



# Halton District School Board

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## Final Report on the Active and Safe Routes to School Project Halton District School Board



**Robert Little Public School's Walking School Bus (Acton, ON)**

Jennifer Jenkins, Project Manager  
January 2011

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

**This project was not an individual effort, but a combined effort of many. Halton District School Board (HDSB) would like to thank and acknowledge all of you for your support and contribution to the ASRTS Project!**

The people listed below participated in, and supported the project in a variety of ways.

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Jacky Kennedy, Green Communities Canada

### **Administrative Support**

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**HDSB Project Schools:**

Alexander's  
Charles R. Beaudoin  
Gardiner  
Falgarwood  
Hawthorne Village  
John T. Tuck  
Joshua Creek  
Maple Grove  
McKenzie-Smith Bennett  
Montclair  
Mohawk Gardens  
Munn's

Orchard Park  
Pilgrim wood  
P.L. Robertson  
Robert Little  
Sam Sherratt  
Sheridan  
New Central  
James W. Hill  
Palermo  
Park  
Tiger Jeet Singh



**Charles R. Beaudoin's Walking School Bus, Burlington, ON**

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The warning bells have been rung; children today are experiencing obesity at alarming rates and are not meeting daily-recommended levels of physical activity. Medical professionals have predicted, shorter, less healthy life spans for this generation, and sadly, parents outliving their offspring.

Reports of poor air quality, traffic congestion at schools and safety issues of near misses between pedestrian and vehicle, further compound the issue.

Luckily, a program exists that can address these issues. It's premise is historical and its act simple; walking.

In September of 2009, after a successful one-year pilot project in 2008, the Halton District School Board expanded the Active and Safe Routes to School (ASRTS) program to 20 of their schools.

ASRTS is a national initiative that strives to create an environment that is conducive to and supportive of, safe, walkable communities. It promotes the use of active transportation for the daily trip to and from school.

Project planning began in September 2009 with schools implementing the program late March 2010. Schools implemented walking school buses, held active transportation events and promoted walking and wheeling to school through incentives, newsletters, campaigns and announcements.

Student surveys were performed pre and post program implementation, and traffic counts were taken at three schools. Comparison schools, which were not implementing the program, were also surveyed. Case studies at two schools were completed, interviewing administrators, teachers, students and parents about the program.

### **Highlights:**

- 23 schools implemented the ASRTS program and walking school buses
- Three Principals/VP's who were either involved in the pilot project (2008) or the 2009-2010 project and moved schools, brought the ASRTS program with them; while the new principal at the school maintained the program
- 13,037 students and staff experienced active transportation messaging (34% of the board's elementary students)
- Approximately 940 students utilized walking school buses (after seven weeks of implementation)
- Schools reported many students using active transport outside of the organized walking schools bus (older students like to walk independently)
- Traffic counts discovered a decrease in car traffic on *Walking Wednesdays* (24-31%)
- Case studies reported both parental and student satisfaction with the program; especially the walking school bus

- Student surveys at the project schools showed an increase in active transportation
- Extensive media coverage from local and provincial newspapers, radio stations, internet sites and television stations
- Six conference presentations locally, provincially, nationally and internationally
- Consultation provided across the provincially nationally and internationally

## **Traffic Counts**

Before counts were taken prior to program implementation on different days of the week while all after counts were performed on *Walking Wednesdays* when the *Walking School Buses* and ASRTS program initiatives were taking place.

Despite circumstances where the walking school bus and ASRTS activities were cancelled, a decrease in traffic was noted. Since counts were taken when the ASRTS program was in operation, one can hypothesize the program and its WSB initiative had a positive impact on student active transport behaviours and car traffic. For instance, at Orchard Park, there was a 31% reduction in car traffic after four weeks of implementing the walking school bus. At John T Tuck, after four weeks of implementation, traffic decreased by 24%.

Most notable and interesting are the PM counts. Research already supports the finding of higher active transport behaviours for the trip home, than to school, but the decrease in car traffic numbers are significant.

## **Case Studies**

Two schools involved in implementing the program and its walking school buses were interviewed to identify successes, enablers, challenges and barriers at the school level. These interviews provide qualitative evidence of how the program impacted those involved.

The following quote nicely sums one student's experience with the program

*“This is a good program because it is a lot of fun. The program is good because you don't have to go in a car, you don't waste pollution. When you're in a car, you can't talk to your friends and when you walk, more people come and you can talk to your friends”.*

## **Student Survey's**

Student surveys were applied at all project schools and five comparison schools. An increase in active transport behaviours were identified at both project and comparison schools. However, due to several limitations in the data, and the use of an accountability format a cause-and-effect analysis could not be made. Readers should refer to the Evaluation section of the report for further information and explanation.

## **BACKGROUND**

**The Need:** (Childhood Obesity, Physical Inactivity, Poor Air Quality, Academic Performance Improvement and Injury Prevention)

1. Obesity, including childhood obesity, has been recognized as an epidemic in many countries including Canada. Obese children are more likely to become obese adults and to suffer from chronic diseases early in life.<sup>1</sup> According to Active Healthy Kids Canada's 2010 Report Card those who actively commute in kindergarten have healthier body weights in Grades one and two.<sup>2</sup>
2. In 2005, 46% of Halton residents aged 12 and older were inactive, which is significantly higher than the proportion that were active (29%) or moderately active (26%).<sup>3</sup> According to Healthy Kids Canada's 2010 Report Card, only 12% of children are meeting Canada's guidelines of 90 minutes of physical activity a day.<sup>4</sup>
3. Society's dependence on the automobile is contributing to a variety of environmental and health concerns. Poor air quality reports are prevalent, and the link to poor childhood health effects is well documented. Increased use of the car has also led to more sedentary lifestyles. There is a need to create an environment that is conducive to health for our current and future generations.<sup>5/6</sup>
4. Research has documented the association between physical fitness and academic achievement. This raises the possibility that a child's chances for academic success could be improved by increasing fitness.<sup>7</sup>
5. Traffic-related injury to children has been reported as the leading cause of unintentional injury-related death for children aged 14 and under. Keeping children out of cars and creating safe infrastructure can help lessen this statistic.<sup>8</sup>

### **Active and Safe Routes to School (ASRTS)**

Active and Safe Routes to School is a provincial initiative that strives to create an environment that is conducive to, and supportive of, safe, walkable communities.

*"Active & Safe Routes to School promotes the use of active and efficient transportation for the daily trip to school, addressing health and traffic safety issues while taking action on air pollution and climate change."* Green Communities Canada (ASRTS promoter and champion)

This nationally implemented, evidence-based program has existed since 1997. It is comprised of eight initiatives:

- Walking School Bus (WSB)
- Walking Wednesdays
- International Walk to School Day and Week

- Walk a Block
- Neighbourhood Walkabout
- Walking Buddies
- No Idling at School
- Classroom Mapping

The goals of the Active and Safe Routes to School Program are as follows:

- To mitigate parent vehicular traffic at the school site (fewer parents driving)
- To improve air quality at the school site (fewer car emissions)
- To create safe walking routes to school (proper infrastructure in place)
- To increase the physical activity levels of youth by having them walk, bike or wheel (roller-blades, skateboards, scooters) to school instead of arriving in their parents' car

## **HISTORY**

### **Halton District School Board and Active and Safe Routes to School**

After a successful one-year pilot project between the Halton Region Health Department (HRHD) and the Halton District School Board (HDSB), HDSB Trustees unanimously voted to expand the Active and Safe Routes to School (ASRTS) program to 25 schools.

A project management position was created and filled via secondment of a Halton Region Health Department member. The project started September 1, 2009. Traditionally, ASRTS was managed through local health departments that introduced and implemented the program at the individual school level. This position, realized for the first time in Canada, heralded a School Board's adoption of the program.

A total of 18 schools volunteered to participate in the project. In January 2010, the Halton Catholic District School Board (HCDSB) joined, providing five more schools. In the spring of 2010, four schools exited the project, citing they had many walkers and the program was no longer needed. However, three new schools joined and prepared for implementation in the fall. During the fall of the 2010/2011 school year another two HDSB schools joined. So, during the project lifecycle, a total of 23 HDSB schools implemented the ASRTS program and 5 HCDSB schools.

## **THE PROJECT:**

**Phase I: School Year: 2009/2010**

**Phase II: Fall 2010**

Project specific details can be found in the Phase I and Phase II Project Plans on the ASRTS web-page at <http://www.hdsb.ca/Programs/Pages/ActiveandSafeRoutes.aspx>

A total of 23 schools joined the project (Table 1 and Table 2):

**Table 1: Phase I: Project Schools 2009-2010 School Year**

<b>Returning Pilot Schools</b>	<b>New Schools: Operating</b>	<b>New Schools: Non-operating</b>
Alexander's	Charles Beaudoin	P. L. Robertson
Sam Sherratt	Pilgrim Wood	
Mackenzie-Smith Bennett	Montclair	
Maple Grove	Munn's	
Hawthorne Village	Joshua Creek	
	Orchard Park	
	Robert Little	
	Falgarwood	
	Sheridan	
	Gardiner	
	John T. Tuck	
	Mohawk Gardens	

**Table 2: Phase II: Project Schools Fall 2010**

<b>Schools who exited June 2010</b>	<b>New Schools Spring 2010</b>	<b>New Schools Fall 2010</b>
Mohawk Gardens	Palermo	Park
Alexander's	James W. Hill	Tiger Jeet Singh
Mackenzie-Smith Bennett	New Central	
Munn's		

## **Project Results:**

The project was completed within time, scope and budget

### **Vision:**

That all students who are in the allotted walking distance of 1.6 km from the school, will use active transport to get to school

### **Goals:**

1. To assist 25 elementary/middle schools to get their students walking to school
2. To support the implementation of the *Active and Safe Routes to School (ASRTS)* program in 20 HDSB elementary/middle schools and 5 HCDSB elementary/middle schools.

### Measurement /evaluation of outcomes (PM=Project Manager)

Objective	Results
1. By December 2010, in 20 HDSB schools and 5 HCDSB schools, complete the implementation of the ASRTS program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>28 elementary/middle schools in Halton engaged in ASRTS projects, including a pilot at five Catholic schools; ASRTS Project Manager seconded until December 2010 (a first in Ontario); final report recommends rolling function into an existing HDSB position</li> </ul>
<p>2. By December 2010, in those 25 schools, complete the following;</p> <p>a) Identification of a walking route to school</p> <p>b) Implementation of walkabouts (to identify enablers and barriers in infrastructure and safety issues)</p> <p>c) Creation of an action plan for implementing the recommendations from the walkabouts</p> <p>d) Organization at the school level to implement ASRTS</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>See Appendix 2 for the project schools</li> <li>A total of 33 walking routes were established. Therefore, 30 walking school buses were organized to run once a week (<i>Walking Wednesdays</i>), and 3 walking school busses every day of the week. Due to boundary changes at two schools, two routes were eliminated on September 2011</li> <li>A total of 22 walkabouts took place</li> <li>22 walkabout reports were written generating 66 action items, with a 94% completion rate. HDSB, Halton Police Services and the four municipalities completed the action items</li> <li>All schools implemented Walkabouts, Walking Wednesdays and Walking School Buses. Some also implemented Anti-idling Campaigns. In addition many active transport events and competitions occurred</li> </ul>
e) Creation of community awareness about the ASRTS program and their school specific initiatives (See objective #4)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>At least 13,037 students and staff received ASRTS messaging (34% of Board students). School promotion included newsletters, presentations to parent councils, bulletin boards, PA announcements, flyers and displays at <i>'meet-the-teacher'</i> nights.</li> </ul>
3. By December 2010, complete an evaluation of project results	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The following evaluation techniques were applied: student surveys (twice), traffic counts (3 counts) and case studies (2 schools)</li> <li>At least 940 students used the Walking School Bus; many others (especially older students) walked independently (these independent walkers were not counted). Student surveys showed an increase in active transportation after only seven weeks of implementation</li> <li>Traffic was decreased at two schools, Orchard Park, by 31% and John T Tuck by 24% (after four weeks of implementing the walking school bus)</li> <li>Five comparison schools were also surveyed. They too</li> </ul>

	<p>had an increase in active transport, however, there were several limitations to the data and the schools were comparison and not control</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Case studies reported both parental and student satisfaction with the program; informal positive feedback from teachers/administrators; Positive feedback from parents: “I truly enjoy the walking school bus...I really look forward to Wednesdays – it’s the highlight of my week. Great program!” Parent from Sam Sherratt P.S.</li> </ul>
<p>4. By December 2010, have implemented a communication campaign, targeting the larger community about the program and the work happening in the schools</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Website created: Average <b>daily</b> web visits: Nov-Dec 2009: <b>82</b> (after media release issued); Jan-Feb: 6, Mar: 7; April: 7.5, May: 6;</li> <li>• PSA created for presentations, school events and placed on YouTube. 481 views on YouTube (note: PSA has not been promoted or placed on promo materials)</li> <li>• Two media releases and one media advisory issued</li> <li>• Positive media coverage appeared in all four <b>local</b> municipalities and Toronto Star (including a “Laurel”); 2 <b>national</b> TV placements (CBC/CTV); editorial and article in Hamilton Spectator; multiple blog postings; Halton program highlighted on the <a href="#">Green Communities</a> website. Achieved <b>86%</b> *MRP at no cost (MRP criteria included: partner mention (to recognize partners and build support), photo (to capture community attention/promote participating schools), key messages (to explain the program), and web/contact information (to encourage new schools to learn more)</li> <li>• Project Manager invited to present at six conferences (provincial, national and international)</li> <li>• Halton Region and HDSB nominated for a FCM Sustainability Communities Award for ASRTS</li> </ul>
<p>5. By December 2010, have approached (and if possible collaborated with) the Halton Catholic District School Board on/in the project</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In January of 2010, HCDSB joined the project with five schools. All five schools implemented the ASRTS program. Walking school busses were established with one school opting not to run a bus. All schools held Walking Wednesdays events and promotions. Implementation ran from October 2010 to the end of November 2010. A slight increase in walking behaviour was seen in October and on Walking Wednesdays. Walking dropped in November but only slightly past baseline.</li> </ul>

*\*MRP™ is the Canadian standard for evaluating and reporting editorial media coverage for public relations initiatives originating in Canada.*

**Additional Notes:**

- Three principals/VP’s who were either involved in the pilot project (2008) or the 2009-2010 project and moved schools, brought the ASRTS program with them, while the new principal at the school, maintained the program

- Consultation provided provincially, nationally and internationally (to other school boards, NGO's and government agencies)

## **EVALUATION:** (Student Surveys, Traffic Counts and Case Studies)

### **Student Surveys**

This year's evaluation model was based on an accountability-reporting format instead of a true formal research methodology. Only the new schools in the project were involved in the evaluation, where returning pilot schools were not. Decisions for this format were based on the following:

- The pilot project in 2008 had extensive evaluation performed by the Halton Region Health Department Epidemiologist Team. The results of that evaluation showed that the program was effective in increasing student active transport behaviours.
- HDSB's Research and Accountability Department had limited capacity for the ASRTS project due to other competing priority projects
- Pilot schools had asked to be excluded from the research portion due to their involvement in the pilot's extensive surveying the year before
- Pilot schools involvement in 2008 had a potential to skew data, since the goal was to focus on implementation effects
- Evaluation Specialist withdrew from program due to a job change and at a time when the hiring of a new specialist was not possible due to project timelines

### **Method**

Utilizing the pilot projects student survey as a template, a more concise, revised version was created for the 2009-2010 ASRTS project. (Student Survey Appendix I)

The project schools applied two student surveys. A baseline survey was taken in March (22-26) and a second survey in June (May 31- June 4). The survey was applied to grades three, five and six students who lived within the 1.6 km walking distance of the school. (Classroom teachers only recorded data on these students.)

Each morning the classroom teacher asked the whole classroom, by a show of hands, how they arrived to school (using the survey categories). The number of students in class who arrived by active transport was compared with the number of students enrolled in class who were considered eligible to use active transport, that is, who lived within 1.6 km of the school. (Teachers were not to reveal their selective recording to the class; i.e. only the children who lived within the walking distance).

Comparison schools also applied the same methodology. These schools were not involved in the ASRTS project nor were they implementing any of the ASRTS initiatives.

## Results

- In both study and comparison schools, the number of students who were eligible for active transport and who arrived at school by car decreased from March to June
- In both study and comparison schools, the number of students who were eligible for active transport and who arrived to school by walking, bicycle or other active transport increased from March to June
- The mean number of students who were eligible for active transport to school remained relatively the same from March to June in both study and comparison schools
- Comparison schools generally had more students in class who were eligible to walk-to-school than in counterpart study classrooms (approx. 2.1 more students in comparison classrooms)
- In study schools, the number of students who walk to school decreased at the end of the week in both March and June
- In both study and comparison schools, walking was the most prevalent form of active transport to school in March and June
- In both the study and comparison schools, there was no significant difference in the pattern of students taking vehicles to school, although in both groups the mean decreased from March to June

## Limitations to the Data

- A rise in active transport was expected due to the change in weather; however, given project timelines (schools did not implement the program until the first week of April, except for two schools, Charles R Beaudoin and PL Robertson) and school mandates (EQAO testing), the best possible data collection timeline was devised
- Variables such as weather and pre-existing school philosophies were not considered during the data analysis
- Data reflects only nine weeks of implementation. Some schools implemented an even shorter time period (5 –6 weeks)
- Not all the returned surveys were completed or populated properly therefore only 39% of March data and 42% of June data were able to be included for data analysis
- Comparison schools were chosen based on their similarity in size, proximity, and geographical catchment areas with relation to study schools. These schools were not surveyed for existing active transport behaviours. These schools may have already had a high active transport philosophy and culture within the school community. (NOTE: All project schools that volunteered to enter the project expressed concerns about low active transport behaviours and high car traffic volumes at their school)
- Ministry-mandated policies such as Quality Daily Fitness (QDF) requirements and other healthy, active living activities and programs may have already been in place, both in study and comparison schools. The data compiled about active transport was not compared to this type of profile information
- Walking School Buses at 10 of the 11 study schools were executed only once a week (Wednesdays)

## Conclusions

- There was an increase in active transport behaviours from March to June
- Study schools adopted the ASRTS behaviours
- Accountability format does not lend to cause-and-effect analysis

## Traffic Counts

Traffic Counts were performed by the City of Burlington's Transportation Services Department (Traffic Section). Only the new project schools located in the City of Burlington were counted. Schools were not notified of the date of data collection.

Count dates were as follows:

- Before: Month of December or March
- After: First week of May (post 4 weeks of implementation)
- Final: Fourth week of June (post 6-7 weeks of implementation)

Before counts were taken prior to program implementation on different days of the week while all after counts were performed on *Walking Wednesdays* when the *Walking School Buses* and ASRTS program initiatives were taking place. City of Burlington staff reported witnessing the arrival of the walking school bus during most of their counts.

Due to some circumstances, WSBs were not running during some count times because:

- Construction with associated heavy equipment at the school site caused concerns for parents in allowing their children to use the walking school bus. Thus, the Principal cancelled the WSB until the construction completion (Charles R Beaudoin at after count)
- Timing; some schools seized their walking school buses two weeks before year end (Orchard Park and John T. Tuck)

**Results** (Table 3 provides the results of the traffic counts)

Due to construction at the school site and the canceling of the Walking School Buses, the final count at Charles R Beaudoin was not performed. Also, final PM counts at Orchard Park and John T Tuck were cancelled due to tornado warnings on the scheduled day.

Table 3: Traffic Counts

School	Before AM	After AM	Final AM	Before PM	After PM	Final PM
Charles Beaudoin	154	144	n/a	139	80	n/a
Orchard Park	166	115	154	135	69	--
John T. Tuck	150	118	115	154	64	--
Total	470	377	(269)	428	213	--

## **Discussion**

Despite circumstances where the WSB and ASRTS activities were cancelled, a decrease in traffic was noted. Since counts were taken when the ASRTS program was in operation, one can hypothesize the program and its WSB initiative had a positive impact on student active transport behaviours and car traffic. For instance, at Orchard Park, there was a 31% reduction in car traffic after four weeks of implementing the walking school bus. At John T Tuck, after four weeks of implementation, traffic decreased by 24%.

Most notable and interesting are the PM counts. Research already supports the finding of higher active transport behaviours for the trip home, than to school, but the decrease in car traffic numbers are significant.

## **Limitations**

- Drivers were not surveyed for residence, meaning they may have lived either within or without the 1.6 km walking boundary. Therefore, some car traffic may have been occupied by eligible-for-bus students
- Schools did not inform the Project Manager they were seizing their walking school buses, therefore some traffic counts were taken when the WSB was not running

## Case Studies

Two schools involved in implementing the program and its walking school buses were interviewed to identify successes, enablers, challenges and barriers at the school level.

### The Schools:

#### P.L. Robertson Public School, Milton, Ontario



Walking School Bus

P.L. Robertson (PLR) joined the ASRTS project prior to opening its doors to the community, with the intent of creating a school philosophy and culture that favoured the use of active transportation. The newly built subdivision in Milton was planned to encourage walking and biking to school and the PLR students eagerly awaited the new school's opening. Having been bussed to another area for several years the students were anxious to get to school by foot or bike.

A very determined Vice Principal, supportive Principal, and engaged Parent Council worked closely with the Halton District School Board's ASRTS Project Manager to set up walking routes, Walking School Bus (WSB) drivers and promotional communiqués to open PLR as a "walk-to only" school.

During the designing stage of the school building, sidewalks were added along both sides of the school to allow students direct access to the back of the school from the roadside walkway. This sidewalk design separated walking students and parents from traffic. Twenty-six bike racks were added to one side of the school to accommodate one third of the school population for cycling to school. Disincentives to car traffic to and from the school were put in place including: 1) no formal 'Kiss n Ride' system development on the school property, 2) staff and visitor parking lots were placed on separate sides of the school, with the staff parking area closed off to other drivers before the school day began, 3) 'no stopping zones' were placed at the front of the school property. Police presence during the opening week helped to encourage continuous vehicular movement and discourage pullovers and drop-offs.

A media release was issued declaring the school as the first "walk-to-only" school in the Board. Although the school did have two large buses and two mini buses, these were primarily for French Immersion students living outside the regular catchment area; the school opened with 80% of their 470 students eligible to walk.

At the school level, two walking routes were developed and reviewed for safety. Parent volunteers and school staff, on a daily basis, led two walking school buses along two different routes. Students and their parents were invited and encouraged to use the WSB as their means of getting to school. For older students who were not interested in using the WSB, they were prompted to use active transport and were found to be walking outside the formal WSB.

PL Robertson was successful in engaging 100-150 students to use their walking school buses on a daily basis. In addition, staff reported many other active transport users outside of the formal WSB.

### **John T. Tuck Public School, Burlington, Ontario**



John T. Tuck joined the ASRTS project in September 2009. A school in a mature neighbourhood in Burlington, John T Tuck opened its doors in 1960.

Having a student population of 605, with only two large buses means 70% of the student population is eligible to walk. Despite this fact, the school was experiencing high traffic volumes at arrival and dismissal times. Expressed frustration by both parents and staff about the traffic lead the school to join the ASRTS project and implement walking school buses.

**Walking School Bus**

Two routes were identified along a collector road where the school was situated. Staff led the two walking school buses once a week on Walking Wednesdays. Promotional events, communications and incentives were used to garner interest and participation. The Parent Council was informed of the initiative and encouraged to support the work.

After much preparation, the school launched its first walking school bus in April, which functioned until the end of the school year and restarted at the beginning of the next.

City of Burlington's Traffic Department agreed to take traffic counts before, during and after the spring implementation. Results of that traffic study showed a 24% decrease in car traffic after four weeks of implementation. Staff reported an average of 50 students participating in the walking school buses and many more students choosing active transportation outside of the formal WSB.

Before restart in the 2010/11 school year, parents and children were asking and waiting for the WSB to move again.

## The Interviews

At both of these schools, administrators, students, teachers and parents were interviewed about their experiences and philosophies about the ASRTS program and the walking school buses. All responded to the same questions. Full Case Study notes are available through the ASRTS Project Manager. Main themes and direct quotes are presented below.

### ADMINISTRATORS:

#### *What has been the programs impact?*

Both administrators interviewed stated there was a level of excitement or ‘buzz’ around the school surrounding the Walking School Bus and/or Walking Wednesdays. The administrator noted this was particularly apparent in the primary and junior division. One administrator commented that by the end of the school year, they had over half of the school involved. She noted the program seemed to have a strong “contagious” effect in the school - “The more people see others involved, the more they want to get involved as well.”

Administrators told us parents were reacting in a positive way. “From the parents’ perspective, they are excited to drop their children off and know they will get to school safely. Many parents said this afforded them some extra time to themselves.” It provides parents with a great opportunity to work with the school. Once they get excited about the program, they are very instrumental in spreading the word about it to other parents along with encouraging them to let their children try it out.

One administrator noted participating parents “have become close friends. Outside of the walks to school, many of them socialize or go for coffee. Some have developed a system where they will stop by each other’s homes after a walk and drop off the wagon to the next walk leader’s house.”

#### **Interesting perspective on winter:**

“Weather can be a big factor with parents. In that regard, winter can actually be a good time to start the program, as it gives some families the opportunity to see others out and active in the winter months. In fact, the program got better and better in the winter, and both parents and students noted they actually got warmer walking, as opposed to sitting in a cold car, waiting for it to heat up.”

#### *What are the needs of the program re implementation and sustainability?*

The administrators stated one of the needs was to simply keep the program going. Another was the availability of incentives as they help make the program more exciting for the students which addresses another need, funding.

Placing ASRTS inside the Eco Schools Certification program will help to give it traction, allowing it to fit into one of the school improvement plan’s pillars, namely ‘Safety and Well Being’

There was a strong need for volunteers. Having two staff members or more involved, since it is a lot of work for one person, particularly at the start.

“There is a need for patience at the school in terms of implementation as well. As long as we think about the fact that its going to take time and that it is not going to happen over night...because if you think it’s going to happen over night you will be disappointed.”

*What are the barriers towards the program re implementation and sustainability?*

In terms of barriers, the administrator recognized the junior and intermediate students were not getting involved – it was running more as a primary program. Staffs were needed to run and sustain the program, and that staff interest and involvement was impacted by the changing weather.

Recruiting volunteers was also an issue as parents have liability concerns.

One administrator stated “a lot of parents I talk to just want to drive and say it is more convenient for them. This means I [and the school] need to keep on the reinforcing the message about ASRTS.” Some parents have even expressed anger at the school’s no parking rules out in the front of the building.”

*Do you have any criticism about the program?*

The two different schools felt the perceived liability issues surrounding its implementation was the biggest criticism they would receive. They said it was difficult to involve parents because they were often afraid of any liability.

## **TEACHER CHAMPIONS:**

*Describe your experience in implementing the ASRTS program*

Being involved in the ASRTS program has been “a great experience for sure.” There was a lot of work in the first year and there was a lot to do behind the scenes. It was difficult predicting how best to get students motivated and a lot of my work in the first year was about promotion within the school.”

“We had a few challenges starting up the program at the beginning of the school year. The challenge was getting enough people to fill each bus [walking school bus] every day and commit to a formal program. Many parents said that they did walk every day, but were hesitant to commit formally, just in case there were times when they would not be able to make it.”

*Do you think there has been an impact on the students?*

“Though the school is a ‘walking school’, many students do not walk. This is slowly starting to change a little bit at a time. Students get to spend time with their friends.”

“The impact on students was the building of a sense of community and pride in the school. Students are getting excited in class about the program, and this excitement seems to be attracting more participants every day we run the walking school bus.”

*What are your needs / barriers when implementing this program?*

- Parent buy-in, without parent support this program will not last.
- Parent volunteers to help run the program and the walking school buses.

*How are the parents reacting?*

“Parents are reacting very well.” Sometimes on her walking routes, she sees parents waiting in their driveways with their children, and they are also keen to let younger siblings (kindergarten students) join the WSB as well.

“There are a few parents who are quite keen about the program and commit to it daily. Also, there are some who expressed interest last year, but now their circumstances (work, other scheduling commitments) don’t allow them to participate. There was a parent last year that was quite concerned about the WSB program. He had never seen or heard of something like this before. He expressed concern about his daughter’s safety and we tried to assure him it was absolutely safe and spoke with him about it several times. In the end, he walked with the WSB for a while and when he felt more comfortable with it, he eventually let her walk on her own with her friends.”

*What would you tell a new teacher champion who is starting up the program?*

“I would tell a new teacher champion, don’t do it by yourself, the more teachers and parents you have the better it is going to be. She also suggested that a new teacher champion should bring the WSB program to parent council and try to get the parents involved right away.

“Have a partner – that is helpful because you can divide-up the phone calls and the work. Look at in-school promotion ideas; maybe the teacher champion should be looking at announcements and having students write jingles, finding new ways for students to promote it themselves.”

<p><b>Teacher Champion:</b> “ It’s [walking school bus] a nice way to start your day. Kids really like it!</p>
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## **PARENTS:**

*What do you think of the Active and Safe Routes to School Program and the walking school buses?*

Parents reported enthusiasm for the program stating, “It is a great program. We like it because it encourages the kids to walk”. One parent said for her daughter in Grade 2, the biggest highlight is seeing the teachers; for her son in Grade 4, it’s seeing his friends.

“My children get excited to see their friends, and for us [her and her husband] it provides a good opportunity to interact with other parents. I have gotten to know other mothers, which has created opportunities to set up play-dates.”

*Does your child participate in the program and the walking school bus?*

“Yes, initially, I was afraid to have my daughter in junior kindergarten participate – I thought it would be challenging for her. My older daughter in Grade 2 participated right from the beginning and now her younger daughter sees this and wants to participate, too. She has even made friends on her walking school bus and now feels bad if she doesn’t walk.”

“My children come home so excited about the program, they are so excited there must be a lot of hype at the school to get participants. It [walking school bus] goes right by her front door, so my children are able to sit on the front step and wait for it to come by.”

*What can parents do towards the program?*

“The role of parents is to promote the WSB/ASRTS program by talking to other parents about it. This could be informally, through social connections or through more formal venues like parent councils. As one mother stated: ‘word of mouth is a big thing around here.’”

“Parking at this school is horrible, I see it much safer to come to school on foot than trying to negotiate through a packed parking lot and surrounding street. I have offered to have my friends drop their children off at my house in the mornings (instead of at the school) to take them on the WSB. I told her [friend] that she can get a little more time in the morning and the children can see their friends a little more as well. It seemed like a good way to get her to try it out.”

*What do you think needs to happen to get more children to walk/bike to school?*

“There needs to be more awareness on the parents’ side. Parents need to know that the program is there – they don’t even have to walk with their kids if they don’t have the time. This should be done with more direct communication to parents.”

The other parent suggested something mandatory at the school level – I don’t know how far a school can go with something like that, but it should go hand-in-hand with other healthy living policies; like healthy foods information in the newsletter and so on.

**One parent said:** “At this school, they encourage parents not to bring in McDonald’s for their children for lunch. They should encourage the WSB in the same way. Overall, the healthier kids are, the better off they are. Even though parents are busy, developing healthy behaviours, either through walking to school or enrolling kids in other activities, it provides bonding time with the children. You get to know who your kids are, know where they are and know who they hang out with.”

## STUDENTS:

*What do you think about the ASRTS program?*

“This is a good program because it is a lot of fun. The program is good because you don’t have to go in a car, you don’t waste pollution. When you’re in a car, you can’t talk to your friends and when you walk, more people come and you can talk to your friends”. Two students stated they have met new people through the walking school bus.

*How did you find out about the walking school bus?*

All students told us they found out about the walking school bus from P.A. announcements, from their teachers and from signs and posters at the school. The students all mentioned there was talk about the WSB inside the school.

*What did your parent say about using the walking school bus?*

- “I was walking to school with my mother and we saw the walking school bus and my mom asked me what that was and she got more information about it from the teacher”
- “My mom likes the bus because it gets some exercise for me”
- “My father likes the bus because he can get some fresh air”
- Two students told us when the walking school bus is not running; they do not walk to school.

*What is the best part of the WSB?* All students were very enthusiastic when answering this question

- Walking with my friends
- Seeing my teacher on the WSB route
- The badges that we get [incentives]

**Student:** “I like that it doesn’t take three seconds to get to school when I walk” [as opposed to when he is driven].

*Do you think more children will walk or bike to school because of this program? Do you know anyone who has?*

All students felt the WSB would get more children walking to school. At each site, at least one interview participant knew of other students who now walked because of the program.

*Is there anything else you want to mention about the WSB or ASRTS program at your school?*

“I live right on the WSB route, so I knows where it starts”

“More signs [walking route signs] would be good”

“The program is a lot of fun and all families should do it. If more people join in more; then more are going to know about it”

## **NEXT STEPS**

1. Organize a *Final Phase (III)*, which explores and coordinates sustainability for the ASRTS program within the existing HDSB organizational structure. (January-June 2011)
2. Develop a HDSB Active Transportation Strategy.
3. Develop a modified approach/process for implementing ASRTS (for easier implementation by the new internal coordinators)
4. Continue the work with municipal, regional and architectural partners for creating *Guidelines* for use when designing, planning and reviewing school sites and the neighbourhood around the school site (1.6 km walking distance)
5. Lobby Ontario *ecoschool* Steering Committee for better recognition of the ASRTS program (request an increased point allotment for the program)
6. Accommodate requests for presentation on the ASRTS project
7. Provide a Sustainability Report by June 2011 (provide feedback on next steps and recommendations for consideration)

## **CONCLUSION**

The Active and Safe Routes to School program has been widely introduced and implemented at the Halton District School Board. Project goals and objectives have been satisfied and accomplished within time, scope and budget.

A total of 26 elementary/middle schools have engaged in ASRTS projects (pilot and 2009/2010). This school year, 18 schools have implemented the program with another ready to start in Spring 2011. Principals reassigned have initiated the program at their new schools. These Principals were motivated to bring the program along because “there are great benefits for the students.”

Thirty-two teachers were involved in implementing the program. After seven weeks of implementation (April-June 2010) schools reported 935 students using their walking school buses (April-June 2010) and many more students using active transportation outside of the WSB. Traffic Counts at two schools, revealed a decrease in car traffic when the program was running.

Halton Catholic District School Board joined in January 2010 and ran a one-year pilot project at five of their schools, furthering the potential influence of the program.

Because of the pilot project in 2008 and the new project in 2009, a momentum has been generated for tacking and reversing the current culture of children not walking to school. Much has been done, hours have been dedicated, and multi-sector supports have been lent to make the ASRTS projects a reality in Halton Region.

However, the work is not done, as it will take continued, ongoing effort to create behavioural change and new social norms. This work needs to continue and be supported to realize lasting change.

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# APPENDICES

Appendix I: Student Survey

# Appendix I

## Student Survey



School Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Teacher: \_\_\_\_\_ Grade: \_\_\_\_\_

Dates of Survey: \_\_\_\_\_ Total Class Enrolment: \_\_\_\_\_

Total Number of Students in Class who are NOT eligible for bussing: \_\_\_\_\_  
 (Your principal has this information for you)

Please gather the following information from the students in your class who are NOT eligible for bussing.  
 Only their data is to be recorded.

### How did you get to school today?

Day	Total number of students in class today who are NOT eligible for bussing	Absent number of students absent today who are NOT eligible for bussing	Walked (from home to school)	Bike	Other ACTIVE transport (skateboards, roller blades, scooters)	Came by car or in a carpool, walked part- way (parent dropped off at a corner), courtesy seat on a school bus or other
Monday						
Tuesday						
Wednesday						
Thursday						
Friday						

### Teacher Information: Protocol for the Survey

## For the best evaluation results, please follow the instructions closely

### Please do at the beginning of the school day

Prior to asking the students the question “How did you get to school today?” Please define for the class the following methods of transportation:

1. **Walked from home to school:** walked from your house to the school
2. **Bike:** Came on your bike
3. **Other ACTIVE transport:** Skateboard, roller blades, or scooter to school
4. **Came by Car:** Driven in a car from your home by a parent, grandparent or guardian.
5. **Car Pool:** Met up or picked up by someone (neighbour, another mother/father) and was driven to school (there would be a friend or two in the car not just a brother or sister)
6. **Walked part way:** Was driven part of the way by someone (parent, grandparent, neighbour, with a carpool), then dropped off and walked the rest of the way
7. **Courtesy Seat on a School Bus:** Took the bus to school. The student is not a regular bus rider, but was given a seat because there was an empty one available.

### Instructions:

Once the students understand the definitions, it is probably easiest to start filling the survey out in this order

1. Before you fill-in the chart, completely fill-out the top portion of the survey i.e.) total class enrolment, total number of students in class who are NOT eligible for bussing (your principal has this information), etc.
2. Then each morning start with filling out the total number of students in class (that morning) who are NOT eligible for bussing.
3. Record the number of students who are absent (that morning) who are NOT eligible for bussing.
4. Start to ask the students how they got to school today (by a show of hands) and fill in the appropriate boxes. Make sure the students know that they are to only put their hand up once.
5. Make sure you record only the students who are NOT eligible for bussing, without letting the students know. This is very important for our data collection.
6. Check that both of the items in red (below) happen each day.
  - Make sure your totals are equal:**
    - The number in the **TOTAL** (number of students in class today who are NOT eligible for bussing) plus the number in the **ABSENT** (number of students away today who are NOT eligible for bussing) columns equals the Total Number of students in class who are NOT eligible for bussing.
    - The numbers in all the four right columns (about getting to school) equals the number in your **Total** (number of students in class today who are NOT eligible for bussing) column.

If these instructions are unclear please call:

Jennifer Jenkins, Project Manager for the ASRTS Project at the Halton District School Board – 905-335-3665, extension 2228.

**Thank you!**