



JOIN THE WALKING SCHOOL BUS!

An initiative of: [Healthy Kids, Healthy Communities of Jefferson County](#)

[United Way of Central Alabama](#) | [YMCA of Greater Birmingham](#) | [Jefferson County Department of Health](#)
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What is Safe Routes to School?

In the past, most kids walked or biked to school on a regular basis. Safe Routes to School is the return to those days with an additional emphasis on safety and accessibility. A Safe Routes to School program encourages kids to be more physically active by walking, biking or skating to and from school.

Background:

- In 1969, about 50% of children walked or bicycled to school.
- Today, fewer than 15% of school children walk or bicycle to school.
- As much as 20 to 30% of morning traffic is due to parents driving their children to school.

SRTS programs can:

- Enhance children's health and well-being
- Ease traffic congestion and improve air quality near schools
- Improve community members' overall quality of life

Safe Routes to School is a national and international movement to create safe, convenient and fun opportunities for children to bicycle or walk to and from school. Safe Routes to School programs are built on collaborative partnerships between students, parents, educators, elected officials, engineers, business and community leaders, and health officials. The ultimate goal of Safe Routes to School is to give more children the opportunity to safely bicycle and walk to school each day.

What is a Walking School Bus?

Walking School Buses are part of the Safe Routes to School program and provide a fun, convenient and safe way for kids to walk to school. A group of children under the supervision of one or more adults walk to school. That may sound simple, and that is part of the appeal. It can be as informal as two families taking turns walking their children to school or as structured as a planned route with meeting points, a timetable and a schedule with trained volunteers.

Benefits:

- Children learn pedestrian safety with adult guidance and supervision.
- Children are physically active, and arrive at school alert and on time.
- Parents save on gas as well as meet other families in the neighborhood.
- Schools and communities benefit by reducing traffic congestion and air pollution.

Health Benefits of Walking to School

Children today are not getting enough physical activity and this contributes to growing rates of obesity and obesity-related health problems, such as diabetes. Safe Routes to School programs are focused on making it safer for more children to walk and bicycle to school. Youth who walk or bicycle to school are more physically active, are more likely to be a healthy weight and meet physical activity guidelines than youth who are bused or driven to school. By increasing the physical activity levels among children, the Safe Routes to School program can play a critical role in reversing the childhood obesity epidemic facing our community.

Academic Benefits of Walking to School

Study after study has shown that physically active children perform better academically. School aged children who have opportunities to engage in physical activity are more likely to focus on academic subjects while in the classroom, have better concentration, and better classroom behavior. Supporting active and safe transportation to and from school provides an opportunity to increase daily physical activity and to reinforce positive health and academic outcomes among youth.

Community Benefits of Walking to School

Neighborhoods are becoming increasingly clogged with traffic. By increasing the number of children walking and bicycling, Safe Routes to School projects can reduce traffic congestion in the community. Besides reducing traffic, Safe Routes to School projects aim to educate students, parents and residents on traffic and pedestrian safety, work with the local police to enforce speed limits, and make infrastructure improvements, such as installing signs, crosswalks or lighting.

Walking School Bus Success Stories

The programs below show real-life examples of successful walking school bus programs across the county.

In response to the Columbia school district cutting bus routes to save on transportation cost, the PedNet Coalition launched the Walking School Bus program in 2005. They started with 4 routes and 30 kids, but now have over 400 routes and 435 kids participating in 2010. Parent volunteers are big cheerleaders of the program. "It's healthier for them to walk," says parent Melissa Clark. Her 4th grade daughter, Nia, comes to school more alert and less grouchy. Nia calls it recess before school.

Parents at C.P. Smith Elementary school started a Walking School Bus program in March 2005 as part of a Safe Routes to School program. Kids were already walking to school along a congested highway, and parents wanted to make it safer. Now students walk with trained parent volunteers along the major roadway picking up students and parents along the way.



Training Volunteers

As the program starts, groups of children, led by a trained and background checked Walking School Bus leader will walk to school on a predetermined route. Interested volunteers will complete a training course and also have a background check.

Volunteers will be trained on the following topics:

- Pedestrian Safety
- Schedules, Cancellations & Inclement weather policies
- Behavior & Disciplinary policies
- Communication Procedures with parents

Safety

Residents of communities today struggle with motor vehicles clogging roads, motor vehicle emissions that pollute the environment, and more children engaging in less physical activity and growing overweight. The implications of SRTS can be far-reaching. Safe Routes programs can improve safety not just for children, but for a community of pedestrians and bicyclists. They provide opportunities for people to become more physically active and to rely less on their cars. Programs benefit the environment and a community's quality of life by reducing traffic congestion and motor vehicle emissions. As programs like Safe Routes to School (SRTS) have developed, some have wondered if encouraging walking and bicycling to school may increase a school's liability exposure.

In general, the answer is no. In fact, SRTS programs are designed to help schools and communities identify and address potential safety concerns. Taking concrete steps to make walking and bicycling safer will reduce the likelihood of injury, and thereby minimize exposure to liability.

Frequency of the Program

Walking School buses will operate every Wednesday (“Walking Wednesdays”) through November 16th. Buses will pick up students and arrive at school before breakfast. When your child registers for the program, you will receive a letter with additional information and a phone call from your Walking School Bus leader.

Responsibilities of the Parents/Students

1. Only registered children may participate in the Walking School Bus program.
2. Each Walking School Bus will be led by a trained adult leader, who has undergone a criminal background check.
3. Children must be at their designated Walk Stop and ready to walk at the scheduled time.
4. If your child is not at the Walk Stop at the scheduled time and we have not received a phone call or a message from you, your leader will continue with the other children.
5. Children must obey all instructions given by their Walking School Bus leader. In particular, children must walk (not run), must stay on the sidewalk, and must not “horse around.”
6. Children who do not follow instructions or who endanger themselves or others will be reported and may be suspended from the program.
7. Under adverse weather conditions, the Walking School Bus will be cancelled and the leader will telephone each participating family before the scheduled departure time.
8. Adverse weather conditions include:
 - Cold weather below 35 degrees
 - Rain hard enough to wet children’s clothes
 - Severe weather warnings
9. I will not hold United Way of Central Alabama, YMCA of Greater Birmingham, Jefferson County Department of Health, Regional Planning Commission of Greater Birmingham, staff or volunteers liable for any accidents or injuries.
10. Photographs of the children may be used in promotional materials.

For more information visit www.uwca.org/health or email saferoutes@uwca.org

