



# How to Organize A Walking School Bus



## 1. Build a Working Group

This gives you a broad starting pool of potential volunteers that you can call on for activities or input. Talk to school staff, administrators, the physical education teacher, the nurse. Introduce the idea of SRTS to parents via the PTO/PTA.

For anyone who expresses serious interest, get their contact information. They may be willing to chaperone a school bus, help with a bike rodeo, make a display board to publicize the walking school bus or they may help provide perks for walking school bus days, like hot cocoa in the fall or fruit.

## 2. Determine Program Goals

SRTS seeks to educate students about safety, encourage them to walk or bike and, if necessary, make the route itself safer. Your program should be clear about what it seeks to do and make sure that the activities match those goals.

Is safety education a goal?

Walking school buses provide an opportunity to educate about safety, but the chaperones have to take advantage of the opportunity, and know what to teach the students. Without a specific focus on safety, walking school buses are just encouragement. See chaperone Tip Sheet for more details.

Is encouragement a goal?

If so, a Travel Tally should be conducted before the program starts. This is a homeroom tally to see how many students walked or biked to school that day. It must be collected on two days in the same week and should be conducted again at the end of the school year, or another effective "after" date to measure change in everyday walking. Forms are available on [www.hartma.com/community](http://www.hartma.com/community).

Is improving local walking facilities a goal for the program?

If so, what obstacles are there to walking to school?

HART can provide parent surveys (paper or online) or guide a walkability audit to help identify obstacles.

### 3. Determine Walking School Bus Details

How often?

What routes will the buses walk?

The school can provide a list of streets that the students live on to help direct route planning. HART can also assist with mapping these.



How many routes will there be?

(You can start small and add as the program gains popularity or go for several routes and combine them if kids don't turn out.)

How many chaperones are available/ needed?

Will permission slips be necessary for the students to join a walking school bus?

Will the school bus wait for students who aren't out of the house, or knock as a reminder, or continue walking and only pick up those who are ready?

How will the program be publicized? (letters to parents, talking to kids the day of or week of, announcements)

Should local "celebrities" such as police officers, firemen or elected officials be sought to add variety to the walks?

Should holidays or themes be used to add interest to the walks?

### 4. Incentives and Recognition

HART can provide:

- Frequent Walker punch cards
- Stickers
- Hi-Viz shoe laces (limited quantity)
- Sling Bags (limited quantity)



The program can be recognized by:

- Mentioning the number of student and steps walked on announcements. Possibly announcing the next walking day. One of the walkers could say this part of the announcements.
- When students fill a frequent walker card, their name could be included in the announcements
- A prominent display can help promote the program. The distance that students have collectively travelled can be recorded to show how far across NJ, or to another city the students have walked. This can be used to as a connection to a geography or history class.
- A competition can also be held to see which homeroom can get the highest percentage of students walking.



### Lessons Learned

Some children and parents have expressed concern about the weight of children's backpacks during the walk. At one school, a parent drives the students' backpacks and drops them off at the entrance.

Routes should be responsive to student and parent comments. Route and time flexibility allows the routes to pick up more students. Moving the bus 5-10 minutes earlier or later can make a big difference to families in the morning. Ensure that any changes in routes or times are publicized to resident on that route.

Students enjoy any type of recognition, be it getting their frequent walker card punched, being part of a special event, recognition on the announcements or elsewhere,