

MEMORANDUM

DATE: November 2023

TO: Community Superintendents, High School Superintendents, Division of School Leadership Field Teams, School Principals

FROM: Office of Community Supports and Wellness (OCSW) and Office of Safety and Youth Development (OSYD)

SUBJECT: Walking School Bus Guidance and Safety Protocols

Background. Students that are in grades K-8 often cannot control whether or not they are brought to school every day. Some parents cannot walk their children to school due to illness, childcare issues, work schedules, young children at home, and various other circumstances. In these instances, school staff have found that if students can be picked up and brought to school by another adult, then the child will attend school and not miss out on valuable instruction.

A “walking school bus” is one option for schools that have students who are unable to come to school due to these circumstances. In a walking school bus model, school staff members meet students at a designated location near their home and walk with them to school on days that families need extra support.

Guidance for Implementing a Walking School Bus Model

- Leadership, Coordination, and Staffing
 - School leadership should partner with their Borough Safety Director, NYPD and school safety to discuss program logistics and request support, when needed, in the community while the walking school bus program is running. Together, they should create a safety plan for the walking school bus that is approved by all partners.
 - The safety plan should include boundaries within which students will be eligible for participating in the walking school bus. The route should not take more than 15 minutes walking and schools should avoid any large highways, where possible, and work with crossing guards to ensure safety.
 - School leadership should select an attendance team member to coordinate the walking school bus. This includes identifying students with the attendance team that would benefit from the program, conducting outreach to families, distributing consent forms and program information, maintaining records, and monitoring the program regularly.
 - School staff can participate voluntarily in the walking school bus program. Staff cannot be mandated to participate in the walking school bus program.

Steps to Implement Walking School Bus Program

- The school attendance team should meet with the Borough Safety Director, NYPD, school safety agents, crossing guards, and CBO partners (where applicable) to discuss procedures and a safety plan. This group should also identify the boundaries for the program and map them out in the plan.
- The school attendance team should meet to identify students that would benefit from the walking school bus program, including students that are not attending school regularly and students that live within the boundaries identified.
- School leadership should meet with staff and identify staff that are interested in the program and create schedules for staff.
- The school attendance team should conduct outreach to families that would benefit from the program and explain the program. If the parent agrees to participate, schools should arrange for them to get a consent form and fill it out.
 - Schools may use this [sample consent form](#)
- Schools are required to send communication to families regarding the walking school bus including the start date, time frame, and contact information for staff before their first day of the program.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

- 1) What should a school do if walking school bus staff are out sick?
 - a) Schools should have a few staff members available that can pick up students in the event that a staff member is sick. If no staff are available to support, the school should call the family as soon as possible to inform them that the walking school bus will not be running that day.
- 2) What should a school do if students don't show up or are late for pick up?
 - a) Schools should communicate regularly with families of students that are participating in the walking school bus program. If a child does not show up for pickup, staff should immediately call the family and identify where the child is. If a child will be late for pickup, staff should not hold the other children there while they wait to pick up the child if it is for more than 5 minutes.
 - b) Schools can decide if they have the ability to send staff members to pick up the child after the designated walking school bus time through direct communication with the family.
- 3) Guidance for partnering with Community Based Organizations (CBOs):
 - a) If your school is a Community School and has a lead CBO partner:
 - i) Lead CBOs were awarded contracts with schools through an RFP process or grant award.



- ii) Because these organizations have a contract to partner with your school as a lead CBO, you do not need to create an MOU for the walking school bus program.
 - iii) All staff that participate in the program through the lead CBO should have appropriate clearances (PETS) to work with students.
- b) If your school is not a Community School, but is looking to partner with a CBO for a walking school bus program:
- i) You should reach out to your district's Senior Field Counsel to discuss any contractual requirements and guidance for creating an MOU with the organization.