



What is a Walking School Bus?

A “walking school bus” is an organized activity involving a group of children who walk together to school along a set route, supervised by an adult. This initiative makes it safer and more convenient for students to commute to school on foot. If you (must be an adult) are interested in implementing this program at your school, please follow the guidelines on inside to determine if it is suitable for your community.



Check out the steps to set up your school's own walking school bus inside.



Walking School Bus Benefits:



**Enhances
Environmental
Safety**



**Saves
Families' Time**



**Models
Safe
Behavior**



**Builds
Community**



**Combats
Truancy**



**Reduces
Congestion
Around
Schools**

**SAFE ROUTES
TO SCHOOL!**





Steps to Starting a Walking School Bus

Setting up a Walking School Bus for your school community is an exciting undertaking. Make sure to discuss the activity with the school's administration before getting started. Some items to discuss include: permission to start activities, school guidelines around off-campus activities, and anything else regarding your school's policies.

Step 1 Getting the Walking School Bus Started

Identify members of your school community (teachers, PTA, parents/guardians, etc.) who can help supervise, staff, and coordinate the walking school bus. After identifying your team, work together to agree on the cadence of the activities. Monthly is a great start, but weekly or daily walking school buses are the goal. **Make sure to check in with your school principal about safety waivers and photo waivers for participating students.**

Step 2 Requesting Walking School Bus Materials

Safe Routes to School has materials for schools looking to start their own Walking School Buses. These items include safety vests for students, stop signs for adults to use while crossing the street, incentives to encourage participants, and a game sheet for keeping students engaged during the activity. **Please refer to the steps below to request your materials.**

✓ Contact the San Francisco Safe Routes to School program:

- Email: sbrown@sfbike.org or jdominguez-chand@sfbike.org
- Subject line: "Walking School Bus Materials Request"

✓ In your email, request the following materials:

- 2 handheld stop signs
- Safety vests for adult supervisors
- Incentives for student participants
- Game Sheet
- Check-in sheets

✓ Specify the following information in your request:

- Your name and role (e.g., parent volunteer, teacher, administrator)
- School name
- Estimated number of participants (children and adult supervisors)
- The date you need materials by

Follow up if you don't receive a response within 5 business days.

If you begin to run out of materials, feel free to submit additional requests for supplies.



Step
3

Choosing Your Route and Meeting Point

When choosing your route there are several things to consider, but always remember that safety is the priority and being flexible is key. Do not be afraid to change a set route if there is an obstruction in your route, negative activity occurring, or something that could be dangerous or uncomfortable for yourself and the students.



Your meet-up location should have space with enough room to accommodate students/families, ideally with shelter in case of rain. Examples of good gathering spaces are playgrounds, parks, recreation centers, and parklets.



When planning your walking school bus route, it's important to think about how safe the route is and how easy it is to walk. The perfect route will be short enough for kids to manage, have safe sidewalks, and be easy to walk without getting too tired.

- **Ideally, design a route that's about half a mile long and takes 10 to 15 minutes to walk.** Try Google Maps to find the best path. Common starting points include parks, community centers, landmarks, plazas, and other locations with room for students and families to comfortably gather.
- **It's okay to make small changes to cross big roads safely.** Look for crossings with stop signs or traffic lights. If those aren't available, choose crossings with flashing lights. These small adjustments can make the walk safer and more comfortable for everyone.
- **Be mindful of the traffic behavior.** Are cars speeding? Do they yield to pedestrians? Some roads produce safer driving behavior than others.
- **Before you take a group out, test it for yourself.** Does it feel safe, efficient, and accessible? Make changes as you deem fit.

If you have questions or need advice when selecting a route, San Francisco Safe Routes to School Program staff can help!



Step
4

Recruiting Walkers

You are now in the final stages of planning a Walking School Bus! Congrats! **Here are a few promotional steps you can take to get the news out:**

- **Be inclusive** by providing Walking School Bus information in languages that reflect your school's community. Many of the materials available in this toolkit are available in English, Spanish, Tagalog, and Chinese.
- **Print out the Walking School Bus flyer template** (linked here) and post it around your school (with permission from the administration).
- **Use the schools' digital communications** like the calendar and newsletter to promote the Walking School Buses.
- **Work with school administration and other guardians/leaders** to promote the Walking School Bus at events like PTA meetings, Coffee with Principal, Back to School Night, etc.
- **Word of mouth is powerful** – from both students and their guardians. Tell friends, family, and other school contacts about the Walking School Bus.

Step 5

Hosting your First Walking School Bus

Now is the time to enjoy all of your hard work. Make sure to arrive early at your meeting location, bring your toolkit supplies, and most importantly have fun! **Here are some tips and tricks of the trade:**

→ Logistical Tips:

- **Confirm that each participating student has a waiver** if required by your school. Ensure you've collected contact information from parents and guardians of students.
- **Make sure to take attendance** of all participating students at the beginning and end of your walking school bus. Find paper attendance sheets in your toolkit.
- **Having 2 adults per 10 students.** Make sure to leave a 5 minute waiting window for any students running late.
- At the end of your Walking School Bus, **submit your participation form** to saferoutestoschool@sfmta.com so we can track and celebrate your school community!

→ **Set some agreements based on safety** (we're going to stay together, stop at intersections, stay on the sidewalk, and pay attention). Make sure to do introductions and include a fun question to answer as people share their names with others. For example; "What did you eat for breakfast".

→ **Kids can have a lot of energy in the morning.** So figuring out ways to keep them engaged and excited to walk to school is important. For example, playing Simon Says before leaving, or counting things along the walk are good ways to keep students attention. More game ideas can be found on the laminated Game Sheet included in the Toolkit.

→ **Everyone's Walking School Bus may look different and change over time.** When starting, don't be discouraged by group size. Get it started, and it will grow! When it does, you can think about ways to shake things up and keep your community interested:

- **Celebrate a holiday at your Walking School Bus,** like Walk and Roll to School Week or Ruby Bridges Day.
- **Try a new meeting location,** like a different park.
- **Bring on Special Guests,** like a favorite teacher or the school principal.



Safe Routes to School Contacts

If you have any questions, would like staffing support for your activity, or want to request your Walking School Bus materials contact our Safe Routes to School team at: saferoutestoschool@sfmta.com