

# Walking School Bus Action Kit



**SafeRoutes**  
Alaska Safe Routes to School



# Table of Contents

Introduction .....	3
How to Organize WSB .....	4
Registration Letter .....	5
Leader Introduction to Parent Letter .....	6
Walking School Bus Program Policies .....	7
Student Behavior Contract .....	8
Leader Policies and Responsibilities Contract .....	9, 10
Volunteer Leader Application .....	11
Game Ideas to Play During the Walk .....	12



Adapted with permission from Pima County—Tucson Safe Routes to School



# Walking School Bus Action Kit

The Alaska Department of Transportation and Safe Routes to School has adapted the Pima County—Tucson Safe Routes to School’s Walking School Bus Challenge to make it Alaska friendly. This Action Kit is purely an *informational* guide to help you start thinking about whether a Walking School Bus program is a good idea at your school.

If you are interested in starting a WSB in your community or learning more about the program, contact the Alaska SRTS State Coordinator at (907) 465-4069.

## What is a Walking School Bus?

A Walking School Bus is a group of students with one or more “driver” adults who accompany them to and/or from school. The driver need not be a parent. Some Walking School Bus programs recruit senior citizens, college students, or other community volunteers. We recommend that all volunteers should receive background checks and be trained in safety procedures.

The Walking School Bus can have pre-determined designated “bus” stops and a published time schedule just like a school bus, or the Walking School Bus participants can determine the route together. Children can be picked up at their homes or at a designated “bus” stop. Participants can also choose to meet as one group at a central location, like a park or a community/shopping center. A meeting time will need to be pre-arranged.

We recommend that you have at least one adult for 6-8 children, depending on the age. For children 10 or older, fewer adults may be needed. If children are ages 4-6, one adult per three children is recommended.

## What is a Bike Train?

A Bike Train is like a Walking School Bus except that everyone rides bicycles. Bike trains are recommended for children 9 or 10 and up, or for those riding attached bicycles with parents. We recommend a greater ratio of adults to children for a Bike Train, especially if there are younger children involved. Children should have a bike in good working order that is appropriate for their size. Adults and children should wear a helmet. It is important that adults do not let children ride ahead or fall behind.



# How to Organize a Walking School Bus

## Recruiting Volunteers

Put out a notice in your school newsletter for parents willing to walk or bike with a group of children. In addition, you can find parents who already walk or bike with their own children and ask them if they would be willing to take a group of children. If you are organizing a Walking School Bus in your own neighborhood, call parents who live near you either through using the school directory or by using your own list of contacts. You can also recruit volunteers from a local seniors group, college students, or a local church group. Advertise in their newsletter or make a presentation to their group. Volunteers will need to be trained by the Coordinator before leading any buses. Contact the Alaska SRTS State Coordinator (907-465-4069) to receive training materials.

## Determine the Routes

It is best to determine the “bus” routes after children have already signed up. Using the list of students already interested, you can then map the routes so that a “bus” will either pick the children up at their houses or at a designated stop as near to their house as possible. Spend a weekend day walking or biking the routes you have chosen for the buses and timing how long it takes to get to each stop. Also, be careful to note any safety concerns and establish how these will be handled. For instance, if there is no sidewalk on part of the route, children will need to walk single file with an adults in the front and at the back. Report any safety concerns to your Walking School Bus organizer.

It is best to choose routes that minimize the number of streets that you must cross. If available, choose routes that have good sidewalks or pathways, even if that means creating a longer route. Use crosswalks and controlled intersections (one with a stop sign or traffic light) when they are available.

## Create Route Maps

Create a map that shows the route and a schedule for meeting up with the Walking School Bus. Be sure to mark the “bus” stops on the map. Indicate how long the “bus” will wait for students at each stop—don’t wait more than a couple of minutes. Send home the maps and schedules of your Walking School Buses. Let people know what days the buses will operate and invite them to join in, if they haven’t already. As the program becomes more popular, you can add additional routes/“bus” stops to accommodate more children. Establish children’s responsibilities: behavior, tardiness, obeying traffic rules. Be sure to have at least 2 volunteers for each bus. Arrange a schedule and have back up people available. Make sure that the volunteers understand that it is their responsibility to show up on time and to let the coordinator know ahead of time if they cannot lead the bus on their shift.

## Safety First

Large groups of children are very visible and therefore provide a greater measure of safety than children walking alone. Children are more apt to obey traffic laws in a group with adult supervision. Instruct the children in basic traffic safety rules on the first trip together and repeat these rules often. You can even make a game out of it. We advise that you wear bright clothing and create a way to identify your group and make it visible. Increasing your group’s visibility also may be an opportunity to do something festive (like balloons or hats). You might want to use special vests or sashes. If you have a large group of children, break up into smaller groups, each with the adult supervision, and be sure not to let children run ahead or lag behind.

## Weather, Heavy Backpacks, and Other Impediments

If there is a particularly bad storm, you might want to convert to a carpool. Try to consult with participating parents before canceling or altering the bus.

You can bring a wagon along to carry school projects and even backpacks. Decorate your wagon to make it more festive. If you are riding bikes, someone can pull a bike trailer or you can outfit the bikes with panniers or other bike packs.

# School Letterhead

23 August, 2012

Re: WALKING SCHOOL BUS FALL PROGRAM  
Monday, September 10th—Friday, November 16th

Dear Parent,

We have exciting news!

\_\_\_\_\_ Elementary School is about to launch a Walking School Bus program. A Walking School Bus (WSB) is a group of children who walk to school together under the supervision of a trained adult leader (e.g. a parent or college student). The program promotes good health, a cleaner environment, and reduced traffic around school.

To participate in the program, please read the notes below, complete and sign the registration form at the bottom of the page, and return it to \_\_\_\_\_ by \_\_\_\_\_.

**Notes:**

- \* The program starts on Monday, September 10th and finished on Friday, November 16th.
- \* Your WSB Team can choose its own name and may wish to make a flag to carry.
- \* Your WSB Team may operate every morning and every afternoon, or less often—for example, only in the morning or on certain days, etc., as the schedules of the WSB Leaders allow.
- \* To be trained as a WSB Leader, please contact \_\_\_\_\_. At least one trained WSB Leader will be assigned for each morning and afternoon the WSB operates.
- \* WSB safety information will be provided to every participating family.

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## Registration Form

Name of child: \_\_\_\_\_ Grade: \_\_\_\_\_  
Name of child: \_\_\_\_\_ Grade: \_\_\_\_\_  
Name of child: \_\_\_\_\_ Grade: \_\_\_\_\_  
Name of parent: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone #: \_\_\_\_\_  
Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
Email Address: \_\_\_\_\_

*\* I give permission for my child(ren) to participate in the Walking School Bus program and to be photographed for promotional purposes.*

*\* I will not hold the staff, administrators, or volunteers at \_\_\_\_\_ Elementary School responsible for accidents or injuries involving my child(ren).*

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

# School Letterhead

23 August, 2012

Re: WALKING SCHOOL BUS FALL PROGRAM  
Monday, September 10th—Friday, November 16th

Dear Parent,

We are very pleased that you have registered your child(ren) for the Walking School Bus program. On the reverse side of this letter, you will find a reminder of our policies and a “Safety Card” is enclosed. One of your designated WSB volunteer leaders (all of whom have received our training and passed a criminal background check) will be calling you soon to introduce him/herself and answer any questions you may have.

Leader name: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Days: \_\_\_\_\_

Leader name: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Days: \_\_\_\_\_

Your child(ren) is/are schedule to be picked up by the WSB as shown below:

Location: \_\_\_\_\_

Time: \_\_\_\_\_

Here are a few reminders:

- The program starts on Monday, September 10th.
- Be sure to have your child at the specified location on time.
- Call the WSB central phone line (\_\_\_\_\_) if you need to cancel.
- Please review our weather cancellation policy.
- Send a water bottle with your child if it is warm.

We are also encouraging parents to walk with the group one day per week. Please let your WSB leader know if you can accompany your child on certain days.

If you have any questions regarding the program, please don't hesitate to call me. Thanks again for participating.

Sincerely,

\_\_\_\_\_  
Walking School Bus Coordinator

## WALKING SCHOOL BUS PROGRAM POLICIES

1. Only registered children may participate in the WSB program.
2. Each WSB 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 on with the other children.
5. Children must obey all instructions given by their WSB 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 WSB will be cancelled and the leader will telephone each participating family by \_\_\_\_\_ AM.
8. Adverse weather conditions include:
9. Families will not hold \_\_\_\_\_, or its staff or volunteers responsible for any accidents or injuries.
10. Photographs of the children may be used in promotional materials.

## Walking School Bus

### Student Behavior Contract

- ◇ I want to walk or bike with the Walking/Biking School Bus.
- ◇ I agree to listen to the adults at all times.
- ◇ I agree to wear my helmet while riding my bike, skateboard, rollerblades, or scooter.
- ◇ I agree to stay with the group at all times and not drag behind or run ahead.
- ◇ I agree to respect other students, adults, and myself.
- ◇ I agree to respect other people's property, such as their yards or cars.
- ◇ I will be on time.
- ◇ I understand that if I cannot behave responsibly, I will be asked to not walk or bike with the School Bus in the future.
- ◇ I have signed my name on the line below. By signing, I understand and agree to follow the rules above.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

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- ◇ I have signed my name on the line below. By signing, I understand and agree to follow the rules above.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

## WSB Leader Policies and Responsibilities

### Introduction:

Thank you very much for agreeing to be a volunteer Walking School Bus Leader.

The Walking School Bus (WSB) program is a fun, safe, and effective way to provide children opportunities for:

- Daily physical exercise;
- Engagement with caring adults outside the family;

Social interaction with peers.

As a WSB Leader, you will be providing an invaluable service to the children in your team. To insure the success of the program and the safety of the children, we ask you to agree to carry out the following responsibilities and uphold the following policies:

### General Responsibilities:

1. Before the program, you will complete the WSB Leader Training/Orientation and agree to a criminal background check.
2. By Friday, September 7, you or your partner will telephone each family on your route to introduce yourself, confirm the pick-up time and location for their child(ren), and answer any questions they may have. If children will only walk on certain days, make a note when to expect those children.
3. On your designated mornings, you will walk the designated route (typically 1 mile) at the designated time (typically, between 8:00 and 8:30 am), collect children at the designated Walk Stops and deliver them safely to school.
4. On the first morning of the program and at regular intervals, you will emphasize the importance of road safety to the children, and review the points on the yellow Safety Card.
5. Throughout the program, you or your partner will lead a Walking School Bus Team of 5-10 children to school every day according to the WSB Leader rotation.

### Tracking Policies:

Each day, you will:

- Record which kids walked;
- Note any good or bad occurrences.

Each Friday after completing the walk to school, you will:

Call or email the WSB Coordinator ( \_\_\_\_\_ ) to give your weekly report.

**Safety Policies (see yellow Safety Card for details)**

As the WSB Leader, it is your responsibility to be extremely visible to motorists. Please wear bright outerwear every day.

Here are the six safety rules to apply to your team of children

- \* Walk, don't run
- \* Stay on the sidewalk
- \* Walk sensibly (no "horsing around")
- \* Walk together as a group
- \* Cross side streets as a group
- \* Cross main streets at a crosswalk or intersection

If a child fails to follow safety rules:

First Offence: Warning and phone call to parents

Second Offence: Suspension for one week

Third Offence: Expulsion from program

As a Leader, you may use discretion if offences are minor. Please inform WSB Coordinator of any problems.

**Cancellation/Absenteeism Policies:**

Bad Weather: The WSB Coordinator (not the Leaders) will cancel the WSB program if:

- \* Temperature is below 25 degrees;
- \* It is raining hard enough to wet children's clothes;
- \* There is a severe weather warning in the area.

In these cases, the WSB Coordinator will telephone all WSB Leaders before 7:15 a.m. You (the WSB Leader) will then telephone all families on your route before 7:30 a.m.

Illness or Other Conflict: If you (the scheduled WSB Leader) are ill or otherwise unavailable:

- \* Telephone your partner and try to make a trade:
- \* Telephone the WSB Coordinator (\_\_\_\_\_).

Please give as much notice as possible.

Child Fails to Show Up at Walk Stop: If a child is ill or otherwise unable to walk, the child's family should call the WSB Coordinator who will then telephone you. If a child fails to show at the Walk Stop without prior notice, please wait 1-2 minutes and then continue to school. After delivering the other children safely to school, please telephone the family to inform them you did not pick up their child.

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Name: \_\_\_\_\_

**"I agree to uphold the policies of the WSB Program and carry out the responsibilities of the WSB Leader."**

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

# WALKING SCHOOL BUS PROGRAM

## Volunteer Leader Application

**Thank you for your interest in becoming a WSB Volunteer Leader. Please complete this form and mail it to:**

*Coordinator name*

*School name*

*Street address*

*City, state, zip*

**If you have any questions, please contact:** \_\_\_\_\_ **at:** \_\_\_\_\_

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Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Home phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Work phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Cell phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Email address: \_\_\_\_\_

For criminal background check: SSN: \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Birth: \_\_\_\_\_

Please give a brief summary of your experience (if any) working with children: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Program starts Monday September 13 and ends Friday November 19. Please list dates you will be unavailable:

\_\_\_\_\_

Please check the times you will be available to walk children to school:

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Mornings (8:00 - 9:00 a.m.)					
Afternoons (3:00 – 4:00 p.m.)					

We will schedule a one-hour training and complete a background check for all volunteers in the WSB program. Signing this form indicates your approval of the process. Thank you for your cooperation.

Signature of Applicant

Date

# Having Fun on the Walking School Bus

**Fun games to play while walking and help keep the group together:**

Eye Spy - I see something you don't see and the color is \_\_\_\_\_.

Animal Game - I'm thinking of an animal that \_\_\_\_\_ (describe details about the animal) and have the kids guess.

"I'm going on a Walk/Picnic and I'm taking a \_\_\_\_\_" - use the letters of the alphabet, A-Z.

Letter of the day: find 10 or 20 things on the way to school that start with the letter \_\_\_\_\_ (challenge competition between Leader and children).

Count the number of cars with just one person in (educational point about inefficient transportation system).

**Other ideas to keep everyone happy:**

Name your Walking School Bus team.

Make and decorate a flag to carry on the walks.

Have a theme day - sports team, school colors/spirit, etc.

Find a sponsor to pay for some t-shirts to be printed and designate Friday as "Walking School Bus t-shirt day."

Have a favorite color day or a hat day.

Think of your own creative ideas.