

Safe Routes to School Networking Call: Launching & Sustaining Walking School Buses/Bike Trains and On-Campus Options Wednesday, March 16, 2022, 10 a.m.

The Massachusetts Safe Routes to School (SRTS) Program third Networking Call consisted of two breakout rooms. The first room discussed launching and sustaining Walking School Buses/Bike Trains and the second room discussed on-campus options when walking, biking, and rolling to school is challenging. Below you will find a summary of each discussion along with helpful resources related to both topics.¹

Breakout Room 1 (participants from Arlington, Belmont, Boston, Brookline, Framingham, Holliston, Lexington, Melrose, Newton, North Adams, North Attleborough, Seekonk, Somerville, Southborough, Turners Falls, and Winchester)

- Kelsey Duffy, a PE teacher in Framingham, talked about how she was able to start a daily Walking School Bus this year to help address attendance concerns and engage with students ([November 2021 WGBH story](#))
 - This has brought attention to students' needs outside of academics and the community has helped overcome various cultural barriers such as proper winter wear and everyday clothing needs
 - Teachers have developed meaningful relationships with these students outside of the classroom (it is all voluntary since it's outside of their contractual hours)
 - Students learn valuable life lessons such as not picking up trash or other potentially harmful materials
 - Framingham received one of this year's SRTS Infrastructure Grants to help improve sidewalk conditions along the route
 - Walking School Bus success makes measurable, positive, and long-lasting change
- Mary Ellen Duggan, Director of Wellness for the Northborough/Southborough Regional School District talked about how she launched a Walking School Bus at one of the schools when she was a nurse there
 - It started out as a Park, Walk, and Roll at a local church a few times a year
 - The students wanted more opportunities to walk to school so they created a route and finished at the church to give everyone else a chance to join
 - This has been running for eight years every Wednesday (not including winters due to sidewalk maintenance)
 - The district used this momentum to sign on the remaining schools as partners and hopes to embrace SRTS as an entire district

¹ The views, opinions, and statements presented in this summary document were made independently by the attendees of this networking call. They may not necessarily represent the opinions or guidance of the Massachusetts Safe Routes to School Program, its agents, or employees.

- Other topics discussed in this breakout room included:
 - “School Streets” and how they function
 - The distance of the average Walking School Bus
 - Possibility of stipend positions to help lead Walking School Buses
 - The use of permission slips for Walking School Buses (no one in this group had them)
 - How to deal with snow removal on sidewalks (modify town ordinances, review student routes with Department of Public Works (DPW) to prioritize Walking School Bus routes, review DPW snow removal policy)
 - For ice concerns, request DPW place sand barrels on school property for school use (example: Muraco Elementary School in Winchester)

Breakout Room 2 (participants from Boston, Sturbridge, and Weymouth)

- Park, Walk, & Rolls give students who normally could not walk/roll to school the opportunity to do so
 - In one community, the high school marching band leads students from a remote drop-off location to the school during their Walk to School Day
- Although there is a lack of infrastructure, some communities stay active in SRTS by having students walk around the school during breaks in the day while teachers explain the health benefits
- Some communities work with their local police departments and the DPW to briefly shut down roads for walkers
 - There was discussion about creating awareness of these road shutdowns by posting flyers on telephone poles
- Factors needed to start and keep up SRTS events included:
 - It is helpful when Outreach Coordinators reach out to new contacts when there is a staff change at schools
 - It is ideal to have a second contact at every school, usually someone from the administrative team
 - When SRTS events are recurring, the community expects and looks forward to them
 - After an SRTS event happens for the first time, school staff often see the benefits and become enthusiastic
- The new On-Campus Activity Guide was unveiled and well-received

Helpful Links:

- [On-Campus Activity Guide](#)
- [Pop-up Projects for Safe Routes to School](#)
- [Park, Walk, & Roll Tip Sheet](#)
- [Walking School Bus and Bike Train Guide](#)
- [Spice Up a Walking or Biking Event](#)