



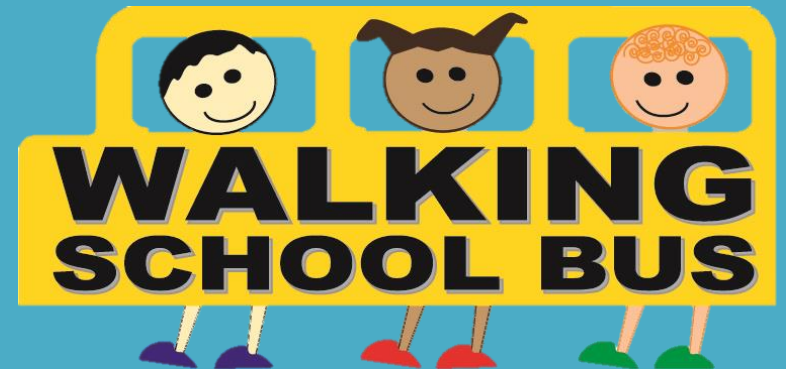
SIouxLAND

COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

WALKING SCHOOL BUS

PROGRAM

A user's guide for planning and implementing a walking school bus program.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

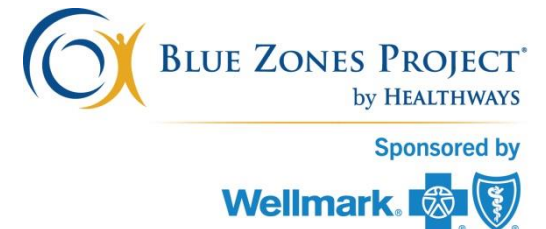
This document was created by Kathryn Pfaffle of Siouxland Interstate Metropolitan Planning Council, Angela Drent of Siouxland District Health Department, Kelli Tuttle of the Sioux City Community School District, and Kylie McCarthy of The Blue Zones Project®. It was released in February of 2015. Kathie, Angela, Kelli, and Kylie would like to thank the members of the Walking School Bus Committee for their time and commitment to the walking school bus program. Cover photo by Michelle Bostinelos.



SERGEANT BLUFF-LUTON
COMMUNITY SCHOOLS



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BACKGROUND

Development of the Sioux City Walking School Bus program began as a component of the transportation bill SAFETEA-LU's Safe Routes to School Program. The Siouxland Area's Metropolitan Planning Organization, Siouxland Interstate Metropolitan Planning Council, is the regional agency that oversees implementation of transportation bill provisions. As a member of the Leadership Siouxland Class of 2009, SIMPCO Transportation Director Michelle Bostinelos brought forward the idea of implementing the area's first walking school bus. Sunnyside Elementary served as the pilot school.

In the spring of 2013, the Siouxland District Health Department (SDHD) secured \$4850 in grant funding to help with the costs associated with starting a walking school bus program at two schools, Liberty and Irving Elementary. To help with the planning and implementation, a coalition was formed between Sioux City School District, Siouxland District Health Department, IPHA AmeriCorps HealthCorps, Siouxland Interstate Metropolitan Planning Council (SIMPCO), the City of Sioux City, and the Blue Zones Project®.

In May of 2013, The Blue Zones Project® started their health initiative program in Sioux City. One of their main focuses was walking school bus programs, so they then joined the coalition. In the fall of 2013, Spalding Park Elementary School joined the Sioux City Walking School Bus program, making for 3 schools involved in the program. In the spring of 2014, 7 new schools were added, making for a total of 10 schools participating in the program. The elementary schools in the Sergeant Bluff-Luton school district also participated in the spring of 2014. In the fall of 2014, 10 total schools participated, including the new Loess Hills Elementary school.



Fall 2013: Spalding Park Elementary Walking School Bus.

Photo by Kathie Pfaffle.

STARTING A PROGRAM AT YOUR SCHOOL

Starting a walking school bus program at your school is easy. Each school will need a walking school bus champion, or a walking school bus program leader. In the past this has been a parent, PTO/PTA member, physical education teachers, retired teachers, and school faculty and staff. Once this person has been identified, a volunteer base will need to be formed. Schools have used faculty and staff, PTO/PTA, volunteer parents, local businesses who have established relationships with the school, neighborhood churches, and high school and college students. A parent interest survey helps with identifying potential parent volunteers, walking school bus routes, and stops.

Data from the parent interest surveys, faculty knowledge of where students tend to walk from, and maps of where the entire student body lives, are all used to determine the walking school bus route and stops. Once potential routes and stops are identified they are evaluated by health and transportation planners from Siouxland District Health Department and SIMPCO. The planners look at things like sidewalk condition, presence or absence of curb ramps, amount of traffic, visibility, among other issues that may be associated with walking or biking along those routes. After the route and stops have been identified and evaluated, they are timed to determine when students will arrive at and depart from the stops in order to get to school at the designated time.

Walking school bus programs provide a safe and monitored route for students to get to school, while also incorporating more physical activity into their days, and allowing them to spend more time with their schoolmates.

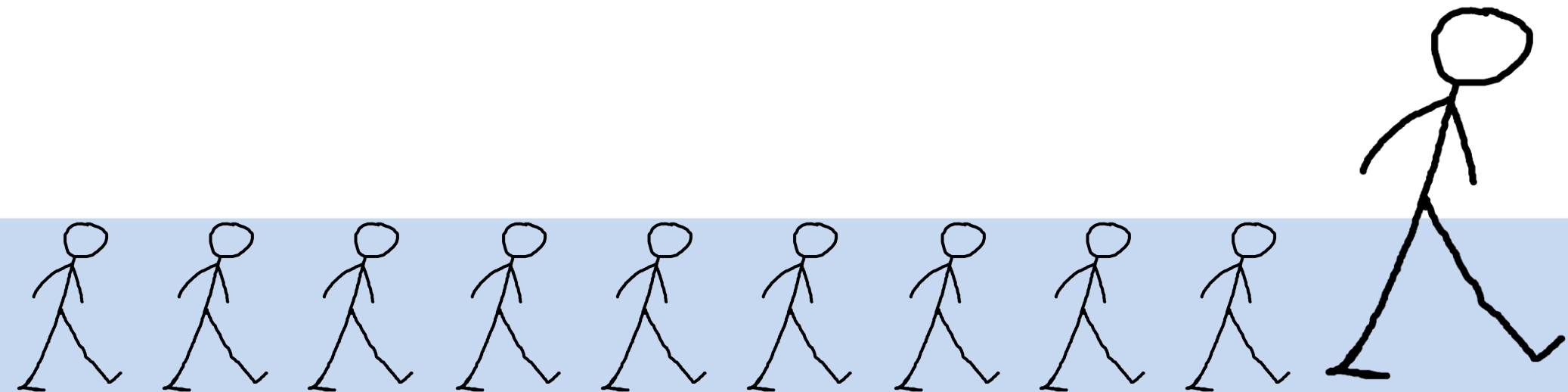
STARTING A PROGRAM AT YOUR SCHOOL CONTINUED

The length and frequency of the programs in Sioux City vary. Most schools will walk for 6-8 weeks, one day a week. Some schools have entitled the program “Walking Wednesdays”, for example. One school has their program every day over numerous weeks at a time. Finding what works best for your school is the key. Some schools have student bodies that do not have bussing service, and in this case it is beneficial to have programs that are more frequent during the week and for larger portions of the semester. Some schools have student bodies that are driven to school most days, so a weekly program may be best for those.

On the day of the actual walking school bus, volunteers and students gather at their preselected stops, and then walk as a guided group along the route to the next stops. At each stop, the group gathers more students and volunteers, and eventually all those who are participating arrive together at school. It provides a safe and monitored route for students to get to school, while also incorporating more physical activity into their days, and allowing them to spend more time with their schoolmates.

Planning resources and materials, including this document, for setting up your school’s walking school bus program can be found at [Live Healthy Siouxland's Website](#), under the Youth Wellness tab. There will be an annual winter training, hosted by SDHD, SIMPCO, and the SCCSD. This will provide an opportunity for:

- Champions to meet with and get one-on-one training from the Walking School Bus Working Group
- Champions to share successes and learn about other programs
- Champions to ask other champions questions

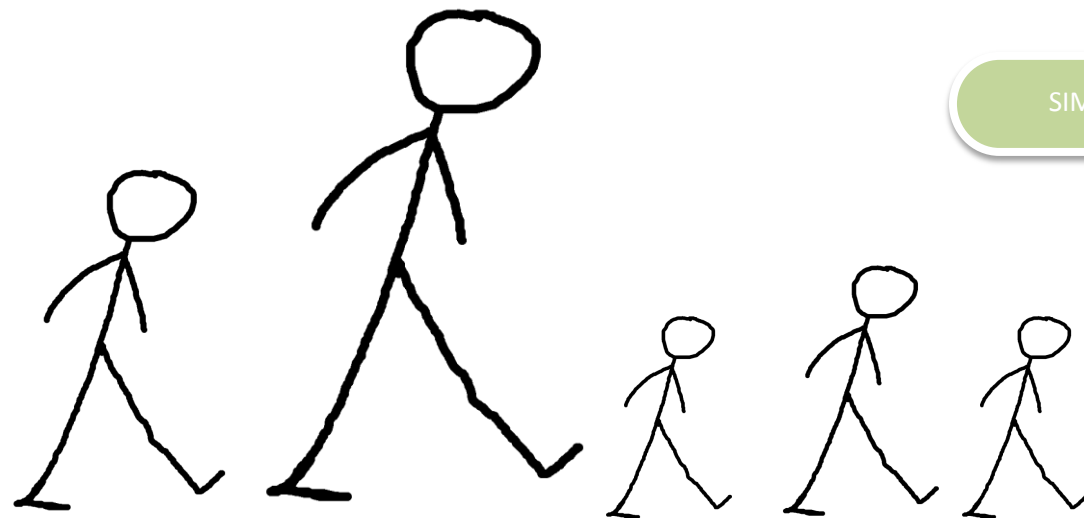
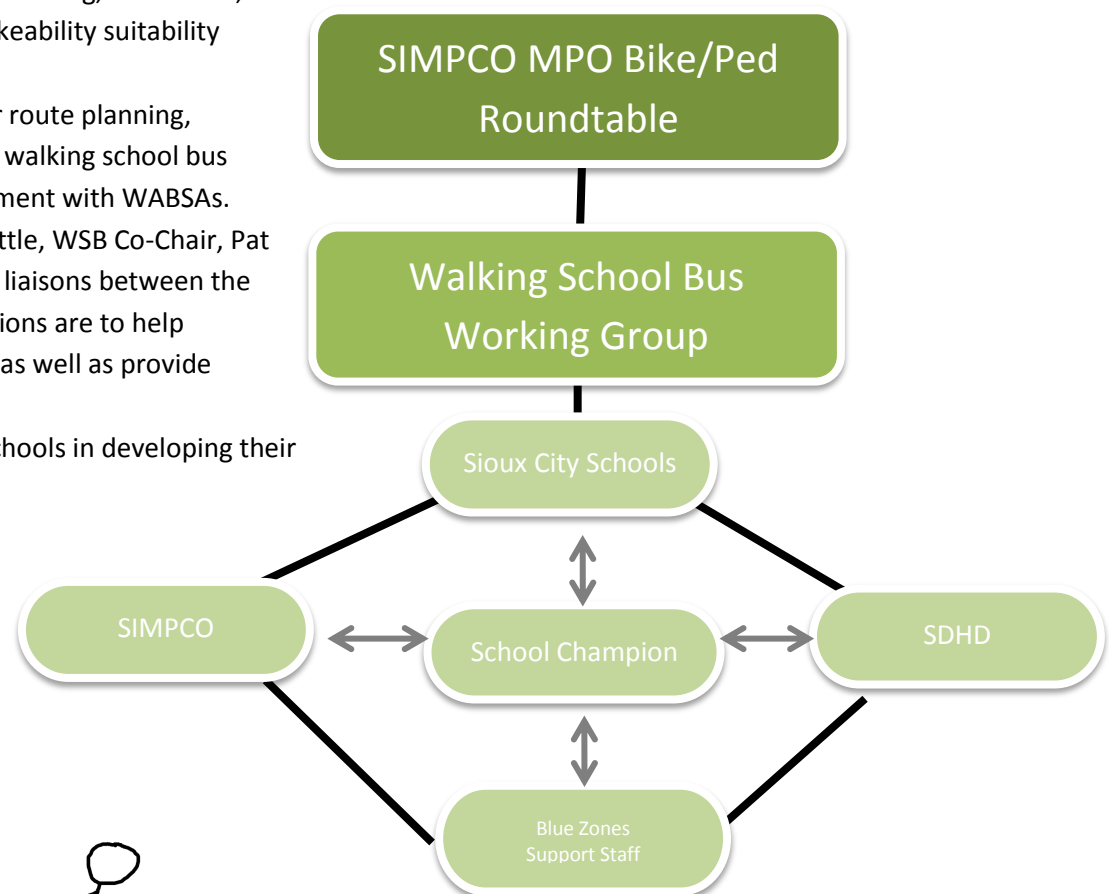


PROGRAM STRUCTURE

The Walking School Bus Working Group will be housed inside of the SIMPCO MPO Bicycle and Pedestrian Roundtable, which is a group of local leaders that works on active transportation projects and policy. The intent of the working group is to ensure that all walking school bus programs are set up for success and sustainability. This means that after the initial set up of the program at a school, all information and materials can be passed on to the champion without program interruption. It is crucial that the schools form relationships with champions and volunteers, and vice versa, to foster a program that is able to sustain itself throughout the coming years.

The organizations' roles in the walking school bus program are outlined below:

- Siouxland District Health Department (SDHD): Route planning, evaluation, and timing. Able to perform formal walkability and bikeability suitability assessments (WABSAs).
- SIMPCO: Evaluation of parent interest survey data for route planning, evaluation, and timing. Mapping of student body and walking school bus route and stops. Aid Siouxland District Health Department with WABSAs.
- Sioux City Community School District (SCCSD): Kelli Tuttle, WSB Co-Chair, Pat Tobin, Arts and Community Engagement Coordinator, liaisons between the district and the WSB Working Group. These two positions are to help promote the program internally at the school district, as well as provide support for the other two organizations.
- All three of these groups work together and can aid schools in developing their WSB programs.



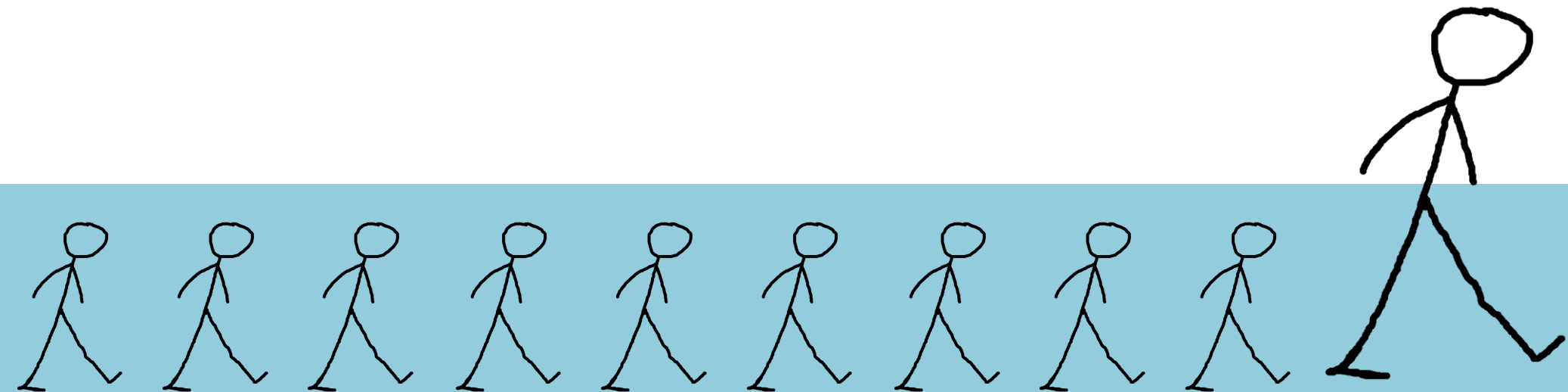
THE WALKING SCHOOL BUS CHAMPION

The walking school bus champion is the person who is responsible for coordinating and marketing a school's walking school bus program. The champion serves as the liaison between the school administration and those families/students that are participating in the walking school bus program.

Identifying a Walking School Bus Champion

Finding a champion for your school's walking school bus program is one of the most important components to the program's success. There must be someone who works closely with the school to be the advocate and organizer of the program. Often principals or parents have an idea of who could be a potential champion, but if you are having difficulty identifying a champion, below are some steps that may aid you in finding your school's walking school bus champion.

- Think about what organizations support your school. Is there anyone associated with one of these groups who is motivated and organized and may be a good at rallying for your program?
 - Is your PTO/PTA very involved? Do they support activities outside of school hours?
 - Do you have a partner business or church that frequently volunteers for your school?
 - Are there certain members of the community who volunteer for your school?
 - Are there any retired teachers who still have a strong bond with your school?
 - Is one of your teachers a big proponent of active and healthy living?
- If you answered yes to any of the previous questions, start with that/those particular person(s). If you can think of more than one person, contact all of them. It is possible and okay to have 2-3 people working together as walking school bus co-champions who each have a subset of the champion tasks and duties.

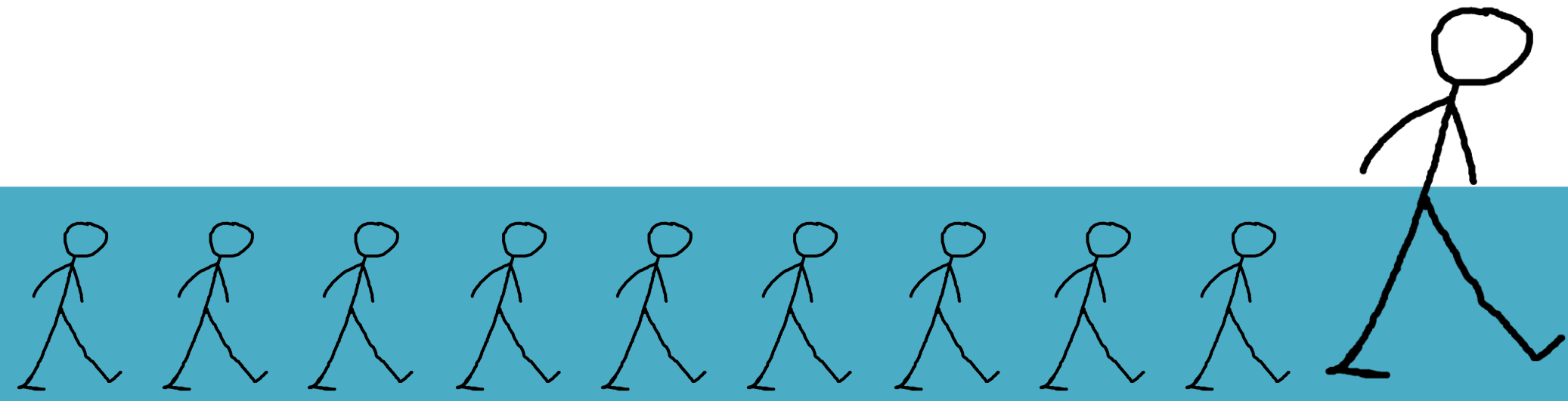


THE WALKING SCHOOL BUS CHAMPION CONTINUED

Walking School Bus Champion Responsibilities

1. Work with school staff to start and/or support the walking school bus program.
 - a. Discuss the program with the PTO/PTA, principals, assistant principals, physical education teachers.
2. New schools will likely need to meet with SDHD and SIMPCO to get information, identify and evaluate possible routes, and develop a timeline for collecting registration and consent forms.
3. Reach out to families that may or may not be living near school.
 - a. Discuss with them the potential to have their children walk to school with the walking school bus, what their barriers are, where they would like to see a route.
4. Recruit and coordinate adult volunteers to walk with children.
 - a. See the Walking School Bus Volunteer Guide on page 11.
5. Assign kids and volunteers to bus stops.
 - a. Use the Bus Stop Check-in Form to categorize students by the stop they have signed up for.
6. Monitor the program's progress by recording metrics and reporting them to the walking school bus working group (walkingschoolbus.scia@gmail.com).
7. Add additional routes to the program, as needed.
 - a. Work with SDHD and SIMPCO to identify and evaluate possible routes.
8. Evaluate progress at the end of school year with a post survey from involved families.
 - a. See the "Year-end survey" document. Change any text to format to your school.

Note: The site coordinator is NOT expected to walk to and from school with these groups, only to educate and encourage the formation of the walking school bus.



THE WALKING SCHOOL BUS VOLUNTEER GUIDE

Securing volunteers for the Walking School Bus program is crucial to its success. The number of volunteers needed will vary, depending on number of participating students and the number of bus stops. It will be at the school principal's discretion to determine whether or not background checks will be required for these individuals. Background checks are free and available in the school front office.

Volunteers can be found within the school's primary network. Parents are an excellent resource for volunteers. A few ways to connect with parents can be with the initial walking survey (if utilized), at parent teacher conferences, or at a PTA/PTO meeting. Faculty may be interested in volunteering for the program, and would not require background checks. Volunteers can also be secured from community supporters such as nearby churches, neighborhood organizations, or community partners.

METRICS TRACKING

Keeping track of student and volunteer participation is an important part of this program, as it creates data that can be used for grant applications and other uses. Tracking of this will be done via a Google Form that can be found at http://bit.ly/sciawsb_participation. Instructions are detailed in the Form.

Tracking Student Participation

The best way to track student participation is by number of miles walked. This is because instead having to keep track of each student and when they walked and from which stop, we can remove the need for such specific data tracking. As long as the number of students is tallied for each stop, by week, the number of miles can be calculated. This will be done in this google form at the end of the program.

Tracking Volunteer Participation

The best way to track volunteer participation is by number of volunteers each walking day. It has been decided that one volunteer's time, each day, is equal to 1 hour. So, if there are 4 volunteers on a day, there are 4 volunteer hours. The number of volunteers for each day will be tallied for the entire semester and then entered into the end of the above google form.

CHECKLISTS

☐ Possible participation incentives

- ☐ Extra recess time
- ☐ A special Walking School Bus student recess
- ☐ Some kind of event at field day, like pie in the face, or race your principal
- ☐ Long Lines rock climbing wall or pool passes
- ☐ Extra reading time
- ☐ Local gift certificates donated by businesses
- ☐ Bike from Siouxland Cyclists
- ☐ Rotating golden sneaker for classroom with most participants each week
- ☐ PE teacher/principal made smoothies for breakfast with participants

☐ Items needed for day of walking

- ☐ Volunteer roster/sign in sheet, divided by stop.
- ☐ Student roster/ sign in sheet, divided by stop.
- ☐ Supply bag
- ☐ WSB signs/cutouts
- ☐ Safety vests
- ☐ Clipboard and pens
- ☐ 1st-aid kit
- ☐ Extra registration forms
- ☐ Incidence forms

FALL WALKING SCHOOL BUS TIMELINE

- **Early to mid-summer:**

- Current programs: Champion should contact SDHD and SIMPCO with any new routing that needs to be done.
- New programs: Champion should contact SDHD and SIMPCO to discuss the new program.

- **Back to School Day:**

- Set up booth and have WSB flyers.
- If available, show the semester's routes whether they are the same from last year, or tentative new routes. SDHD and SIMPCO will help with the routing of this, and SIMPCO will make the map PDFs that will be sent to the champion/principal/PTA/PTO to print.
- Have parent volunteer signup sheets.

- **First few weeks of school:**

- If you are just starting your program, send out the interest survey to identify possible routes and potential parent volunteers.
- Hang up the laminated Walking School Bus signs that have the start dates.

- **At a professional development meeting, request 5 minutes of time to present the WSB video.**

- **Conferences:**

- Set up booth and have WSB flyers.
- Routes should be solidified at this time, so have maps of the routes.
- Have parent volunteer signup sheets.
- Have student signup sheets.

- **2-3 weeks before start date:**

- Depending on when your program is set to start, you should send out registration forms that includes the routes map.
- Email volunteers details on walk dates, arrival times, route and stop map/locations, and the walking school bus policies and procedures.

- **2-3 days before start date:**

- If you have chosen a bus pass mechanism, send out whatever that mechanism is you have chosen for signing in, whether it is a lanyard with the bus pass, or a laminated bus pass with a zip tie for coats/backpacks, or something else.
- Send out flyer that is reminding parents of the start date and stop arrival times.
- Gather necessary bus stop supplies (see page 6).
- Print volunteer rosters and sign-in sheets, student rosters and sign-in sheets. Divide these by bus stops and place in supply bag with other bus stop supplies.

- **Start date:**

- Meet volunteers at predesignated meeting place like the school lobby, parking lot, or nearby business.
- Check in volunteers as they arrive and provide just-in-time trainings on routes to-be-walked, stop arrival and departure times, emergency procedures, and student check-in process. Once everyone is checked in and trained, head to pre-designated stops.

SPRING WALKING SCHOOL BUS TIMELINE

- **Start dates have usually been the first week in April.**
 - **Attend the winter WSB workshop for current, future, and potential WSB champions.**
 - **First semester conferences, school fundraising or other school events, such as carnivals, book fairs, PTO/PTA sponsored events:**
 - Set up booth
 - Have WSB Flyers.
 - Routes should be solidified at this time, so have maps of the routes.
 - Have parent volunteer signup sheets.
 - Have student signup sheets.
 - **Early March:**
 - Determine start and end dates of the program, and the frequency.
 - Send home the intro flyer and/or the interest survey if your school is new, that includes routes, start and end dates and times, frequency, etc.
 - Hang up the laminated Walking School Bus signs that have the start dates.
 - **2-3 weeks before program start date:**
 - Depending on when your program is set to start, you should send out registration forms that includes the routes map.
 - Email volunteers details on walk dates, arrival times, route and stop map/locations, and the walking school bus policies and procedures.
- **2-3 days before start date:**
 - If you have chosen a bus pass mechanism, send out whatever that mechanism is you have chosen for signing in, whether it is a lanyard with the bus pass, or a laminated bus pass with a zip tie for coats/backpacks, or something else.
 - Send out flyer that is reminding parents of the start date and stop arrival times.
 - Gather necessary bus stop supplies (see page 8).
 - Print volunteer rosters and sign-in sheets, student rosters and sign-in sheets. Divide these by bus stops and place in supply bag with other bus stop supplies.
 - **Start date:**
 - Meet volunteers at predesignated meeting place like the school lobby, parking lot, or nearby business.
 - Check in volunteers as they arrive and provide just-in-time trainings on routes to-be-walked, stop arrival and departure times, emergency procedures, and student check-in process. Once everyone is checked in and trained, head to pre-designated stops.

SUMMER PREPARATION

In order for the Walking School Bus Working Group to stay abreast of each school's program from academic year to academic year, they have developed a survey for the principals to fill out. This letter will go out on June 1st from the director of elementary education.

Dear Elementary School Principals,

Thank you to those who have participated in the walking school bus program. The SCCSD Walking School Bus program has served as an effective model to many states across the nation. With your efforts, XX students walked XY miles this past year. Your continued support is appreciated and encouraged so that our students continue to have a safe and supervised walk to school while learning the importance of active and healthy lifestyles outside gymnasium walls. The program also facilitates community involvement and relationship building with staff and volunteer community members outside of the classroom. Studies have shown that students who walk to school are physically healthier, have lower stress levels, and have increased academic performance; the walking school bus program is a great way to achieve these results.

Numerous families have expressed their appreciation and approval of the walking school bus program. Comments received have ranged from increased neighborhood safety and community connectedness, to improved attendance and tardy rates, as well as the ability to have students eat a nutritious breakfast before their days begin.

I strongly encourage those who have participated in the walking school bus in the past to continue this beneficial program. For those who have not yet participated, I strongly encourage you begin to build your own program –contact walkingschoolbus.scia@gmail.com to begin. To keep me abreast of your schools' participation in the walking school bus program for the upcoming school year, please fill out the [this Google Form](#) and submit it by July 1st.

Thank you,

Brian Burnight and

Kelli Tuttle Angela Drent Kathie Pfaffle

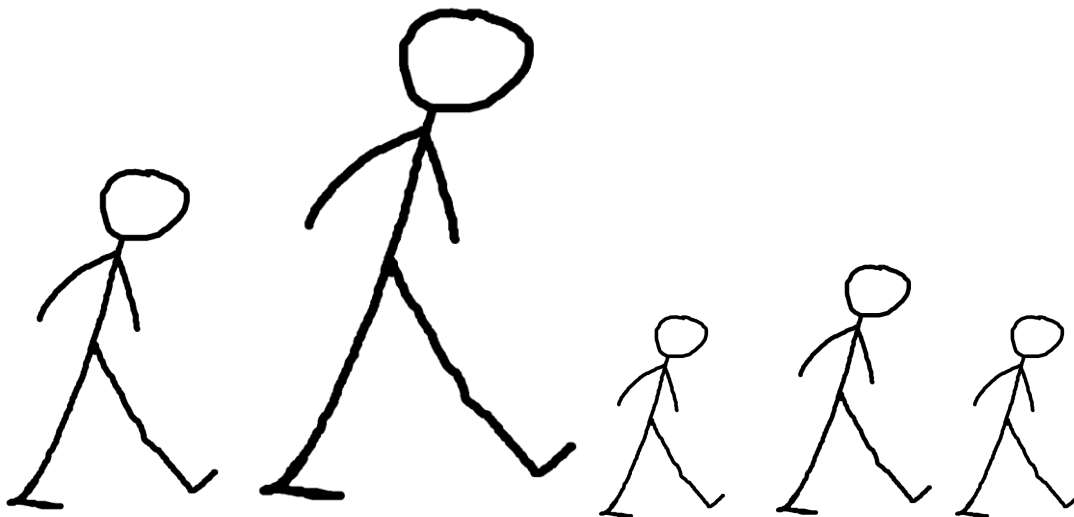
CONCLUSION

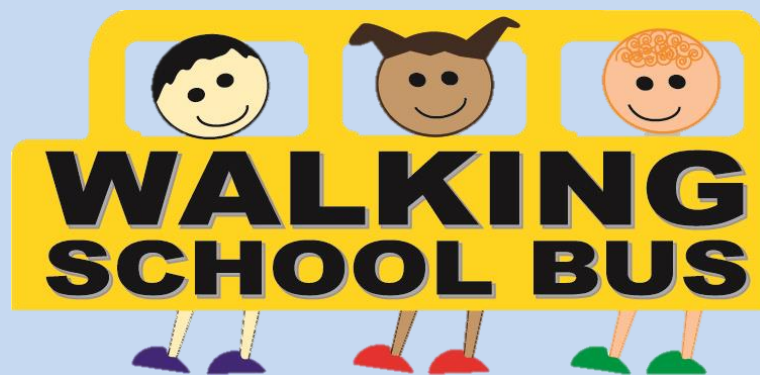
According to The Blue Zones Project®, “Research and experience have proven that children who walk to school are more alert and ready to engage in classroom learning. Children who exercise with their friends are more likely to have a better level of overall fitness. Walking school bus programs will strengthen friendships while teaching kids to be responsible pedestrians and develop lifelong fitness habits.” Walking school bus programs also facilitate community involvement and relationship building with staff and volunteer community members outside of the classroom.

The Walking School Bus Working Group encourages and supports walking school bus champions, school principals, parents, and community leaders to innovate, enhance, and optimize students’ safe and active journeys to and from school.

“Setting an example is not the main means of influencing others; it is the only means.”

–Albert Einstein





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