



# BE SAFE & SOUND

## School Safety and Security Newsletter

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Volume II ISSUE 1

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### Our Mission

To raise awareness of school safety and security issues and provide concrete measures that parents, community members, educators, and elected officials can take to make schools safer and more secure

Be Safe and Sound is an initiative of the National Crime Prevention Council conducted in collaboration with National PTA and NCPC partners—The Allstate Foundation, ASSA ABLOY, and the Security Industry Association.

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## Safe and Secure, To and From School

By **Meghan Sharp**, *Program Manager, Be Safe and Sound National Crime Prevention Council*

This month's issue of the Be Safe and Sound newsletter takes a closer look at ways that school districts are ensuring the safe travel of students between home and school.

The past ten years have seen the launch of walk-to-school programs in communities across the country. Beyond encouraging physical activity, these programs help ensure students' safe arrival at and return from school—and they help make communities safer. Check out our article "Local Programs Get Kids Walking to School—Safely" below. Additional walk-to-school program resources and tools can be found on page 3.

To enhance the safety of bus transportation, districts have looked to Global Positioning Systems (GPS) to track buses and help ensure parents' peace of mind. Combined with wireless phones, these technologies allow school districts to respond more quickly in emergencies. Learn more on page 4 in "GPS Technology: Keeping Track of School Buses."

Also check out "Tips From McGruff®" on page 4 to learn how you can help children be safe as they ride the bus or walk to and from school.

## Local Programs Get Kids Walking to School—Safely

By **Jennifer De Simone**, *Intern, Be Safe and Sound* and **Meghan Sharp**, *Program Manager, Be Safe and Sound National Crime Prevention Council*

Years ago it was commonplace to see kids walking or bicycling to and from school. In fact, in 1969 nine out of ten trips to or from school were made on foot. These days, only about one in ten trips is made by walking or bicycling. Even families that live less than a mile from school prefer to drive; among this group, only one out of three trips is made by foot or bike.

Experts attribute this shift to the fact that communities are no longer compact. Population boom and suburbanization have pushed communities farther out from their centers, making it more difficult to get around by foot. In a 1999 survey, parents reported that distance and traffic safety concerns were the greatest barriers to permitting their children to walk or bike to school. Concerns about crime, which may include abduction or molestation, were reported by nearly one out of five parents.

Across the United States, federal and state agencies, nonprofits, community groups, and school

districts are determined to reverse this trend and eliminate these fears by promoting programs that encourage walking and biking to school. Such programs look at ways that parents, community leaders, law enforcement, and schools can work together to address concerns about traffic safety and crime. The goals of these programs vary widely and include the following:

- Increased physical activity among children
- Increased independence among children
- Decreased crime and violence
- Improved air quality
- Increased pedestrian safety and improved pedestrian skills
- Decreased congestion and traffic in neighborhoods
- Increased sense of community through social interaction
- Improved community collaboration and partnerships

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National Crime Prevention Council

## Local Programs Get Kids Walking to School

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Effective programs that promote walking or bicycling to school employ some or all of the following strategies:

- Educating children about safe pedestrian skills
- Generating enthusiasm among parents and children about the issue
- Mapping and publicizing designated safe routes
- Engineering for traffic calming and pedestrian safety (i.e., creating more walkable or bikeable routes)
- Patrolling routes and chaperoning children as they travel to and from school
- Increased enforcement of traffic laws

The following summaries of successful walk-to-school programs highlight the interplay of these various goals and strategies.

### Arlington County, VA: Safe Routes to School

Arlington County, located just outside Washington, DC, started Safe Routes to School in 2000 to enact measures that would benefit children's health along with keeping them safe as they walked or biked to school. The program, initiated by the county government, uses education, engineering, and enforcement methods to support the program. Parents mapped out safe traveling routes, while engineers identified needs specific to each school area, such as repairing broken sidewalks and trimming overgrown vegetation. Teachers educate youth on safety while engineers repair areas of concern, and the police department contributes by enforcing policies, such as speed limits, to further ensure pedestrian safety. While encouraging children to meet new people in their neighborhood, the program also gives them the opportunity to appreciate their environment and to get daily exercise. The county government has granted more than \$1.5 million dollars to the program to fund the construction and installation of needed safety items, such as stop signs. The success of the program is due to cooperation between police and local sheriffs, parents, educators, and engineers.

For more information, visit Arlington County's "Walk Arlington" webpage at [www.walkarlington.com/walkable/saferoutes.html](http://www.walkarlington.com/walkable/saferoutes.html).

### Chicago, IL: Walking School Bus

First implemented in 1998, Chicago's Walking School Bus program is one of the first walk-to-school programs in the United States. To address health and safety issues of all residents, community members established a program where students and adults would walk to school instead of driving. Once safe routes were identified, paid program coordinators instructed parent volunteers on how to implement safety measures during the walk to and from school. After passing background checks, volunteers were given vests and walkie-talkies to identify them within the community and communicate with each other. Volunteers walk door to door and pick up children on their Walking School Bus. These Walking School Buses are led by a volunteer "driver," often a parent, who chaperones five or six children ("riders") as they walk to school as a group. The buses operate rain or shine and are designed so that children enjoy a degree of independence. Over 3,000 people now volunteer with the program and have become the "eyes of the community," which has, in turn, reduced crime rates and gang presence within neighborhoods. A budget of \$135,000 allows parents, educators, and the police to work with other community members to meet the needs of the community as a whole.

To learn more, call the Chicago Alternative Policing Strategy Implementation Office at 312-747-9986.

### Marin County, CA: Safe Routes to School

Safe Routes to School was implemented in Marin County, outside San Francisco, in August 2000. With funding from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, the Marin County Bicycle Coalition was asked to develop a walk-to-school program that could serve as a national model. Initially the program focused on issues such as decreasing morning traffic congestion caused by parents driving their children to school, but county citizens were also concerned about air quality and children's health. The program implements classroom lessons to educate students about pedestrian and bike safety. Children are motivated to bike or walk to school through the use of



Photo: [www.pedbikeimages.org](http://www.pedbikeimages.org) / Dan Burden

contests and incentives such as Frequent Rider Miles and activities like bike trains. Furthermore, road improvements such as bike lanes, safety signals, and sidewalk construction have allowed more youth to arrive at school safely. Marin County has seen a 29 percent drop in busing and single rider car use and a 50 percent increase in the number of children who walk or bike to school. Current funding is provided by the Marin Community Foundation and the Marin Congestion Management Agency, as well as other public and private funders. The program is supported by local law enforcement agencies, which hold workshops for students, state legislators, parents, educators, and other members of the community on how to establish, implement, and sustain a Safe Routes to School program.

For more information, visit the Marin County's Safe Routes to School webpage at [www.saferoutestoschools.org](http://www.saferoutestoschools.org).

Walk-to-school programs can and should be developed to match your community's unique needs and resources. Programs can be started with a small budget by employing volunteers and making minimal physical changes to walking routes, such as repainting crosswalks. Programs with larger budgets can employ paid coordinators and make more substantial changes to walking routes, such as installing traffic lights or traffic-calming measures. Educating children about pedestrian safety can be done at little cost other than classroom time.

The key ingredient to the success of walk-to-school programs appears to be the level of community collaboration. Successful programs will involve stakeholders from across the community, including elected officials, educators and school district leaders, parents, and law enforcement officers.

# Walk-to-School Resources and Tools

## National Highway Traffic Safety Administration

[www.nhtsa.dot.gov/people/injury/pedbimot/bike/Safe-Routes-2004](http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/people/injury/pedbimot/bike/Safe-Routes-2004)

**Safe Routes to School: Practice and Promise** is a comprehensive guide to Safe Routes to School that discusses why walk-to-school programs are important, describes the various approaches employed and how to evaluate their effectiveness, and examines successful projects in diverse communities. Each of the **nine project overviews** includes a brief history, description of efforts, overall effects, sample effects at demonstration sites, challenges, funding, and lessons learned. Extensive appendices provide a **complete listing of Safe Routes to School programs**, a resource section, tools for assessing the walkability or bikeability of your community, guidance for starting a program in your community, and an overview of national transportation law and funding.

## Center for Disease Control and Prevention: KidsWalk-to-School

[www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/kidswalk/](http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/kidswalk/)

KidsWalk-to-School “aims to get children walking or bicycling to and from school in groups accompanied by adults,” encouraging physical activity, safe pedestrian skills, and a better understanding of the environment. Tools on the website include the following:

- **Factsheet** on walk-to-school programs and a KidsWalk-to-School brochure provide useful information.

- **Free step-by-step guide** to developing and implementing a KidsWalk-to-School initiative: Tools and tips are provided to help communities identify interest, organize partners, assess the walkability and bikeability of their neighborhoods, plan and implement their initiatives, and evaluate success. The guide offers program variations and addresses ways to generate children’s enthusiasm, to work with the media, and to engage elected officials.
- **PowerPoint presentations** and presenters’ guides can be used to educate stakeholders and increase support of such initiatives.

## Partnership for a Walkable America: Walk to School

[www.walktoschool.org](http://www.walktoschool.org)

Walk to School works to “change community culture and create environments that are more inviting for everyone, young and old,” while encouraging healthy lifestyles for children. Partners include Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, and Federal Highway Administration. The website offers more information about the following:

- **Safe Routes to School** details ways in which communities can ensure safe arrivals of children to and from school.
- **National Walk to School Day** on October 5, 2005, will be held during the National Walk to School Week (October 3–7, 2005).

- **Legislation and Funding** that support walk-to-school programs. Congress is working on new Safe Routes to School laws and is creating a budget for states to use to develop their projects.
- **Walk to School programs** in place across the country are described.

## National Center for Bicycling and Walking

[www.bikewalk.org/safe\\_routes\\_to\\_school/SR2S\\_introduction.htm](http://www.bikewalk.org/safe_routes_to_school/SR2S_introduction.htm)

In response to inadequate sidewalks and in an effort to ease parents’ worries about their children biking to school, the National Center for Bicycling and Walking is working with educators, officials, and engineers to develop programs that will help children arrive at their destination safely. The website offers information on the following:

- How to make neighborhoods bicycle- and child-friendly, including **assessment tools** to spot trouble areas, such as a lack of bike lanes, and hidden street signs
- A **Pedestrian Facilities Reference Guide** that identifies concerns about street signs, curbs, intersection crossings, and other pedestrian services, and ways to correct the problems

**Find more information on the Internet!** Try using terms like “pedestrian safety,” “bicycle safety,” “neighborhood safety,” “traffic calming,” “traffic law enforcement,” “walking bus,” “bicycle bus,” and “safe routes.”

# Teaching Kids About Neighborhood Safety Resources From the National Crime Prevention Council

The National Crime Prevention Council offers a variety of resources to help parents and educators teach kids how to be safe as they walk and bike to school. Kits include background information on safety issues, age-appropriate lesson plans, reproducible activities for children, and letters to parents (in English and Spanish) to reinforce messages. Colorful posters and comic-activity books are designed to engage children in learning safe pedestrian behaviors.

- *Get the Message! McGruff’s Tool Kit to Keep Children Safe*, grades K–5
- *Keeping Kids Safe: A Kit for Caring Communities*, grades K–5
- *Community Works: Smart Teens Make Safer Communities* curriculum, grades 5–9
- *Talking With Youth About Prevention: Teaching Guide for Law*

*Enforcement and Others*, grades K–12

- *McGruff Wants You To Help Take Bite Out of Crime* comic-activity book, grades 2–5
- *Scruff Beats the Scary Streets* comic-activity book; available in Spanish only, grades 2–5
- Posters on bicycle, pedestrian, and neighborhood safety, grades K–4
- McGruff.org’s Milstein Child Safety Center ([www.mcgruff.org](http://www.mcgruff.org))

To find more information on these and other resources, visit [www.mcgruffstore.org](http://www.mcgruffstore.org) or call 800-NCPC-911.



# GPS Technology: Keeping Track of School Buses

A version of this article appeared as an insert in the November 2004 issue of *School Planning and Management*. Reprinted with permission.

The idealistic image of students climbing aboard shiny yellow buses and trundling safely to and from school is a daily staple for countless families. But when something goes wrong, from a traffic jam to an incident as unsettling as an accident or—as happened in Oley, PA, in 2002—a hijacking, school officials and parents need to know one thing: where is the bus? For many schools Global Positioning System (GPS) technology, used in combination with wireless communication technology, is providing the answer to this question and much more.

## Tracking Buses in Real-Time

The assumption is that the buses and bus drivers will run on-time and on-route from each student's home to school and back again each day. But the reality is that situations can arise to throw the best-laid plans off track. Students who are tardy to the bus stop, unexpected road hazards resulting in traffic slow-downs or detours, mechanical problems, bad weather, and countless other situations can cause a bus to vary from its schedule. If the bus is equipped with a wireless communication device and GPS software, a school official has the capability to log on to a website and locate the bus instantly. Beyond this tracking capability, wireless phones allow the school immediate contact with the bus drivers and vice versa if a situation or concern arises, enhancing safety.

Tracking information can also be made available to parents through a password-protected website. If parents are concerned about sending their child to the bus stop during inclement weather or when the radio is announcing traffic problems in the area, they can log on to a website and find out where the bus is and whether or not it is on schedule to pick up their child. And at the end of the school day, if the bus is late returning the child home, another quick check can save a concerned phone call to the school.

## How Does GPS Work?

GPS technology utilizes an array of 24 satellites in stationary orbit 11,000 miles

into space to define precise locations on the surface of the Earth, based on standards of latitude and longitude. In addition to supplying geographic location, elevation, and time information, GPS provides tracking and navigation data that can be analyzed with Geographic Information Systems (GIS) software. Since GPS became commercially available in 1997, positional location accuracy has increased to 15 meters [more than 16 yards] from perhaps 100 meters [110 yards], and now to perhaps a centimeter [less than half an inch]. This access to instantly updated digital mapping has many useful applications for school transportation concerns.

## Tracking Students for Added Safety

Kids will be kids. They might occasionally miss the bus in the morning, get off at the wrong school or bus stop, forget to get off at their own stop, or get on the wrong bus to head home at the end of the school day. The risks and consequences of this sort of misstep are heightened for those buses transporting handicapped or special education students.

One option available for student tracking with a GPS system is a swipe-card system. Students swipe an ID card each time they enter or exit the bus. An existing database of students and bus routes would note any inconsistencies, such as students who missed the bus or got on or off at the wrong stops, and an alert could be sent either by email or phone to school personnel and/or parents about the irregularity.

The past decade has seen a rapid increase of the integration of wireless communication technology into daily life, lifting both communication and safety to much higher levels. Though it used to be such technologies were only available at great cost, they are now affordably available on wireless phones, making fleet management solutions more efficient, easier to deploy, and cost-effective.

To learn more, search the Internet for "school bus GPS."—Editors

## Tips From McGruff®

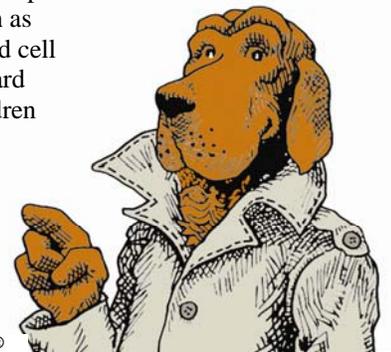
Help your children stay safe as they ride the bus or walk to and from school with these tips from McGruff the Crime Dog. For more tips like these, visit McGruff's website at [www.mcgruff.org](http://www.mcgruff.org).

### Safety on the Bus

- Have your children arrive at the bus stop at least five minutes before the bus is scheduled to pick them up.
- Make sure children know to stand on the sidewalk or on the grass while waiting for the bus.
- Teach children to make sure that they can see the bus driver and the bus driver can see them before they cross in front of the bus. Tell them to never walk behind the bus.
- Be aware that bullying often takes place on the school bus. Ask children about their experiences on the bus—who they sit with, who they talk to, and what the other kids do. Let them know that if they see someone being bullied or are bullied themselves, they can talk to you, the bus driver, or another trusted adult.

### Walking to School Safely

- Map out with your children a safe way for them to walk to school or to the bus stop. Avoid busy roads and intersections. Do a trial run with them to point out places they should avoid along the way, such as vacant lots, construction areas, and parks where there aren't many people.
- Teach children to follow traffic signals and rules when walking or biking. Stress that they should cross the street at crosswalks or intersections with crossing guards when they can.
- Encourage children to walk to school or the bus stop with a sibling or friend and to wait at the bus stop with other children.
- Teach children not to talk to strangers, go anywhere with them, or accept gifts from them without your permission. Tell them that if they see a suspicious stranger hanging around the neighborhood or in their school, they should tell an adult.
- Help children memorize their phone number and full address. Write down other important phone numbers such as your work and cell phone on a card for your children to carry with them.



McGruff the Crime Dog®