

Project Title: This Bus Is Us (The Walking School Bus)

School- Oakridge

Contact(s)- Sean Jones

Brief summary of the project

This Bus Is Us is a walking school bus program generated by the community. Oakridge has been working with Safe Routes to School as well as an Arlington 55+ group to create opportunities for students to walk to school. It not only reduces car traffic/pollution in Arlington, but it also allows for students to slow things down, enjoy nature, participate in intergenerational learning, while getting exercise and fresh air first thing in the morning.

Getting Going

How did the project start? This is something that we have talked about for years at Oakridge. It is something that had been mentioned to Lauren Hassel and Safe Routes to School. This year, Lauren offered to help pilot the program at Oakridge. We met a few times, took survey at school to garner interest, sent out info to parents via school talks and pta meetings, then went from there.

Who were important people to contact at the beginning? Lauren Hassel

What are the threshold resources that need to be identified at the beginning before proceeding further? (For example, robust parent volunteer network, elevated loading docks, nearby outdoor spigot.)

Parent volunteers, senior volunteers, willing students and families

What are the policies (if any) from APS or elsewhere that may affect the project and need to be considered?

We utilized the map that shows designations for walkers when we were planning out our routes. The main aspect was we had to be within the mile radius for walkers. Afterwards, we had to adhere to policies similar to that of a field trip, where parents gave permission for students to walk with our volunteers.

What budget and/or funding sources were needed?

Time and effort went into this, but not a lot of money. Some money was used from Safe Routes to School to purchase reflective vests for all of the students as well as slap bracelets.

Implementation

Did you pilot or test the project and then scale it up? If so, describe your process.

We met quite a few times as a group to lay out a plan to get families involved, drum up interest from students and ensure there would be volunteers. Initially it only started with a few students (3 or so), but after the kick off, more students joined each week. We continued efforts to get the word out and encouraged families to share their experiences. We also reached out directly to families that we saw or knew lived along the bus routes and provided info about the program.

As you rolled the project out, how did you present this to students and encourage their participation?

There were posters and signup sheets throughout the school. We also manned a table in the front of the school to catch students or their families in case people were interested. We initially sent out an interest form to all students via google forms and they shared whether or not they would be interested in walking to school, If they currently walk to school, If they want to walk to school but don't, the rationale behind that.

Approximately how many students were actively involved, and how many were affected?

I'd say roughly 30-40 students ended up getting involved in the program. This was good for the first year due to the number of volunteers we had and as it was a pilot project, we wanted to test things out.

What obstacles were overcome? Are there continuing obstacles? What lessons did you learn from doing this?

We really had to reach out directly to families to increase student involvement. We thought it would be something that people would rush to participate in, but we found that people were interested, but not fully informed and they were not pursuing the information. When they were contacted by myself or Lauren, they loved what they heard and would sign up. So it was more so, people weren't interested in signing themselves up, but when reached out to they would let us sign them up.

Will the project continue into future years? If so, how will you keep continuity? Do you plan modifications?

We hope to continue this next year and beyond if we continue to have volunteers and families that are interested. I hope to maintain a positive relationship with the volunteers and that they remain happy to continue to do this.

What effect has it had on the school?

The students who participated have absolutely loved this experience. They are so proud of being a part of the group that many of the students wear their walking school bus vests the entire school day. When interviewed, students talked about how it was a great way to wake up, they enjoyed walking with friends or making new friends. All the volunteers, staff, and students who have walked the route have loved it. It just leaves a warm feeling inside.

Are there photos that could help others visualize how this worked for you? If so, please insert them here.

<https://oakridge.apsva.us/post/this-bus-is-us-launched/>

Replication

Do you have resources you used that would be helpful for someone trying to replicate this project? Would you be willing to share them?

Absolutely, just ask and I am happy to share.

What else should someone wanting to implement a similar project at their school know?

It was something that really helped coming off of virtual learning and social distancing. The community enjoyed it and seem to want more things to bring people together.