



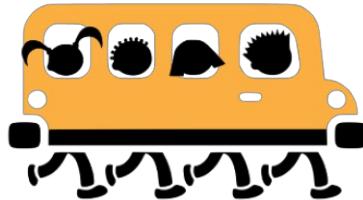
UNITED WAY
Racine County

Walking School Bus: Bridging Gaps and Building Community

Presenter: Stuart Wood, United Way of Racine County

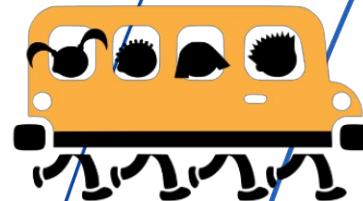
Session Length: 60 minutes (45-minute presentation, 15-minute Q&A)

Goal: inspire attendees to consider, implement, or enhance Walking School Bus programs in their communities.





Stuart Wood
Walking School Bus Coordinator



Session Overview & Learning Objectives



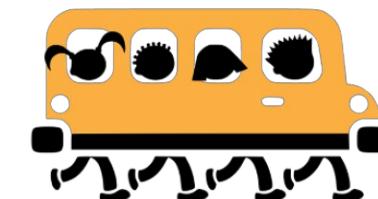
The Nuts and Bolts: How to set up and run a program.

Engaging Your Community: How to identify volunteers and participating students.

The Real World: Tackling challenges like communication and route management.

The Bigger Picture: Understanding the positive ripple effects on everyone involved.

Making It Your Own: How you can take these ideas and adapt them to your unique school and community.



The Walking School Bus: More Than Just a Walk

Addressing the Need: Why a Walking School Bus?

The Problem: Many students face attendance challenges due to lack of support or logistical difficulties getting to school.

The Solution: A Walking School Bus (WSB) is a group of children walking to school along a designated route, supervised by at least two adult volunteers.

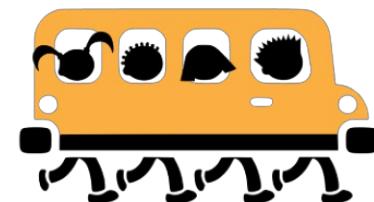
Transformative Impact:

For Students: Improved attendance, better academic performance, physical activity, social interaction, confidence boost.

For Families: Reliable support, eased morning stress, built trust with school and community.

For School Staff: More students arriving on time and ready to learn.

For Volunteers: Rewarding way to make a tangible difference.



Getting Started: Laying the Groundwork

Step 1: Strategic Planning & Route Identification

Understand Your Community:

Identify students who could benefit most. Map their home location relative to the school.

Identify Key Partners: School administration, teachers, parent groups, community organizations (e.g., United Way), potential volunteers.

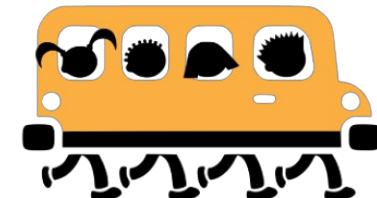
Define Your Goals: What do you want to achieve (e.g., improved attendance, increased physical activity)?

Route Mapping & Safety:

Plan walkable distances (typically 1-1.5 miles for elementary).

Assess safe pedestrian infrastructure (sidewalks, crosswalks, visibility).

Our Experience: We walk potential routes prior to adding students.



Getting Started: Laying the Groundwork

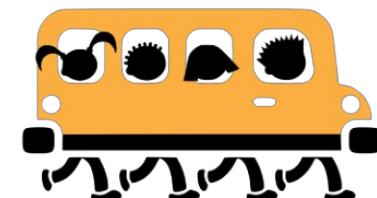
Step 1: Strategic Planning & Route Identification

How does UWRC/RUSD identify students for the WSB?

- The school provides us with any students who are chronically tardy or absent.
- We map those students to get a general direction from school.
- We use Infinite Campus to identify other students who live in the same direction.
- We call the parents of every student who lives in that direction to gauge interest/benefit.
- We fill the routes.

Parent/Guardian Student Agreement (PGSA)

The PGSA outlines the rules for walking with the WSB. The document is read and initialed by the parent and student. If the student is unable to read, parent reads it to them. PGSA is available on the presentation website.

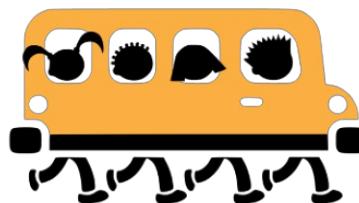


Getting Started: Laying the Groundwork



UNITED WAY

Racine County



Getting Started: Laying the Groundwork

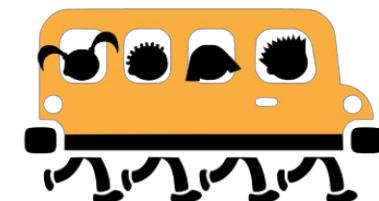
What's in the bag.

Walking School Bus inventory:

- Backpack.
- First Aid kit.
- Safety vests.
- Ponchos.
- Flashlight.
- Whistle.
- Stop sign.
- Route map.
- Phone w/ tracking app. (Active4.me)



During the Winter we also carry extra cotton gloves and hats. Student who walk with us are provided Winter clothing.



Fueling Your WSB: Recruiting & Retaining Participants

Step 2: Volunteer Power!

Volunteer Recruitment:

Think Broadly: Parents, guardians, college students, retirees, community members, school staff.

Where to Find Them: School newsletters, PTA meetings, community centers, faith-based organizations, volunteer portals, other community partners.

The 'Ask': Be clear about commitment (e.g., 'one morning a week for 40 minutes').

Highlight Benefits: Making a difference, community connection, positive role model.

Crucial: Background checks are a must for student safety.

Volunteer Training & Retention:

Provide training on safety, route details, communication, basic behavior management.

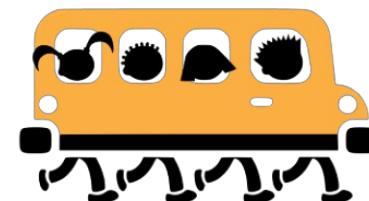
Show appreciation: a regular thank you, recognition, spotlights. **Create a sense of team.**

Student Recruitment:

Identify students who could benefit (liaise with teachers, social workers, principals).

Promote WSB as fun, healthy, and cool!

Essential: Parental permission and clear communication about routes, schedules, and safety.



Fueling Your WSB: Recruiting & Retaining Participants

Step 2: Volunteer Power!

Volunteer Tools:

There are many programs you may use to track volunteer signups.

At UWRC, we use Signup Genius. <https://www.signupgenius.com>

You can create a custom calendar for your routes and volunteers can signup for as many days as they like.

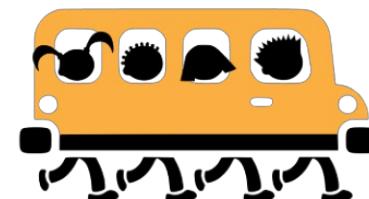
This gives your volunteers the freedom to pick a day without contacting you. It notifies you who is volunteering on any given day. Once a volunteer signs up, the coordinator is notified by email.



Background Checks:

UWRC uses Sterling Volunteers to do background checks for all volunteers. <https://www.sterlingvolunteers.com>

The volunteer provides you an email address. You provide Sterling the email address and they send the forms directly to your volunteer. Once a volunteer completes the background check, Sterling takes between 24-72 hours to process with a “clear” indicator.



The Journey: Challenges, Solutions & Celebrating Success

Navigating the Road

Potential Challenges & Our Solutions (from RUSD experience):

Parental Communication Gaps:

Solution: Multiple channels (text reminders, community school coordinators, school office), clear initial onboarding. Establish a regular line of communication with parents. We are consistent with our text communication to parents. We find parents appreciate routine. So do students.

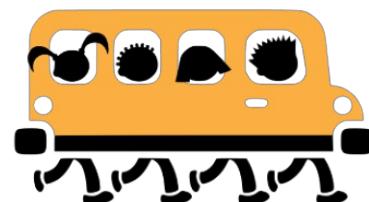
Volunteer Reliability/Coverage:

Solution: Backup volunteer system, coordinator stepping in, clear absence reporting protocol. Be prepared to adjust/cancel a route if you do not have enough volunteers. *Please don't walk with students if there are not enough volunteers.* UWRC uses the two for ten model. Minimum of two volunteers for a maximum of ten students. Safe Routes to School – backed by Federal Highway Administration and the CDC.



Route Management & Logistics:

Solution: Regular route review, flexibility, clear maps and instructions. Be adaptable.



The Journey: Challenges, Solutions & Celebrating Success

Navigating the Road

Weather:

Solution: Clear weather policy communicated (e.g., WSB cancels if school cancels). When there is a weather advisory (i.e. thunderstorms) we recommend students do not walk.

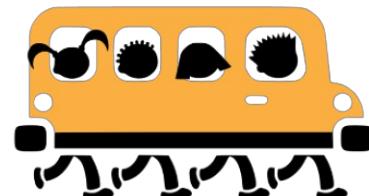
Student Behavior:

Solution: Clear expectations, positive reinforcement, school staff involvement if needed. Take steps: 1) correct behavior with student, 2) speak with parent or guardian. 3) write up and/or removal from program.

Highlighting Successes:

Anecdote: "I remember one student who consistently missed the first hour. Once they joined the WSB, their punctuality transformed, and their teacher noted a significant improvement in their engagement." – Knapp teacher

"You are my alarm clock! Y'all keeping me honest in the morning." – WSB parent



Your Community, Your WSB: Adaptation

Making it Your Own.

Adaptability: The Walking School Bus model can be adapted to your unique context.

Consider Your Context:

Urban vs. Rural: Route density and safety considerations will differ.

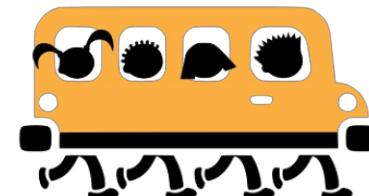
School Size & Culture: How will you integrate with existing school initiatives?

Available Resources: What community partners can you leverage?

Start Small if Needed: Begin with one route, a couple of days a week. At UWRC, we operate one route at two schools, five days a week. During Summer School, we operate one route at two schools simultaneously.

Core Principles Remain: Safety, communication, and community engagement are constant.

Take the time before you start walking with students. Be prepared for any situation. Regular walking of routes with and without students is recommended.



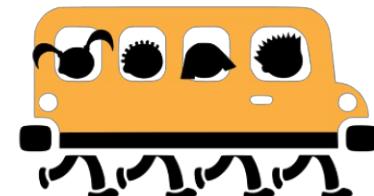
Your Community, Your WSB: Adaptation

How UWRC does it.

Parents/Guardians are sent a text the evening before a walk to inform them of the planned arrival time the following morning. Any weather concerns or changes in schedule are typically addressed in the text. The morning of, another text is sent to confirm arrival time at their stop.

Volunteers meet at the school about forty minutes before school starts. Volunteers walk together to the furthest stop on the route and upon arrival, the route leader texts the parent/guardian to let them know we have arrived at their stop. Volunteers will wait no more than three minutes for the student. If a student does not join you after three minutes, we send another text to inform the parent we are moving on to the next stop. If a student does join the group, we help the student put on a safety vest and continue to the next stop.

This is repeated until we arrive at the school with all the WSB students. Once we arrive at the school, vests are removed, students enter the school. After all students are in school, the route leader sends a confirmation text to the parent/guardian and scans them in using the Active4.me app.



UWRC/RUSD WSB 2024-25 Statistics

Summer School Statistics:

@ Julian Thomas - Four students have taken 34 trips for 13.3 walked miles.

@ Knapp - Nine students have taken 74 trips for 37.2 walked miles.

Total - Thirteen Summer School students have taken 108 trips for 50.5 walked miles.

Regular School Year Statistics:

@ Julian Thomas - Twelve students walked 445.9 miles. (1,111 trips)

@ Knapp - Eleven students walked 325 miles. (708 trips)

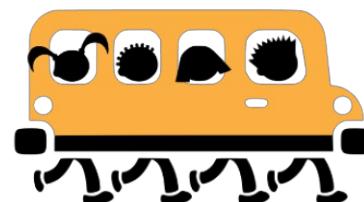
Total - Twenty-three students took 1,819 trips for 770.9 walked miles.

Since the beginning of the 2024/25 school year, The Walking School Bus has hosted **32 students**. They took **1,927 trips** and walked **821.4 miles**.

The WSB walks students one-way (only to school).



Active4.me



Q&A and Moving Forward

Your Questions: What questions do you have? Are you already doing something similar? What specific challenges or opportunities do you foresee in your community?

Key Takeaways:

It's achievable with careful planning and community collaboration.

Volunteers are essential, and their engagement is key.

Challenges are part of the process, but solutions and successes are impactful.

Call to Action: Explore how a Walking School Bus could benefit your school or community.

Contact Information: Stuart Wood,
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Thank You!

