, thorough encouragement component that has really motivated children and parents.

## Putting It Into Practice: Comprehensive Encouragement Campaign Maurice Cody Public School, Toronto, Ontario, Canada

On Wednesday, June 8, 2005, Canada's Clean Air Day, families and staff at Maurice Cody Public School in Toronto celebrated their 200th Walking Wednesday! The celebration involved many VIPs who accompanied students, parents and staff in a community parade led by a Scottish piper.

Maurice Cody, a Junior Kindergarten through sixth-grade public school with approximately 500 students, has participated in the Green Communities' Active & Safe Routes to School since 1997. They have successfully combined daily physical activity with environmental protection and classroom learning in their Walking Wednesday activity. They are also one of four Toronto schools participating in Green Communities' School Walking Routes pilot project.



Maurice Cody celebrates its 200th Walking Wednesday.

Maurice Cody was one of the first three schools to participate in Green Communities' Active & Safe Routes to School program and the very first Toronto school to implement Walking School Buses. Almost all of the students at Maurice Cody live within walking distance of the school and about 86 percent of the school's students walk to school on Wednesdays.

Maurice Cody inspired the first weekly Walking Wednesday activity in Canada in 1999, following on the heels of International Walk to School Day, and then went on to initiate a Cross Canada Walking Tour. Not content to stay in Canada they then set off across North America and by the end of the 2003 school year they had "walked" to the Panama Canal!

The program relies heavily on parent volunteers with support from staff and students. Every Wednesday morning volunteers greet students at tables set up in the school yard or inside the school during inclement weather. Walking Wednesday banners hang on the fence around the school. As walkers arrive, they are greeted with a compilation of walking-themed music. They receive a Cody Coyote hand stamp and sign in on large shoes made from poster board which are then displayed in the school hall. For families who are unable to walk all the way to school on Wednesdays, they are urged to "walk a block" — actually a minimum of two blocks.

To track participation and encourage continued participation, each Wednesday classroom teachers count the number of students who arrive at school "actively." During the Tuesday morning announcements the participation numbers from the previous Walking Wednesday are given, along with a reminder to "W-A-L-K: Walk to School on Wednesday!" At the end of each school year, a Recognition Assembly is held and the much coveted Golden Shoe Award is presented to the class with the highest participation in Walking Wednesdays throughout the year.

See more information on Walking Wednesdays at <http://saferoutestoschool.ca/index.php?page=walkwheelwed>.

## Putting It Into Practice: Comprehensive Encouragement Campaign

### Morton Way Public School, Brampton, Ontario, Canada

For six years, Morton Way Public School has actively and successfully promoted walking to school through a variety of program elements: weekly Walking Wednesdays; "Walking Weeks," including International Walk to School Week, Earth Week and Environment Week; parent-led walking school buses along designated routes; "IWALK Club" cards students use each time they walk; and a "25 [Cars] or Less" campaign. With 96 percent of the students living within walking distance of the school, their Green Communities Active & Safe Routes to School program is focused on increasing daily physical activity and reducing the number of motor vehicles in the school zone at drop-off time. For the school's 870 students, the goal is to make every day Walk to School Day!

On Walking Wednesdays, parents and one teacher act as walking school bus leaders, meeting students at various locations in the school community and walking safely and happily to school as a group. Along one route, the number of participants has risen from four to over thirty. (Some leaders walk with their "buses" on other days of the week, too.) On Wednesdays, students hold up a banner outside the school stating, "Peel Students Walk" (purchased by the Police Services Board). Permanent banners (provided by Go for Green) proudly announce: "Morton Way Walks" and "Morton Way Celebrates Walking Wednesdays." As students arrive at the school, songs about walking are played outside on the stereo. Once a month, parents and grandparents are invited into the library for tea and to hear guest speakers. These "meet and greet" sessions, sponsored by the school administration, help build a sense of community. Find out more about Walking Wednesdays at <http://saferoutestoschool.ca/index.php?page=walkwheelwed>.

To promote walking every day, each student has an "IWALK Club" card to track the number of times they walk to school. Students receive small rewards after reaching ten walks and then again after fifty. Completed cards are posted on a bulletin board. As an added incentive, students can become "Walking Winners" in the monthly Walk to School Draw and classes with 100 percent participation can win the use of a bag of playground equipment for a week.

Started in 2005, the "25 or Less" campaign aims to further reduce the number of motor vehicles dropping off children in front of the school. Stickers saying "25 or Less" and "We are counting...on you!" are posted throughout the school. To promote participation, reminders are included in the school newsletter, and the number of motor vehicles is announced daily. An enthusiastic Morton Way teacher even wrote a poem describing the goals.

The Walk to School Program has now been in place for six years. Walking Wednesday is practically considered a day of the week, even by kindergarten students. Morton Way staff members are committed to the program, and they are determined to continue it, led by a five teacher "Active Schools Committee." Much of the weekly responsibilities are conducted by dedicated students who make up the "Walk to School Committee." They conduct weekly surveys, then calculate, post and announce the Walk to School results, including the classes with 100 percent participation. In 1999 surveys showed that almost half of students were driven to school regularly. In 2000 Walking Wednesdays began, and ever since, between 80 percent and 95 percent of students walk, bicycle, scooter or in-line skate to school on Wednesdays. More students are using active means of transportation on other days, too, as indicated by the reduction in the number of motor vehicles dropping off students from an average of 75 to 55.



Dale McCormack

One reason Morton Way students walk is because they care about the environment.



Morton Way students walk to celebrate Earth Week.

# Resources

**International Walk to School in the USA**

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

**International Walk to School**

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

**Walking School Bus**

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

**NHTSA SRTS Toolkit**

[www.walktoschool.org/resources/srts-nhtsa.cfm](http://www.walktoschool.org/resources/srts-nhtsa.cfm)

**PE Central Log-It**

[www.peclogit.org/logit.asp](http://www.peclogit.org/logit.asp)

**America on the Move**

<http://aom.americaonthemove.org>

**Marin County Bicycle Coalition Safe Routes to School Walk Across America**

[www.saferoutestoschools.org/walk](http://www.saferoutestoschools.org/walk)

**Active & Safe Routes to School**

[www.saferoutestoschool.ca](http://www.saferoutestoschool.ca)

**Active & Safe Routes to School Walk Across Canada**

<http://asrts.goforgreen.ca/english>

**The Walking School Bus: Combining Safety, Fun and the Walk to School**

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

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