



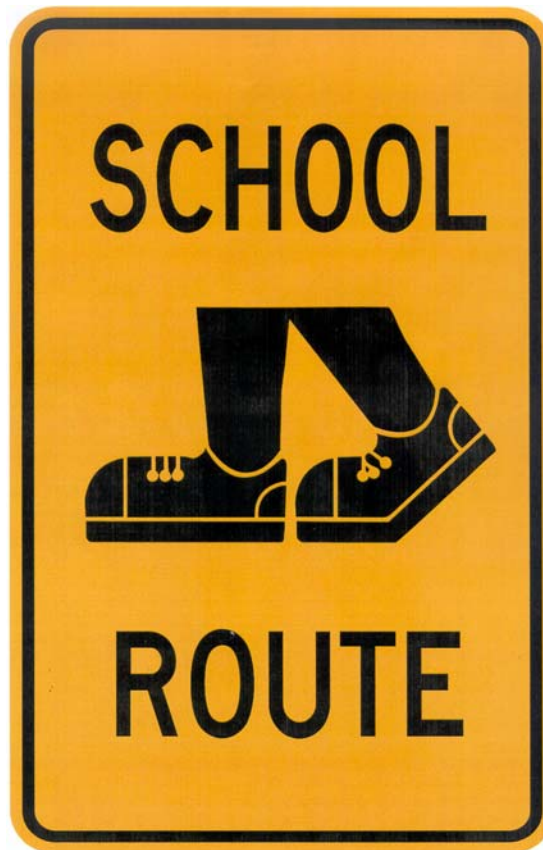
# Halton District School Board

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Don Vrooman, *Chair of the Board*

## **Joint Active and Safe Routes to School Project Final Report for the Halton Catholic District School Board**



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January 2011**

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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 help address these issues. Its premise is historical and its act simple: walking.

In September of 2009, after a successful one-year pilot project, the Halton District School Board (HDSB) expanded the Active and Safe Routes to School (ASRTS) program to 20 of their schools. To help create region-wide active transport change, HDSB decided to lobby and invite the Halton Catholic District School Board (HCDSB) to join in their efforts. In January of 2010, HCDSB agreed and joined, adding five schools to the projects portfolio.

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 January 2010 and schools implemented the program in September. Schools ran walking school buses, held active transportation events and promoted walking and wheeling to school through incentives, newsletters, campaigns and announcements.

To monitor active transport behaviours, a survey was applied to Grade 3 and 5 students over three months (September: baseline, October and November: implementation). The project culminated in December 2010, after three months of implementation (October, November and first half of December).

**Results** (for full results see the *Project Results* section of this report)

- Five schools implemented the ASRTS program
- All schools identified walking routes, but only four of the five schools lead *Walking School Buses*
- School level implementation started in October and continued until the first half of December
- 100 students used the four WSB's in the month of October
- 98 students used the walking school busses in the month of November
- Three schools had an increase in active transport behaviours from September to October
- Three schools had a decrease in active transport from October to November
- Active transportation slightly increased on *Walking Wednesdays* when the *Walking School Buses* were running
- 3,340 students received active transport messaging
- Less than 40% of Grade 3 and 5 students, who are walking-eligible, are using active transport

## **BACKGROUND**

**The Need:** (Childhood Obesity, Physical Activity, 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 (Ontario's 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

## THE PROJECT

### Project Planning and Initiation

In the fall of 2009, the HCDSB was approached by the Halton District School Board (HDSB) to join their ASRTS project. After a presentation to HCDSB Administrative Council, it was agreed five HCDSB schools would implement the ASRTS program as a pilot project. (See table 1 for project schools)

**Table 1: Project Schools**

Project Schools	Municipality
St. Christopher's (STC)	City of Burlington
St. Elizabeth of Seton (SES)	City of Burlington
St. Catherine of Alexandria (SCA)	Halton Hills
Guardian Angels (GUA)	Milton
St. Vincent's (STV)	Oakville

HDSB's ASRTS Project Manager would project manage between the two school boards. Project timelines were determined to be January 2010 to December 31, 2010. Data analysis and report writing were slotted to occur post the project timeline. HDSB's project plan was dovetailed to include HCDSB resulting in a revised project plan. HCDSB joined the ASRTS steering committee; and other key school board departments were contacted about the project (communications, research, facilities, IT).

Project information can be found in the Project Plan at:

<http://www.hcdsb.org/Community/Safe/Pages/default.aspx>

### Project Execution

The main deliverables of the project were (see Appendix I for more details)

1. School selection (5 schools)
2. Steering Committee Membership
3. Walkabouts
4. Baseline data collection
5. Implementation
6. Final Report

Project planning and set-up with the board took place in January and early February. Meetings were held with key department staff for involvement (research, communications, IT). An ASRTS website was erected. The Communication Plan in place with the Halton District School Board was updated to include HCDSB. Schools Principals were contacted and meetings were set-up for late March. Teacher Champions were identified and the ASRTS program and pilot project particulars were presented to involved school staff. In April, schools chose their walking routes for their walking school buses. Parent council presentations were made at some of the schools, along with staff meetings, to create awareness and garner support and interest.

Walkabouts of the chosen routes took place in May. Walkabout reports were written and action items were identified that centered on increasing student safety and walkability. In June, all Teacher Champions attended HDSB's Teacher Debrief Meeting for an opportunity to network and learn about implementation barriers and enablers. At this meeting promotional items were distributed to the schools.

During the summer months, action items listed in the walkabout reports were attended to, and the evaluation component of the project was organized for execution in September.

Baseline data was taken in the month of September before program implementation. Teacher champions were contacted and changes in staffing were dealt with. Project status reports were introduced and organized for monthly submission. A Phase II Communication Plan for the fall months was devised. Schools decided to launch implementation the first week of October to coincide with International Walk to School Week.

In the months of October and November, the schools implemented and promoted the program. Events were held and promotional items distributed. Articles in the school newsletters were submitted encouraging parents and students to choose active transport to school. Surveys were completed. Each school and Teacher Champion was autonomous in his or her implementation of the program. The Project Manager provided guidance and support as needed.

In December, during the last three weeks of the project, schools promoted and ran their walking school buses, but survey data was not collected. Schools were encouraged to continue their efforts after the holiday break and into 2011.

## **Project Monitoring and Controlling**

The following project monitoring and controlling events occurred during the project:

- Regular meetings were scheduled with the school board project champion
- Regular communication was maintained with involved department staff
- Five status reports were delivered
- School site visits occurred 3-4 times during the project
- Principals and Teacher Champions were contacted personally or with group reminders (email)
- All principals who requested assistance with some aspect of the project were responded to and had some form of service set-up within 24 hours
- Teacher Champions submitted schools status reports (October and November)
- Budget accounting was tracked

The above allowed the project to progress smoothly and all tasks, deliverables and milestones were achieved.

# 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 HCDSB position</li> </ul>
2. By December 2010, in those 25 schools, complete the following; <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Identification of a walking route to school</li> <li>b) Implementation of walkabouts (to identify enablers and barriers in infrastructure and safety issues)</li> <li>c) Creation of an action plan for implementing the recommendations from the walkabouts</li> <li>d) Organization at the school level to implement ASRTS</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A total of 5 walking routes were established. Four walking school buses were organized to run once a week (<i>Walking Wednesdays</i>).</li> <li>• A total of 5 walkabouts took place</li> <li>• 5 walkabout reports were written, generating 13 action items, with a 100% completion rate. HCDSB and the four municipalities completed the action items</li> <li>• All schools implemented <i>Walkabouts</i>, and <i>Walking Wednesdays</i>. Four schools implemented <i>Walking School Buses (WSB)</i>. Some also celebrated <i>International Walk to School Week (iWalk)</i> using it as the launch of their WSB. In addition, some 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 3,340 students and staff received ASRTS messaging. School promotion included newsletters, presentations to parent councils, bulletin boards, PA announcements, flyers, posters, incentives 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 was applied: student surveys (three in total)</li> <li>• According to teacher status reports, at least 100 students used the 4 Walking School Buses in October. This number decrease in November to 98 participants.</li> <li>• Many others (especially older students) walked independently</li> </ul>

	<p>(these independent walkers were not counted).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student surveys showed an increase in active transportation at three of the schools (between September and October), and a decrease at three schools in November.</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 and link is promoted on ASRTS posters</li> <li>• ASRTS posters created with both HDSB and HCDSB web links and logos</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 local municipalities and Toronto Star (including a “Laurel”); 2 <b>national TV</b> 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% *MRP</b> 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> </ul>
<p>5. By December 2010, have approached (and if possible collaborate with) the Halton Catholic 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>

## PROJECT EVALUATION

The evaluation model was based on an accountability-reporting format instead of a true formal research methodology. Decisions for this format were based on the following:

- The HDSB pilot project in 2008 had extensive evaluation performed by the Halton Region Health Department Epidemiologist Team. The results of that evaluation showed the program was effective in increasing student active transport behaviours.
- HCDSB’s Research Department had limited capacity for the ASRTS project due to other competing priority projects, therefore, HDSB’s Research and Accountability Department agreed to handle the evaluation
- Early on during this phase of the project, the focus was deemed to be accountability rather than new research, as the research questions had already been addressed by the 2008 HDSB pilot study. Thus, the HDSB Research and Accountability Department handled the evaluation deliverable of the project.

## Method

Utilizing the HDSB's 2008 pilot project student survey as a template, a more concise, revised version was created for the 2009-2010 ASRTS project. (See Student Survey Appendix II)

The five project schools applied three student surveys. A baseline survey was taken in September (21-23), a second after two weeks of implementation in Oct (19-21), and the third after six weeks of implementation in November (16-18). The survey was applied to grades three and five \*walking-eligible students. (Classroom teachers only recorded data on these students.)

During the designated study weeks, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday mornings, the classroom teacher asked the whole classroom, by a show of hands, how they arrived to school (using the survey categories). Only results from the walking-eligible students were recorded on the survey sheets. The number of walking-eligible students in class who arrived by active transport was compared with the total number of students enrolled in class who were considered walking-eligible (teachers were not to reveal their selective recording to the class).

Comparison schools were not used in the evaluation.

## Results

In reporting the results, mean percentages of active transport methods are used. Active transport methods are defined as walking to school, biking to school or using another active method (i.e. skateboards or scooters). Only three schools yielded complete data sets for September, October and November, leaving only 66% of the data usable. The sample sizes from each month also changed: September (n=70), October (n=72) and November (n=57), where n represents the number of participating study classrooms. The change in sample sizes from month to month is due to missing, incomplete or unusable data. (See **Figure 1 and Table 2**)

- In the three schools which provided data for three months, two (i.e. GUA and SCA) had an increase in active transport behaviours in October; a third school (STC) also showed an increase in active transport behaviours from September to October, though they did not have a complete data set for November.
- The three schools, which yielded data for all three months, had a decrease in active transport from October to November (i.e. GUA, SCA and SES).
- Two schools had a decrease in active transport from September to October (i.e. SES and STV)
- In all schools, walking is the most prevalent form of active transport
- The change in the data from month to month has not been determined to be \*\*statistically significant.
- In all of the HCDSB study schools combined, more students participating in the survey reporting walking on Wednesdays (35.18%), when the walking school bus was running, as compared to Tuesdays (30.65%) or Thursdays (34.17%) (See **Figure 2 and Table 3**)

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*\*Walking-eligible students are students who live within the 1.6 km radius of the school and are not eligible for busing*

*\*\*Definition: Statistical significance is a measure of whether change-in-results is likely due to chance. That is, if a change in a data set is found to be statistically significant, then the probability that this change is due to chance is low. Conversely, if a change in a data set is found to be not statistically significant, then the probability that this change is due to chance is higher.*

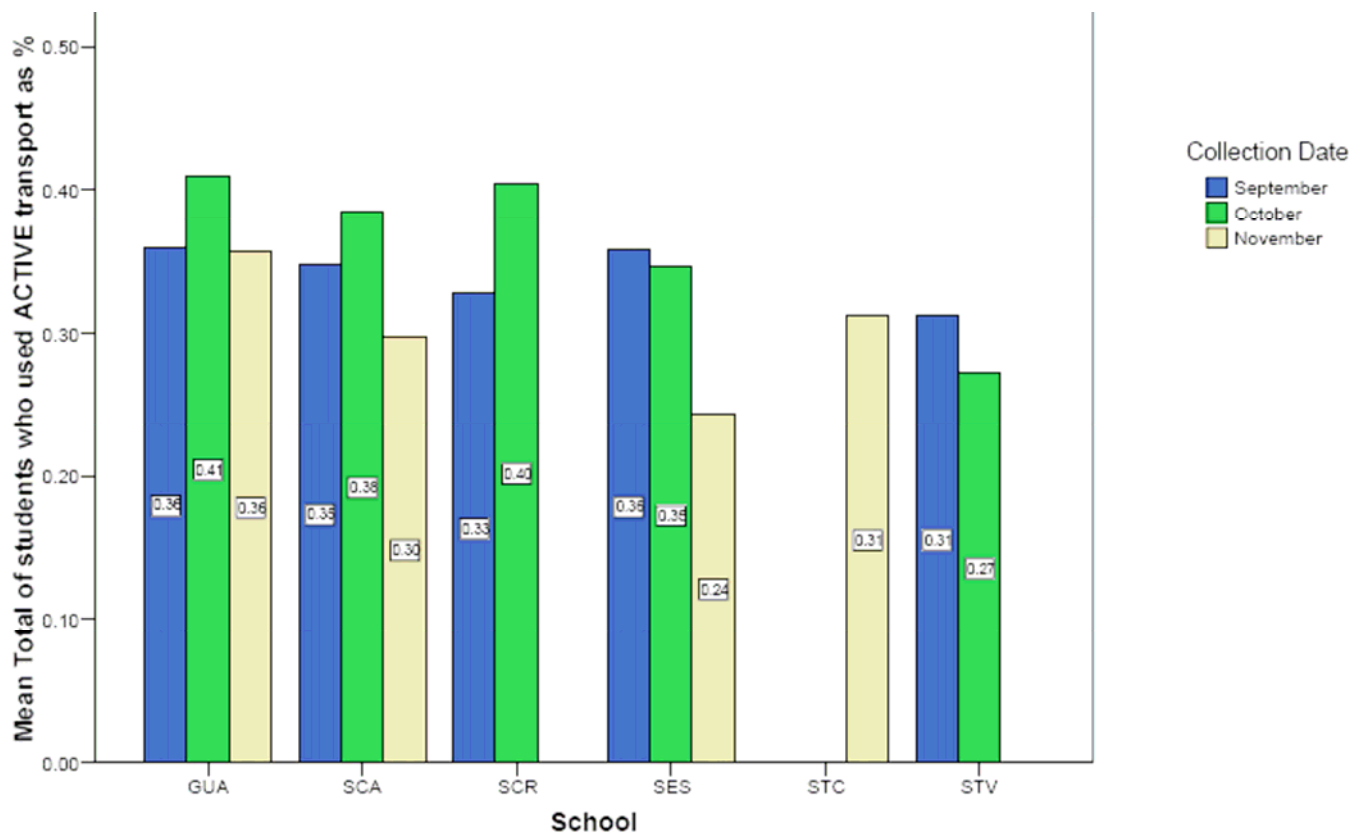
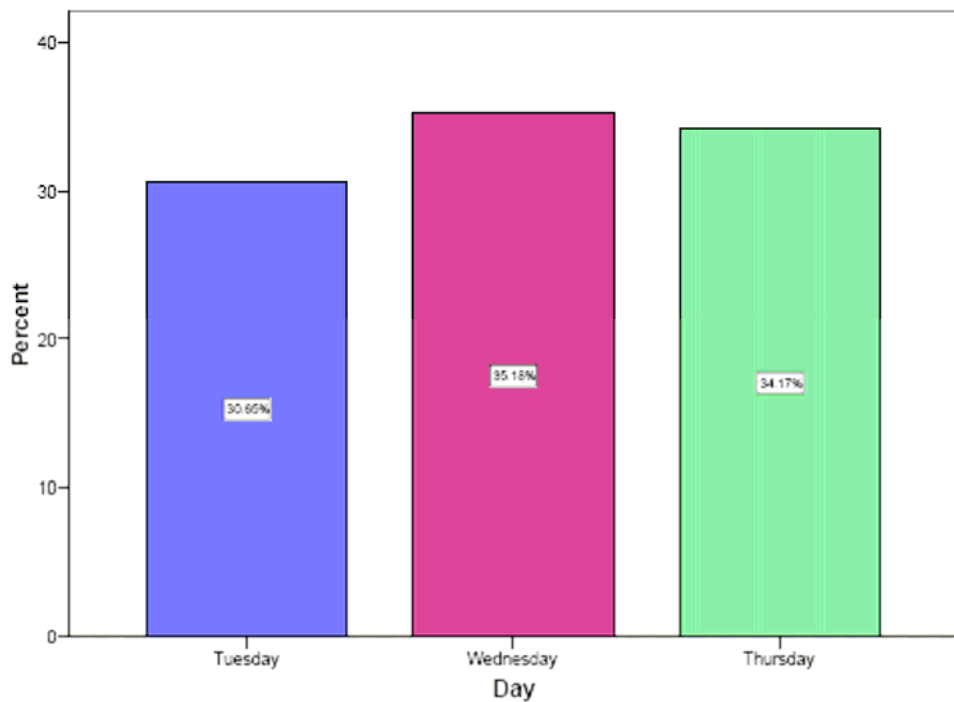


Figure 1: The percentage of walking-eligible students arriving to school by active transport, September baseline and fall survey months, all participating schools, 2010

Table 2: Monthly percentage of walking-eligible students

The percentage of walking-eligible students arriving to school by active transport						
School/Month	GUA	SCA	SCR	SES	STC	STV
September	36%	35%	33%	36%		31%
October	41%	38%	40%	35%		27%
November	36%	30%		24%	31%	



**Figure 2: Percentage of walking-eligible students arriving to school by active transport; by days of the week, all participating schools, 2010**

**Table 3: Percentage of walking-eligible students by days of the week**

Days	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday
Percentage	30.65	35.18	34.17

### Limitations

- Changing weather conditions from month to month could not be accounted for in this survey
- Ministry mandated policies such as Quality Daily Fitness (QDF) requirements and other healthy, active living activities/programs might be in place at these study schools. The data compiled on active transport was not compared to this type of profile information
- Study schools were not surveyed for existing active transport behaviors. These schools may already enjoy a high active transport philosophy and culture
- 34% of the data was not usable: missing or incomplete
- One school did not employ walking school buses
- Walking school buses ran along one route only, thus servicing a small portion of the walk-to-school population
- Data was limited to Grades 3 and 5

### Discussion:

The sample size, survey duration (three months with only two months of implementation) and study design (a simple hands-up survey based on student self-reporting and teacher recording, that does not take into account other factors listed in the limitations section above) impedes the ability to draw conclusions about the relationship between the ASRTS program and student transport behaviours (cause and effect).

It should be noted, the project goals and objectives and evaluation format were not organized for a cause-and-effect-scenario. Much research already exists about the potential of the ASRTS program and its ability to

influence active transport behaviours. One example is the 2008 pilot project between HDSB and Halton Region Health Department found at <http://www.halton.ca/cms/one.aspx?portalId=8310&pageId=10745>

What information the survey does provide the reader is:

- Active transport behaviours increased on Wednesdays. This is when the walking school bus and other promotional events were held (Walking Wednesdays)
- Less than 40% of Grade 3 and 5 students who are walking-eligible are using active transport. HCDSB has much work to do to change this social norm. The potential to positively affect student health, academic performance and carbon footprints is great, and the ASRTS program is one way to help create change.

Based on earlier work in the 2008 HDSB pilot study, it can be hypothesized; the Active and Safe Routes to School Program may have had a positive impact on active transport behaviours in the walking-eligible students by:

- Influencing those who did not previously use active transport to do so
- Supporting those who did walk or bike to school to continue to use various modes of active transport

## **NEXT STEPS**

As HCDSB decides their direction with the ASRTS program, the following next steps should be considered

1. Move ASRTS from a project to a program by starting a *Final Phase*, which explores and coordinates sustainability for ASRTS within the existing HCDSB organizational structure.
2. Develop a Board Active Transportation Strategy.
3. Develop a modified approach/process for implementing ASRTS (since it will be housed within an existing school board portfolio)
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. Utilize HDSB's ASRTS Project Manager to assist with the above items

## **CONCLUSION**

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

A total of five elementary/middle schools have engaged in the ASRTS project. These schools are congratulated on their hard work towards introducing this important program in their communities. Although the program requires dedicated time and energy, the potential benefits it affords students outweighs the efforts.

Because of HDSB's pilot project in 2008 and HCDSB's pilot project in 2010, 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 for cultural change to occur.

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# APPENDICES

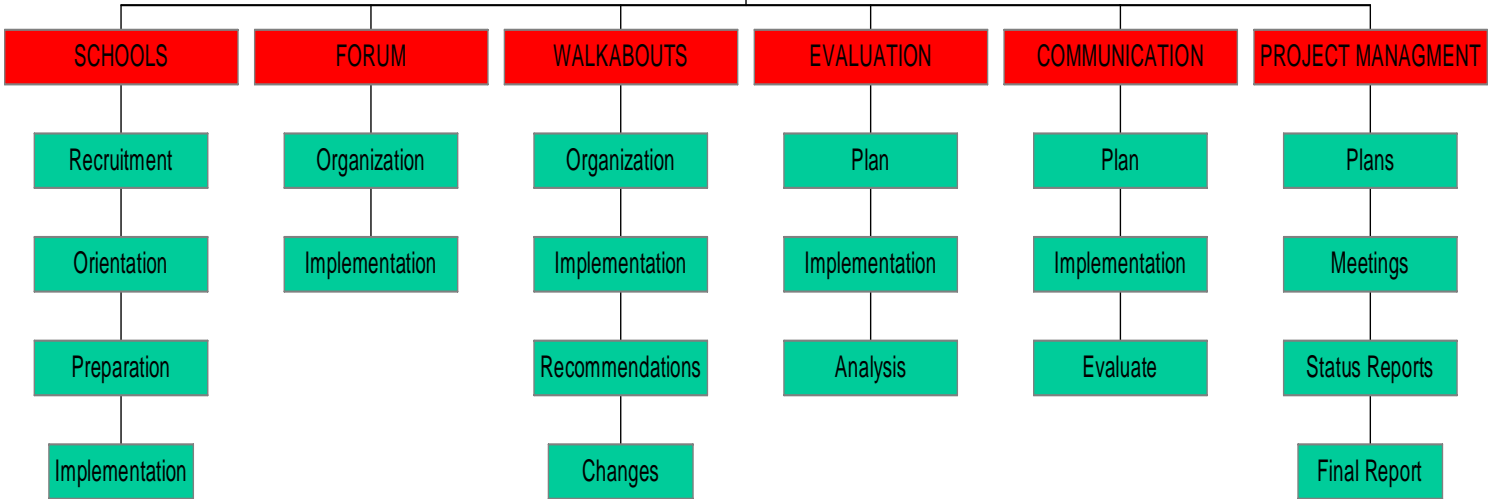
Appendix I: Work Breakdown Structure

Appendix II: Student Survey

# Appendix I

## Work Breakdown Structure

### Active and Safe Routes to School Project





## Appendix II

# 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?

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