



August 2018



Coordinator's Corner

The start of the school year is always an exciting time, filled with new beginnings and new opportunities, but it can also be a very busy time. If you're planning any Safe Routes to School events this year, the beginning of the year is a great time to help your students establish healthy, fun, and safe habits for the year.



This newsletter is full of helpful tips and the information you need to get your Safe Routes to School program up and running. First, we'll introduce a teacher from Rockingham County who spearheaded a successful walking school bus initiative at his school. Next, we'll highlight resources you can use to improve your arrival and dismissal procedures for students who walk and bike. Also, you'll find information about our fall events, funding opportunities and meet the newest members of our staff.

As always, we're happy to answer any questions you have. If you would like more information on any of the topics included here, please call the Virginia SRTS Hotline at 1-855-601-7787 or send an email to info@virginiasrts.org.

Regards,

Rob Williams
Virginia SRTS Coordinator

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CALENDAR

AUGUST

9: QuickStart Mini-grant due date

SEPTEMBER

All month: Take Student Travel Tallies

13: QuickStart Mini-grant and Walkabout Mini-grant due date

OCTOBER

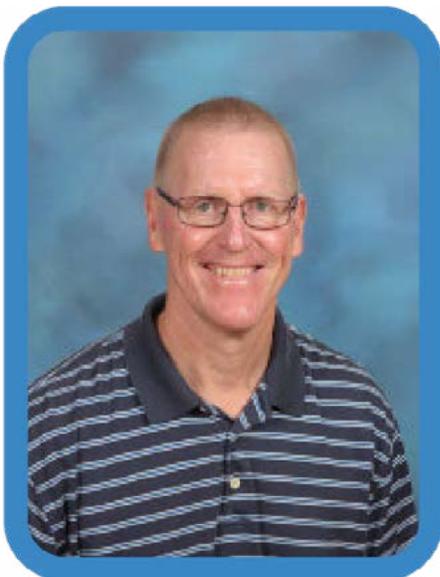
All month: Take Student Travel Tallies

10: Walk to School Day

11: QuickStart Mini-grant due date

Friends and Faces: Interview with Pat Failes

A walking school bus is a group of students who walk to school, supervised by an adult, on a set route. It's a chance for children to get exercise, spend time with their friends, learn about their community, and gain a sense of independence. By traveling with a group of other children and adults, students can learn about pedestrian safety by example. Schools benefit from a walking school bus because they reduce traffic congestion around the school and help students arrive to class awake and alert.



Pat Failes

We talked to Pat Failes, a physical education teacher at Elkton Elementary School in Rockingham County about the walking school bus he helped launch last year. Pat has been a teacher at Elkton for many years and is now teaching the children of his former students. We asked him what a walking school bus is, how to start one, and how to prepare for the inevitable surprise.

How would you describe a walking school bus to someone who's never heard of one?

Basically, a walking school bus is a creating a group of people that walk along a certain route to school. It takes the same principle as a motorized school bus, except we walk.

How did the walking school bus get started?

Last year was the first time we've ever done a walking school bus; we've had Walk to School Week for about five years. I've been a substitute bus driver and knew the routes and where the kids are, so I was able to create a [walking] route that would pick up as many kids as possible.

I think on our biggest day, we had twenty kids walking with us. Some of the parents who drive their kids to school would see us walking and pull over to drop their kids off to join us. Kids really enjoyed it; parents were really enthusiastic about it and wanted to know if I could lead it every day!

How often do you do the walking school bus?

During Walk to School Week, we had a walking school bus on Tuesday and Thursday. On the other three days, kids were dropped off at another school and walked three blocks over. Every child walked to school in some fashion or another.

As a PE teacher, how do you encourage your students to get more exercise outside the classroom?

We teach a biking unit, and encourage kids to do more biking on their own. We've had quite an increase in the number of kids biking to school. Any given day we might have maybe a dozen bikes in front of our school, and we have parents that bike with their kids.



Elkton Elementary School's walking school bus route

What do you think are the most significant challenges to implementing a walking school bus at your school?

Communication was a big challenge when we first started. Our regular buses have to do a different route on the days that we do walk to school. At the beginning, we basically had to make a decision the day before, because we couldn't get last minute messages to our parents.

Modern technology has helped that a lot. We've gone to a messenger system to communicate with our parents, through text and email. At 7:30 the morning of, we send out a message saying either, "Thumbs up, we're walking to school," or that we'll be following our regular school arrival procedure.

Adequate supervision is another challenge. We're very, very lucky we have a supportive police department that does anything they can do to help us. One of the roads we have to cross is North Stuart Avenue, which is a fairly major road. Our police chief is always waiting and ready to direct traffic for us while we walk across.

What's the key to a successful walking school bus?

Getting the parents on board. I've been around Elkton for a while, so I taught some of the parents of current students back when they were in school. I try to seek out

these parents to tell them what we're doing and they're usually willing to jump in and help whenever they can. Communicating to all the people involved is huge.

[Another key is] having enough adult support. I knew how many kids I would have on the walking school bus route for the most part, but for other schools, if you're going to get three, four times the kids I have, you'd have to have more adult supervision. You would need more support from parent volunteers or from within your staff.

What advice would you give to a school interested in starting a walking school bus?

Start early and give your kids a better chance to walk. You get into a rut, you get off the bus the same time, you get out of the car the same time. I like to do things that are different and are more fun, and we laugh and we joke when we're walking.

I'm going to go ahead and try to do this right off the bat and not wait for our Walk to School Week, because our kids loved it and the parents loved it. Don't wait until the end of the year, because if it works out as well as ours did, you'll definitely want to do it when your weather permits.

Meet Your Local Technical Assistance Coordinator!

Four Local Technical Assistance Coordinators (LTACs) are available on a part-time basis to assist local SRTS programs. Each LTAC is assigned to work in a particular region of the state - Blue Ridge, Piedmont or Coastal. Their work involves both direct contacts with local communities and VDOT District Offices, and broader activities that support SRTS statewide and locally.

Find your LTAC's contact information on the [Contact Us](#) page of our website, and download the [Learn it. Do it. Live it! Local Technical Assistance Program](#) guide for more information about the program and each of the LTACs.



Arrival & Dismissal Resources

Not sure if your school's arrival and dismissal procedure is working well? A well-designed arrival and dismissal process encourages walking and biking, minimizes vehicular traffic around the school, and addresses parent and community concerns. The new school year is a good time to evaluate it and make any needed adjustments, especially to improve walking and bicycling safety in the school zone.

So, how do you evaluate this process, and what can you do to make improvements? The following resources can help you design a better arrival and dismissal process. As the new school year starts, this is a great opportunity to incorporate new habits into this routine, to make coming and going from school safer and more enjoyable for all students.

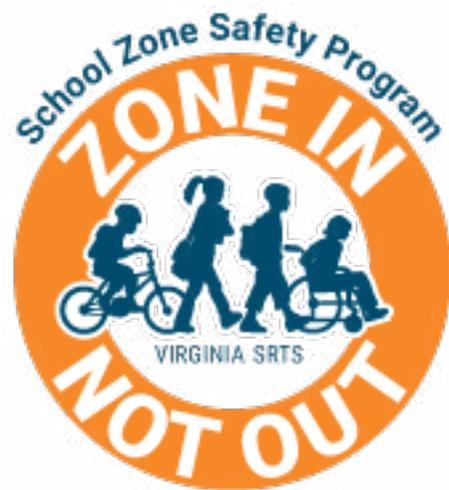
[Zone In, Not Out \(ZINO\)](#) is a set of resources that can help you make school zones safer for all travelers, especially children walking and biking to school. Developed with input from local SRTS coordinators in Virginia, ZINO takes a comprehensive approach to address common issues in school zones including a lack of supervision, distracted driving, walking and bicycling, disregard for established procedures, and speeding. In addition to tip sheets and an arrival/ dismissal observation guide, ZINO includes a Safe Driver Pledge Kit and yard sign templates.

[The ZINO Arrival/Dismissal Toolkit](#) can help your Safe Routes to School team observe travel behaviors during arrival and dismissal times to better understand walking and bicycling safety issues at your school. During the field exercise, you'll watch how all travelers, including students, adults, bus drivers, family vehicle drivers, and other people passing through the school zone, all interact during arrival and dismissal. This is something the whole

school community can be a part of, including the principal and administration, teachers, parents, and members of the PTA.

This toolkit includes a helpful worksheet you can use to record your observations and findings, which can then be shared with the school administration, PTA, and local staff from your community's transportation department or school division.

[Keep Calm and Carry On to School](#) is a resource from the National Partnership for Safe Routes to School that explains the principles of a good arrival and dismissal procedure, and strategies for improving the process, such as changing the design or engineering of the arrival/ dismissal area, changing operations or programming, or using education or enforcement to change behaviors. It also includes examples of best practices implemented at other schools.



Ten Tips For a Great Walk to School Day

[International Walk to School Day \(iWalk\)](#) falls on Wednesday, October 10 this year and is a great way to promote active travel to school and build momentum for your SRTS program. Last year 328 schools participated in iWalk and this year we hope to reach 350 schools! Help us meet our goal by registering your event on walkbiketoschool.org, and see below for innovative ideas to incorporate into your event:

1. Host a Walking Event During the School Day:

Walking to school is not feasible at every school. Consider hosting a walking event on a blacktop, school track, or in the gym as a way to allow every student to be active.

2. Test a Walking School Bus: A walking school bus is a group of children walking to school with adult chaperones leading the way and usually has designated route, stops, and times similar to a transit bus. iWalk is a great opportunity to promote and test out a walking school bus which could lead to more regular participation. See the Friends & Faces column for more tips on starting a walking school bus.

3. Designate a Park and Walk Location: Not all students live close enough to school or have a safe enough path to school to be able to participate. Consider having buses or parents drop-off at a designated site near the school so that all students have the opportunity to incorporate walking into their school commute. Check out the Learn it. Do it. Live it! resource on how to organize park and walk sites [here](#).

4. Combine Events: Consider combining iWalk with other events such as a "Family Stroll, Family Roll Day" or "Walking Wednesday" to broaden the appeal. Events like "Walking Wednesdays" can be held every Wednesday or other regularly scheduled interval to reinforce active school travel.

5. Capture the Moment: Invite your school's communications office or the local press to your event. An article highlighting iWalk or a video capturing the enthusiasm for iWalk can send a great message to the local community. See a video from Fairfax County Public Schools [here](#).

6. Host a Competition: Generating competition between schools, grades, or classes can increase participation and bring extra attention to your event.

7. Host a Walk Audit: If many parents are concerned about the safety of school-zone infrastructure, consider hosting a walk audit to evaluate where improvements could be made. Learn more about walk audits [here](#).

8. Provide Incentives: Walking tokens and Walk to School Day stickers or t-shirts can make a bold visual statement to the entire community while rewarding students for walking to school.

9. Invite the Local Police or Fire Department: Students look up to firefighters and police officers, so invite them or partner with them for your event! Whether welcoming students to school or providing an escort along a walking route, the presence of these heroes can help reinforce the importance of active school travel.

10. Invite Elected Officials: Seeing firsthand the excitement and energy of iWalk can go a long way in growing your program, so invite the school superintendent, school board members, county council members, mayor, or other elected officials to your event. For more ideas and downloadable flyer and sticker templates, visit our [Walk to School Day](#) page.



Student Travel Tally Week



The Student Travel Tally is a quick, in-class survey that provides valuable information on student travel patterns and can help you monitor the success of your SRTS program over time. The Virginia SRTS program encourages schools to collect tallies annually during [Student Travel Tally Week](#), which can be any week in September or October that works for each school.

[The Student Travel Tallies Learn it. Do it. Live it.](#) has materials to get you started including an example letter to school staff from the principal, and morning announcement scripts for teachers to explain to students how to participate. Follow these easy steps to plan a successful Student Travel Tally Week:

1. Get buy-in from school administrators;
2. Identify a coordinator;
3. Set the dates;
4. Inform teachers of the tally dates and process to conduct the tallies;
5. Distribute tally form or link;
6. Be a cheerleader for the tally collection process and help make it happen; and
7. Collect and submit completed tally information on saferoutesdata.org by November 15.

Schools that participate for the first time will receive a Virginia SRTS banner and event decal. Schools can earn other decals by participating in International Walk to

School Day (October), Crossing Guard Appreciation Day (February), and Bike to School Day (May).

Your SRTS banner can be used in a number of ways. Students can carry them during a Walk to School Day parade, they catch the eye when hung from a table at an event, and they make a statement about a school's support for Safe Routes to School when displayed near the school entrance.

Remember: If you already have a banner that is full of decals, we'll send you a new one with our updated design. Please email a photo of the old banner with your mailing address to info@virginiasrts.org.

QuickStart and Walkabout Mini-Grants

Do you have a creative idea for encouraging students to walk and bicycle to school? Want to improve pedestrian and bicycle conditions near your school? Consider filling out an online application for a QuickStart or Walkabout Mini-grant this fall.

	QuickStart Mini-grant	Walkabout Mini-grant
What is it?	The QuickStart Mini-grant is a \$1,000 reimbursement grant that can't be used to fund SRTS education and encouragement activities	The Walkabout Mini-grant includes a guided "walkabout" of areas near your school to assess pedestrian and bicycle conditions and a report with recommended improvements.
Due Dates	September 13 October 11	September 13
	Apply here	Apply here

Recent QuickStart and Walkabout Mini-grant Examples:

- **Hillsboro Charter Academy** in Hillsboro received a QuickStart Mini-grant to purchase materials for a Student Safety Patrol and cones for Hillsboro's October Walk Around event. The grant money also funded scooters for a "rules of the road" traffic safety curriculum.
- **Greenbriar Elementary School** in Charlottesville received a QuickStart Mini-grant to purchase balance bikes for a bicycle education program. The balance bikes enabled students who did not know how to ride a bike to participate in the program. Many of these students subsequently learned to ride thanks to the balance bikes.
- **The Police Department in Arlington County** received a QuickStart Mini-grant to purchase double sided, blinking-LED stop signs. These signs are now used by crossing guards at schools throughout the county.
- **Elkton Elementary School** in Elkton received a Walkabout Mini-grant in fall 2017. The Walkabout included representatives from the Town of Elkton, Rockingham County Public Schools, and the Virginia Department of Transportation. After the Walkabout, an Assistant District Planner for VDOT's Staunton District identified unused funds that could be reallocated and used to construct a new sidewalk identified during the Walkabout.



QuickStart Mini grants were used to fund crossing guard equipment in Arlington County