



Safe Routes
to Schools

Alameda County

Walking School Bus — Toolkit —

APRIL 2019





Table of Contents

1. What is a Walking School Bus?.....	1
2. Recruiting Route Leaders.....	3
3. Route Planning.....	4
4. Growing the Bus.....	7
5. Along the Route.....	9
6. Alameda County SR2S Support.....	11
7. Helpful Links.....	13
Appendix A: Sample Resources	

1. What is a Walking School Bus?

A Walking School Bus is an organized group of families living in the same neighborhood who form an adult-supervised walking group to and/or from school. In other words, it's like a carpool, minus the car.

The Walking School Bus can be a structured program with a regular schedule of trained volunteers or it can be more informal, with parents or caregivers taking turns escorting children to school.

Walking School Buses can happen on a daily, weekly, or even monthly frequency, depending on volunteer availability and participant interest.

How to use this Guidebook

This guidebook has been developed by Alameda County Safe Routes to Schools (SR2S), a program of Alameda CTC, which promotes healthy habits by working with educators, parents and kids to increase walking, biking and carpooling to school. The program encourages schools to start and sustain their own Walking School Buses. The guidebook serves as a “how-to” manual when starting a Walking School Bus or bringing new people onboard, and outlines best practices used in Walking School Buses across the country. It includes recommended procedures, template forms, and handouts that schools may use, or choose to adapt.



Alameda County SR2S provides initial technical support – outlined on page 11 – for new and changing Walking School Buses. Look for this pencil throughout the toolkit to find the specific activities where the SR2S Program can provide additional training and technical support to your school.

Benefits of a Walking School Bus

- Saves time and money by sharing transportation responsibilities
- Decreases traffic congestion around school by reducing the number of cars at drop off and pick up
- Encourages healthy living and active lifestyle choices
- Builds community among participants
- Can reduce absenteeism and tardiness by helping students get to school regularly and on time

Steps to a Successful Program

1. RECRUIT ROUTE LEADERS

Leaders can include parents, caregivers, or community members.

2. ESTABLISH ROUTES



Consider volunteer and potential participants' locations, along with roadway safety, to determine the routes and stops. Also decide how frequently the Walking School Bus will run.

3. PROMOTE THE PROGRAM

Contact families, school administration, and community members to recruit interested students and families.

4. HOP ON THE BUS!

Walking School Bus Roles



Students participate and celebrate the trip to school. Walking School Buses are most appropriate for elementary school students.

Parents can volunteer as Route Leaders or in another support role, encourage their children to participate, and provide incentives to support the program.

PTA/PTOs, school faculty/staff, neighbors, active seniors or older adults, and other school community members can get involved as Route Leaders or support volunteers and build enthusiasm with participants.

Schools can provide support by posting information about how to get involved and by hosting meetings to organize the program.

Local businesses can donate materials or food to encourage more people to get involved.

Alameda County SR2S can provide a suite of technical support features, as outlined on page 11.

2. Recruiting Route Leaders

One of the first important steps in creating a Walking School Bus is to recruit Route Leaders who supervise students on their walk to and from school. Route Leaders are the driving force behind Walking School Buses.

Ideally, each group should have two or more adults, one at the front of the group and one at the back. Having two adults ensures if one is sick or cannot make it there is a backup volunteer.



Route Leader Roles

- ✓ **ENSURE THE SMOOTH OPERATION**
of the Walking School Bus
- ✓ **COORDINATE SUPPORTING VOLUNTEERS**
on the route if necessary, and provide leadership about walking formations, timing, and safety
- ✓ **SUPERVISE STUDENTS WALKING THE ROUTE**
until the group arrives at school
- ✓ **TEACH AND MODEL SAFE WALKING BEHAVIOR**
- ✓ **RESPOND TO INCIDENTS**
and alert parents of participants, when necessary
- ✓ **HELP CREATE A FUN ATMOSPHERE**
that is welcoming for all students

3. Route Planning

Walking School Buses follow an established route. Routes can originate from a particular neighborhood or begin from a designated “park and walk” location, such as a park or parking lot.

How to Plan a Route

- ✓ **IS THERE A SAFE PLACE TO WALK?**
Choose sidewalks or paths, even if the trip will take a little longer. In places where children already walk to school along routes that lack facilities, adult supervision can improve safety until improvements can be made to the infrastructure.
- ✓ **IS IT EASY TO CROSS THE STREET?**
Minimize the number of street crossings and avoid busy, high-speed, or multi-lane roads. Choose crossing locations with traffic signals, all-way stop signs and/or crossing guards.
- ✓ **ARE THE STREETS QUIET AND SAFE?**
Where possible, choose streets that are quiet, have slow driving speeds, and are adequately lit.
- ✓ **DID YOU TEST THE ROUTE?**
Once you have determined a potential route, walk the route without students present.

Sample Walking School Bus Route Map



The Alameda Safe Routes to Schools Team can provide initial support in determining routes and creating route maps to groups as needed.



4. Growing the Bus

Enthusiastically promoting the Walking School Bus program may be one of the most important things a school or Route Leader can do. More participants means a greater chance to recruit more volunteers. With enough enthusiasm for the Walking School Bus program, new routes can be established.

Promote your Walking School Bus

- ✓ **ADVERTISE THE WALKING SCHOOL BUS**
through school newsletters, e-news, fliers, or announcements
- ✓ **HAND OUT ROUTE MAPS**
to students and parents so they can easily see how they can join in
- ✓ **PROMOTE AT SAFE ROUTES TO SCHOOLS EVENTS**
such as Walk and Roll days, BikeMobile events, or Pedestrian Rodeos
- ✓ **FOCUS ON BACK-TO-SCHOOL TIME**
as a great opportunity to set transportation habits.
- ✓ **EMPHASIZE THE BENEFITS**
of participating for students, caregivers, and the community



5. Along the Route

Following a few simple guidelines can help create a safe, yet fun and welcoming environment, all while getting students to school on time.

Walking School Bus Guidelines

- ✓ **WAIT UP TO 5-MINUTES AFTER DEPARTURE TIME**
It's important to keep students moving toward school.
- ✓ **STOP AND WAIT BEFORE CROSSING THE STREET**
Students should stop and wait for instructions before crossing the street, and always “look left, look right, look left” before crossing.
- ✓ **ASK STUDENTS TO FOCUS ON WALKING**
Students should walk and never run at any time, and avoid playing with toys or using electronic devices during the walk.
- ✓ **ASSIGN STUDENT JOBS**
Assigning jobs such as assistant line leader or tree/wildlife spotter can reorient students who are distracted or misbehaving.
- ✓ **ALERT PARENTS OF DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIOR**
Students who cannot participate safely will not be invited to continue walking with the group.

Ways to Make the Program fun!

- Name the bus—it's fun and creates a sense of ownership. For example, one route could be “Great Egret,” another could be “Steelhead Trout,” etc.
- Have a theme day—this can include dress up days, wearing the same colors, and other fun themes.
- Create signs for students to carry with “Walking School Bus” and the school name.
- Play “I Spy” and have children pick the theme. For example, “I Spy things that promote physical activity.”
- Create a Jingle— Work with the kids to create a safety-themed song to a tune such as “Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star”.

Preparing for the Unexpected

What if a student is late?

If the student is late before school, it is the parent's responsibility to get the student to school. In order to ensure students arrive on campus on-time, Walking School Buses cannot wait for students who may be running behind. The family is responsible for getting the student to or from school if they are late.

What if there is an emergency?

Alert parents in the event that anything out of the normal occurs. If there is a life threatening emergency or someone is in danger, dial 9-1-1.

What if unexpected students show up?

Establish a procedure for when unexpected students want to join the Walking School Bus. You may agree that it is either mandatory or recommended that students have a signed parental consent form with them in order to participate.

What if it's raining, too cold, or too hot?

Encourage students to wear weather appropriate clothing and shoes. Consider organizing a carpool for days with very bad weather.

What if the Route Leader is sick?

Establish a procedure for communicating if the Route Leader needs to cancel. Identify an alternate route leader or a single point of contact who can alert families.

What if a student misbehaves?

Establish a procedure for when a student misbehaves. For example, if a student behaves in an unsafe manner in traffic, or does not listen to the directions of the adults, they may be given a warning and their family will be informed. If the student acts in a way that creates a persistent danger to themselves or other students, the student will not be allowed to continue participating in the Walking School Bus.

6. Alameda County SR2S Support

Alameda County SR2S provides initial technical support for new and updating Walking School Buses. The long term goal is for Walking School Buses to be self-sustaining and renewing among individual school communities.

✓ **WSB TOOLKIT AND FORMS**

This guidebook and the corresponding forms serve as a “how-to” manual when starting a Walking School Bus or bringing new people onboard.

✓ **WSB COORDINATION MEETINGS**

The Alameda County SR2S Team can attend Walking School Bus coordination meetings at the school. The purpose of these meetings are to identify parents interested in being Route Leaders and explain the initial logistics and safety components of running a Walking School Bus.

✓ **ROUTE PLANNING**

The Alameda County SR2S Team can provide initial support in determining routes and creating route maps. Maps can include “Park and Walk” students who want to participate, but live too far to walk to a Walking School Bus stop.

✓ **SUPPORT MATERIALS**

The Alameda County SR2S Team has a limited number of high-visibility vests to provide to Route Leaders and Walking School Bus Yard Signs to alert participants of the meet-up locations.





7. Helpful Links

The following links offer additional information about Walking School Buses:

Consent Forms

“Parental Consent Form.” Kids Walk-to-School: A Guide to Promote Walking to School <https://stacks.cdc.gov/view/cdc/11316> (PDF, pg. 59)

Evaluation Tools

“Student Survey.” Safe Routes to Schools: Marin County <http://bit.ly/J67TbH> (PDF)

“KidsWalk-to-School Participant Evaluation.” KidsWalk-to-School: A Guide to Promote Walking to School <https://stacks.cdc.gov/view/cdc/11316> (PDF, pg. 61)

International Walk to School Events

International Walk to School in the USA <http://www.walkbiketoschool.org/>

International Walk to School Month <http://www.iwalktoschool.org>

Example Walking School Bus Programs

“Walking School Bus” Portland, Oregon <https://www.portlandoregon.gov/transportation/article/536540>

“Safe Routes to School: Walking School Bus” Columbia, Missouri Elementary Schools <https://pednet.org/project/walking-school-bus/>

Liability

10 Tips for Safe Routes To School Programs and Liability http://apps.saferoutesinfo.org/training/walking_school_bus/liabilitytipsheet.pdf

Route Planning

“Safe Routes to School Online Guide: Engineering, school route maps and the tools to create them.” National Center for Safe Routes to School http://guide.saferoutesinfo.org/engineering/school_route_maps_and_the_tools_to_create_them.cfm

“Walkability Checklist.” Bicycle and Pedestrian Information Center <http://www.pedbikeinfo.org/data/library/details.cfm?id=12>

Safety Tips

“Walking School Bus: Guidelines for Talking to Children about Pedestrian Safety.” Pedestrian and Bicycle Information Center <http://www.walkingschoolbus.org/safety.pdf>

Walking School Bus Guide and General Resources

“Starting a Walking School Bus” <http://www.walkingschoolbus.org/resources.html>.

“The Walking School Bus: A Primer and First Steps” http://apps.saferoutesinfo.org/training/walking_school_bus/

APPENDIX A

Sample Resources

Table of Contents

Walking School Bus Route Sign-up Form
Walking School Bus Recruitment Flyer
Student Participant Agreement Form
Route Leader/Volunteer Agreement Form
Walking School Bus Safety Tips
Walking School Bus Game Ideas
Walking School Bus Scenario Planning Activity

The Walking School Bus Sample Resources are available in Word format for easy editing. Please visit alamedacountysr2s.org/plan-an-event/walking-school-bus-bike-train/ to access these resources.

(Materials adapted from the Safe Routes to School National Partnership)

Walking School Bus Route Sign-up Form Sample

Tentative Walking School Bus Routes

Join the Walking School Bus at XX Elementary



Alameda County

Contact Us

info@alamedacountysr2s.org

- ➔ A Walking School Bus (WSB) is a group of students walking to and/or from school with trusted adults. A WSB improves children's safety by walking in a supervised group and it saves parents time and money by sharing the responsibility of taking kids to school.
- ➔ We have two tentative routes planned for the Walking School Bus - the yellow route and the blue route (see the map on the back). We anticipate that the Walking School Bus will happen once a month, starting in February 2018.
- ➔ Are you interested in leading a Walking School Bus route, volunteering, or having your child participate? Fill out the form below!
- ➔ Questions? E-mail info@alamedacountysr2s.org



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The Alameda County Safe Routes to Schools Program is funded by the Alameda County Transportation Commission (www.alamedact.org). Your transportation dollars at work!

PLEASE fill out and return this form to the Main Office.

1. Are you interested in volunteering for the Walking School Bus? If so, which route? (see map on back).

Yellow Route Blue Route No

2. Is your child interested in participating in a Walking School Bus? (see map on back).

Yellow Route Blue Route No

Parent or Caregiver Name: _____

Student(s) Name(s): _____

Phone Number: _____

Email: _____

Home Address
(or nearby intersection): _____

Tentative Walking School Bus Routes

¡Cómo iniciar un Autobús Escolar Caminante a Hillside Elementary!



Alameda County

Contáctenos

info@alamedacountysr2s.org

¡Acompáñenos el 28 de noviembre a las 8:15 a.m. en la Escuela Primaria Hillside para conocer cómo usted o su hijo o hija pueden participar!

- ➔ Un Autobús Escolar Caminante es un grupo de estudiantes que caminan de o a la escuela con adultos de confianza. Hillside Elementary está estableciendo rutas de Autobús Escolar Caminante para el año escolar 2017-2018.
- ➔ Un Autobús Escolar Caminante mejora la seguridad de los niños y niñas al caminar en un grupo supervisado y ahorra a los padres tiempo y dinero al compartir la responsabilidad de llevar a los niños a la escuela. Los niños pueden ejercitarse y divertirse con sus amigos mientras ayudan a salvar el planeta.
- ➔ ¿Está interesado en dirigir una ruta de Autobús Escolar Caminante, ser voluntario o hacer que su hijo/a participe? ¡Venga a conocer más en esta reunión inicial!
- ➔ ¿Preguntas? Manda un correo electrónico a info@alamedacountysr2s.org



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POR FAVOR llene y llene y regrese este formulario a la oficina principal.

1. ¿Está interesado en ser voluntario para el autobús escolar caminante?

 Sí No

2. ¿Cree que su hijo/a está interesado en participar en el Autobús Escolar Caminante?

 Sí No

Nombre del Padre, Madre o Tutor _____

Nombre(s) de estudiante(s) _____

Número de teléfono: _____

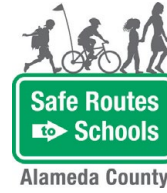
Email: _____

Dirección de su casa
(o intersección cercana): _____

Walking School Bus Recruitment Flyer Sample

Join other families and students walking to school
Únete a otras familias y estudiantes caminando a escuela

Walking School Bus



Questions? Contact:
E-mail Safe Routes to Schools at
info@alamedacountysr2s.org

- ➔ **WHO?** Students, Route Leaders, and Volunteers
QUIÉN? Estudiantes y padres que airen ser líderes
- ➔ **WHAT?** A Walking School Bus is a group of students walking or biking to and from school with friends and trusted adults.
QUÉ? Un autobús escolar caminante es un grupo de que caminan a y de escuela con padres que sirven como guías estudiantes
- ➔ **WHEN?** Beginning fall 2017 for the 2017-18 school year.
¿CUÁNDO? Empezando otoño de 2017 para el año escolar 2017-18
- ➔ **WHY?** Have fun with friends, exercise, explore outdoor activity, and save the planet!
¿POR QUÉ? Diviértete con tus amigos, haz ejercicio, explora actividades afuera y salva el planeta



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1. Are you interested in participating as a Route Leader or Volunteer?

¿Esta interesado en participar como guía/lider de un Autobús Escolar Caminante?

Yes/ Sí No

2. Is your child interested in participated in a Walking School Bus ?

¿Crees que su hijo/hija esta interesado en participar en un Autobús Escolar Caminante?

Yes/ Sí No

Parent Name: _____

Phone Number: _____

Student Participant Agreement Form Sample

Walking School Bus

Student Participation Form



Parent Name: _____

Today's Date: _____

Student Name _____

School: _____

Parent Phone Number: _____

Grade: _____

Parent Email: _____

Classroom: _____

Preferred way to be reached: _____

Before you join us on a Walking School Bus, please review the following rules and expectations with your family. Walking School Buses can be a fun and safe way to get to school if you follow these simple rules! Your Route Leader will give you a warning if you forget any of these rules. If the behavior persists, the Route Leader will alert the school and your family.

I agree to the following expectations:

- ➔ **BE ON TIME.** Be on time to join my assigned Walking School Bus.
- ➔ **STAY WITH THE GROUP.** Walk behind the Route Leader in the front and in front of the Leader in the back.
- ➔ **STOP AND WAIT AT INTERSECTIONS.** At street corners or stop signs, wait for the group and then look left, look right, and look left again before crossing.
- ➔ **FOLLOW DIRECTIONS.** Always listen to your Route Leaders and don't run or take off at any time.
- ➔ **BE AWARE.** Pay attention to car traffic at driveways and intersections; don't play with toys or electronic devices while you walk.
- ➔ **BE RESPECTFUL.** Be considerate of other students, the neighborhood, and neighbors.

I have read and understood the expectations of a participant in the Walking School Bus and agree to follow these rules. Please return to the school office.

Student Signature: _____

Parent/Guardian Signature: _____

Route Leader/Volunteer Agreement Form Sample

Walking School Bus

Volunteer Agreement



Parent Name: _____

Today's Date: _____

Phone Number: _____

School: _____

Email: _____

Are you interested in being a (circle one):

Preferred way to be reached: _____

Route Leader Volunteer

I agree to the following expectations:

- ➔ **TRAINING.** Attend a Walking School Bus volunteer training.
- ➔ **BE ON TIME.** Be on time to join my assigned Walking School Bus.
- ➔ **ASSIST THE ROUTE LEADER.** Help the Route Leader manage the students along the route.
- ➔ **MODEL SAFE WALKING BEHAVIOR.** Model appropriate walking behavior, following the rules of the road and practicing guides such as "look left, look right, and look left again" before crossing the street.
- ➔ **COMMUNICATE.** Inform my Walking School Bus Route Leader if I am unable to attend my designated Walking School Bus or if I am running late.

I have read and understood the expectations of a volunteer and agree to follow these rules. Please return to the school office.

Volunteer Signature: _____

Walking School Bus

Safety Tips



Alameda County

Questions? Contact:

Safe Routes to Schools at
info@alamedacountysr2s.org

- **BE ALERT.** Look left, right, then left again before crossing the street. At a four-way intersection, look over your shoulder for cars that may be turning.
- **LISTEN FOR ONCOMING CARS** that may be behind a parked car, tree, or other obstacle.
- **CROSS AT CORNERS** or at a marked crosswalk. This is where drivers expect you.
- **USE CROSSING SIGNALS CAREFULLY.** If the intersection has a walk signal, push the button and wait for the walk signal. Before you cross, check that all drivers have stopped, especially those turning right.
- **USE EYE CONTACT** and hand signals to communicate before crossing. Don't assume driver see you.
- **FOLLOW DIRECTIONS** from crossing guards and safety patrols.
- **USE A SIDEWALK WHEN AVAILABLE.** If there's no sidewalk, walk on the road facing oncoming traffic.
- **WALK WITH AN ADULT**, other students, or a buddy, particularly if you are a younger student
- **DRESS TO BE SEEN.** Bright colors are more visible during the day, and light colors are more visible in the evening or at night. Reflective clothing is always a good idea, too!



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Walking School Bus

Game Ideas



Alameda County

- **EYE SPY:** Allow children to pick an Eye Spy theme. Examples may include: Eye Spy safe things, Eye Spy dangerous things, Eye Spy things that pollute, and Eye Spy things that promote physical activity.
- **ALPHABET GAME:** “I’m going on a walk and I’m taking a ____.” Use the letters of the alphabet, A-Z, to think of things to take on your walk.
- **LETTER OF THE DAY:** Find 10 or 20 things on the way to school that start with the letter _____. Make it a competition between the leader and the children.
- **CARPPOOL COUNT:** Count the number of cars with just one person in them and also the number of cars with more than one person in the vehicle.
- **THEME DAYS:** Children and adults can come up with themes that go along with each day of the week. For example, Mondays can be “yellow day” when everyone wears yellow; Tuesdays can be “rhyme time” when participants say as many words as they can think of that rhyme with a selected word; Wednesdays can be “sports day,” etc.
- **NAME YOUR BUS:** Name your walking school bus group. Solicit input from the students and ask them to vote.
- **ANIMAL GAME:** “I’m thinking of an animal that_____” (describe details about the animal).
- **CREATE A JINGLE:** Work with the kids to create a safety-themed song to the tune of a well-known song such as twinkle twinkle or Daniel Tiger’s theme song.

Questions? Contact:

Safe Routes to Schools at
info@alamedacountysr2s.org

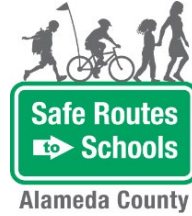


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Walking School Bus Scenario Activity Sample

Walking School Bus

Scenario Planning



Scenario	Route Leader response
<p>Imagine a child in the walking school bus tripped and fell on the sidewalk. He has a scraped knee and is crying.</p>	
<p>There is one child in the walking school bus with a lot of energy. She continuously runs ahead of the bus.</p>	
<p>One of the children in the bus is not following proper walking safety rules. He runs out between parked cars and forgets to look left, right, then left again.</p>	
<p>One day, on your normal route, you find construction has started that blocks the entire sidewalk.</p>	

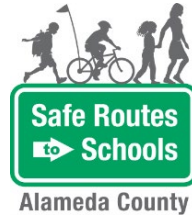


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Walking School Bus Scenario Activity Answers Sample

Walking School Bus

Scenario Planning



Scenario	Route Leader response
Imagine a child in the walking school bus tripped and fell on the sidewalk. He has a scraped knee and is crying.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Assess the situation: can child still walk to school with group? Or, does one route leader stay behind with the child to seek appropriate medical attention.
There is one child in the walking school bus with a lot of energy. She continuously runs ahead of the bus.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Remind her the importance of staying with the group and give her a task: help lead the younger students, start off a game of eye spy, etc. - If she is continually running ahead of the group, warn her that you will have to talk to her parents.
One of the children in the bus is not following proper walking safety rules. He runs out between parked cars and forgets to look left, right, then left again.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Remind him of the rules of a safe walking and potentially start playing a game to get him involved with the group. - Warn student that you will have to contact his parents if he continues to not follow proper walking safety rules. - It is up to the discretion of the Route Leader to determine if the student cannot safely walk to school with other students in the WSB
One day, on your normal route, you find construction has started that blocks the entire sidewalk.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Assess the road. If it seems like low volume of cars, you may carefully walk students on the road facing oncoming traffic. - If the road is too busy, turn around and either look for a crosswalk to cross to the other side of the street, or use a nearby street for an alternate route.



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