

# WALKING SCHOOL BUS GUIDE



## Background

### What is a Walking School Bus?

A Walking School Bus (WSB) is an organized group of students who walk to and from school with adults.

The WSB has a designated route and stops where students gather or get dropped-off near their homes or local community hubs, such as parks or places of worship.

### Who?

Volunteers and Route Leaders can be family members, teachers, or other interested community members.

After completing the training, participants will know how to:

- ★ Lead students safely along their route
- ★ Encourage families to get involved by explaining the benefits of the WSB
- ★ Know what to do when different situations arise

### How?

Continue through this guide for more details and/or contact your PTA or [schoolpool@kirklandwa.gov](mailto:schoolpool@kirklandwa.gov) for more info.

### Why?

Many families would like to walk to school but are concerned about traffic, have personal safety concerns, or may lack the time to walk with their children to school. Sharing the trip with other families:

- ★ Provides adult supervision for groups of students
- ★ Reassures parents that their children can get to school safely and on time
- ★ Builds community in the neighborhood

WSBs are a great way for students to get daily physical activity and travel to school, while having fun with their classmates. Students will:

- ★ Learn how to be “Safe Walkers”
- ★ Gain confidence exploring their communities
- ★ Protect the environment by reducing greenhouse gas emissions



# Preparation

## Defining Roles & Responsibilities

A Walking School Bus can be a structured program with a regular schedule of trained volunteers or it can be more informal, with parents or caregivers taking turns escorting children to school. For a WSB to be successful and fun, all participants have to agree to shared expectations and responsibilities.

Each WSB should have two or more volunteer adults each scheduled day, with one adult in the back and one in the front of the group. Having an additional volunteer scheduled provides back up if one volunteer is sick or cannot make.

## Route Leader Role

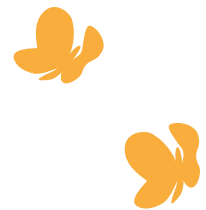
Those interested in organizing and leading a route will promote the WSB, recruit volunteers and families, and coordinate schedules. Having a designated Route Leader can help sustain the WSB, keeping families and volunteers engaged. Please refer to the Route Leader Toolkit to help you organize your route, craft a volunteer schedule, and confirm volunteers who commit to a predetermined number of trips and schedule each week.

### Route Leaders can be expected to:

- ★ Establish the route and times based on interested families.  
*TIP: Consult with city staff for walking route suggestions or concerns at [schoolpool@kirklandwa.gov](mailto:schoolpool@kirklandwa.gov)*
- ★ Create and coordinate the volunteer schedule to include when and who will volunteer to lead the WSB. (See Route Leader Toolkit forms)
- ★ Create and manage a communication plan with and amongst volunteers for scheduling purposes and in case of incidence or emergencies along the route.  
*TIP: Facebook group, email listserv and/or text group, phone or text chain. All participating students, volunteers, and Route Leaders should provide phone numbers so that they can be reached when routes or Route Leaders change, when the weather is bad, or in the event of other news that would change the routine of the bus. For updates that need to be communicated under short notice, phone calls are always best.*
- ★ Coordinate volunteer training and provide guidance about walking formations, timing, and safety. (See WSB Training)
- ★ Complete necessary paperwork as designated route leaders, provide necessary paperwork and contact information to volunteers, and respond to incidents as they arise. (See Route Leader Toolkit forms)

In addition to the Route Leader roles and expectations, please refer to the Volunteer Roles for other applicable expectations of leading and volunteering with a WSB.

Consider any school district, PTA, and/or school-affiliated volunteer requirements, such as background checks.



## Volunteer Roles

Those interested in volunteering with, but not coordinating, a WSB route should complete the appropriate sign up forms (See Volunteer Agreement Form). Having volunteers establish a commitment to a predetermined number of trips and schedule each week is suggested.

### Volunteers are expected to:

- ★ Supervise students walking the route until the group arrives at school.
- ★ Teach and model safe walking behavior for students.
- ★ Be aware of and abide by school policies regarding personal conduct.
- ★ Arrive at least 10 minutes before scheduled departure from first stop.
- ★ Let the route leader and/or fellow volunteers know if you are unable to attend, the earlier the better.
- ★ Wear a safety vest or sash with a name tag or other identifier with your role and the route identity.
- ★ Contact emergency response when necessary and provide basic first aid to the best of one's ability in event of injury.
- ★ Help create a fun, welcoming atmosphere for all students!  
*TIP: Volunteers can use creative directions or assign student jobs, such as assistant line leader or tree/wildlife spotter, to reorient students who are misbehaving.*

## Student Participation Policy

For everyone's safety, participating students must be well-behaved and comply with the Route Leader and volunteers' instructions. Students and parents should read and sign the Family/Parental Agreement Form and Student Agreement Form. Establishing a participation policy for students can help to provide clear expectations and guide students to follow rules such as:

- ★ Walk according to the rules, with one route leader walking in front of the participants and one behind.
- ★ Stop and wait for instructions before crossing the street.
- ★ Follow directions and "look left, look right, look left" when crossing the street.
- ★ Always walk and never run at any time.
- ★ Stay within the crosswalk (marked or unmarked) when crossing the street.
- ★ Listen to Route Leaders and volunteers, who will remind participants to be aware of car traffic at driveways, intersections, and other thoroughfares.
- ★ Be respectful of all other students, the Route Leaders, volunteers, the neighborhood, and neighbors.
- ★ Focus on walking, and avoid playing with toys or using electronic devices during the walk.

The Lake Washington School District (LWSD) requires all volunteers be approved prior for activities such as the Walking School Bus program.

Please visit [lwsd.org/get-involved/volunteer-programs/volunteering-in-lwsd](https://www.lwsd.org/get-involved/volunteer-programs/volunteering-in-lwsd) to apply and learn more about volunteer opportunities with LWSD.





Register your Walking School Bus with Kirkland SchoolPool's secure RideShareOnline tool at [kirklandgreentrip.com/schoolpool](http://kirklandgreentrip.com/schoolpool).

## Team Training

The Route Leader and the volunteers could benefit from a team training to cover the materials presented in this guide and establish communication and emergency plans. Suggested training components include:

- ★ Traffic safety information, including pedestrian rules of the road and considerations for younger walkers (see Walking Safety Tip Sheet). Consider inviting the school crossing guard(s) or others involved in traffic safety near and at the school.
- ★ Expectations and roles for organizers, volunteers, families, and students, including talking through how to handle potential scenarios (see Defining Roles & Responsibilities above, Preparing for the Unexpected below, and the forms in the Route Leader Toolkit).
- ★ Logistics including the specific route and stops, any challenging areas along the route, scheduled times for stops, schedules, participants, contact information, and supplies (see Route Leader Toolkit).



# Preparing for the Unexpected

## What if there is an emergency?

Route leaders and volunteers should carry emergency contact information for each student participating in the Walking School Bus, as well as a charged cell phone.

## What if a student is late?

A policy for late arrivals should be established for each departure time. Generally, the family is responsible for getting the student to or from school if they are late.

## What if unexpected students show up?

Students must have a signed parental consent form with them to participate in the Walking School Bus.

## What if it's raining or snowing?

Encourage students to wear weather-appropriate clothing and shoes. Route leaders and volunteers should be aware of school resources, such as Clothes Closets, if students regularly do not have the right attire. Consider organizing a carpool for days with very bad weather. Additionally, have a phone chain or communication plan for school closures or delayed start times due to snow.

## What if a route leader or volunteer is sick?

Establish a procedure for communicating if the leader or volunteer needs to cancel. Identify an alternate route leader or a single point of contact who can alert families.

## What if a participating child misbehaves?

If a student behaves in an unsafe manner in traffic, or does not listen to the directions of the adults, they should be given a warning and their family informed. If the student acts in a way that creates a persistent danger to themselves or other students, the student should not be allowed to continue participating in the WSB.



# Route Leader Toolkit

## Preparation

The appendix includes the following templates to use and tailor to promote and implement your WSB!

- ★ Walking Safety Tips
- ★ WSB Promotional Flier
- ★ Family/Parental Agreement Form
- ★ Student Agreement Form
- ★ Launch & Recruitment Announcement Form
- ★ Volunteer Agreement Form
- ★ Scheduling Form

## Other Resources

Here are some additional guides and materials to help you learn more about Walking School Buses and dive deeper into organizing a WSB for your school.

- ★ **Spare the Air Youth Program Walking School Buses & Bike Trains Page:**  
[sparetheyouth.org/walking-school-buses-bike-trains](http://sparetheyouth.org/walking-school-buses-bike-trains)
- ★ **Safe Routes to School National Partnership Step-by-Step Guide to Start a Walking School Bus at Your School:**  
[saferoutespartnership.org/sites/default/files/resource\\_files/step-by-step-walking-school-bus.pdf](http://saferoutespartnership.org/sites/default/files/resource_files/step-by-step-walking-school-bus.pdf)
- ★ **National Center for Safe Routes to School Training Modules:**  
[apps.saferoutesinfo.org/training/walking\\_school\\_bus/modules.cfm](http://apps.saferoutesinfo.org/training/walking_school_bus/modules.cfm)
- ★ **Safe Routes to School National Partnership Walkability Assessment Checklist:**  
[saferoutespartnership.org/sites/default/files/pdf/walkability-assessment-checklist.pdf](http://saferoutespartnership.org/sites/default/files/pdf/walkability-assessment-checklist.pdf)
- ★ **Safe Routes to School National Partnership Liability 201:**  
[saferoutespartnership.org/sites/default/files/pdf/Liability%20201%20sara%20slides.pdf](http://saferoutespartnership.org/sites/default/files/pdf/Liability%20201%20sara%20slides.pdf)
- ★ **Implementing Safe Routes to School in Low-Income Schools and Communities:**  
[saferoutespartnership.org/sites/default/files/pdf/LowIncomeGuide.pdf](http://saferoutespartnership.org/sites/default/files/pdf/LowIncomeGuide.pdf)

## On the Go

Every route leader or lead volunteer for that day should carry a toolkit that includes:

- ★ Contact information for parents/guardians of children participating in the Walking School Bus, including cell phone numbers and email addresses.
- ★ First aid kit
- ★ Route maps
- ★ Family/Parental Agreement Forms
- ★ Student Agreement Forms
- ★ Optional: safety vests/sashes, name tag(s), WSB stickers, umbrella(s) or ponchos.

