

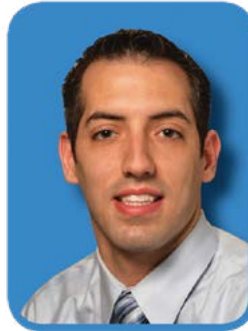


December 2018



Coordinator's Corner

As winter approaches, our attention turns to colder weather, holiday celebrations and a well-deserved break from the hustle and bustle of the school year. But it's also an opportunity to take stock of everything you've accomplished this year for Safe Routes to School, and all the people who helped make it happen, and to get ready for an active spring.



This newsletter is full of advice and insights to make your Safe Routes to School program a success this winter. First, we'll learn about how a walking school bus is improving student performance in Richmond. Next, we'll recap our fall events and learn what the latest research has to say about pedestrian safety. You'll also find information about our winter events.

As always, we're happy to answer any questions you have. If you would like more information on any of the topics included here, please call the Virginia SRTS Hotline at 1-855-601-7787 or send an email to info@virginiarts.org.

Regards,

Rob Williams
Virginia SRTS Coordinator

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CALENDAR

DECEMBER

1: Most Outstanding Crossing Guard Nominations open!

JANUARY

25: Outstanding Crossing Guard Nominations close!

FEBRUARY

2: QuickStart Mini-grant and Walkabout Mini-grant applications due

13: Crossing Guard Appreciation Day

All month long...
Crossing Guard Appreciation Month

Friends and Faces: Interview with Rachel Arrowsmith

A walking school bus can give your students exercise, reduce traffic at pick-up and drop-off time, and teach kids independence. However, it can also improve attendance and academic performance. That's the lesson from Fairfield Court Elementary School in Richmond, one of the city's most disadvantaged schools, where Rachel Arrowsmith of Communities in Schools organized a walking school bus last spring. We talked to Rachel about her work:



Rachel Arrowsmith (center) and students get ready to walk.

Can you talk about Communities In Schools (CIS) and the work they do in Richmond?

CIS is a nationwide nonprofit geared towards dropout prevention. Our main focus is to make sure that our students and families have what they need to succeed in school – basic stuff like backpacks or glasses, as well as connections to mental health resources.

As a site coordinator for Fairfield Court, I helped our administrators partner with Safe Routes to School. It started off with Walk to School Day, but I saw a need

with school attendance. We have really high chronic absences at our school, it's approaching 30 percent. Tara FitzPatrick [from SRTS] introduced me to the walking school bus concept, and we worked together to create one here. The typical refrain is "We want to reduce pollution and reduce traffic," but for me, "I just want to get my kids to school."

What are some of the challenges students face when walking to school?

We're located in the East End of Richmond, which is a community that has some of the highest child poverty rates in the nation. Ninety-five percent of our students live in public housing. There are lots of factors that affect our kids that all trickle down, and we know poorer attendance is a symptom of other needs not being met.

Maybe the parents have to leave for work 30 or 45 minutes before the kid has to go to school, and the kid falls back asleep. Sometimes it's parental illness. Sometimes it's missing the school bus and there's no one to walk you to school.

How does the walking school bus work at Fairfield Court Elementary School?

We identified a route and every morning from 8:20 to 8:50, we go door to door to the house of every single student identified as being chronically tardy or chronically absent or had some factor that made a challenge for them to get to school, like a parent with health issues.

I led the route every day; Tara FitzPatrick came some days and made sure we had all the supplies we needed: backpacks, umbrellas, ponchos, and signage. Also on the route were four teachers, one parent volunteer, and a volunteer from one of our school's nonprofit partners.

The route served 19 students, and the kids embraced it. They were the ones knocking on doors, remembering the route, and the adults were just there to make sure they were safe. The students held each other accountable to show up and get to school on time.

How does the walking school bus benefit your students?

We started the walking school bus in March 2018 and continued every day through the last day of school. In February, the 19 students we served had a combined 56 absences and 42 tardies. After one month, the absences decreased 77% and tardies decreased 62%.

One kid had tons and tons of tardies. After starting the walking school bus, he was the first kid to arrive to his classroom every morning, and his teacher was completely astonished. When he got his report card, he was so proud of himself! He had Ds and Cs in the previous quarters, now he had all As and Bs. I asked him, "What do you attribute that to?" And he said, "I was at school every day." It was cool for him to realize that getting to school every day matters!



Students in the Fairfield Court walking school bus.

What were the biggest challenges to implementing a walking school bus?

When you're walking kids who are chronically tardy or chronically absent, the parents won't be able or willing to walk every day. Getting more parents involved is a goal we're continuing to work towards this school year. We knew we had to model it for our parents, so we walked with a couple of parents routinely with the hopes that it would become a community led initiative over time.

Meanwhile, we've gotten even more support from faculty. We ask teachers to do one day a week, and they've seen how successful it was and even volunteered time outside their contract hours.

What do funding opportunities such as Safe Routes to School mean for your school?

Safe Routes to School has provided us with all the materials to make the walking school bus possible. Tara helps lead things like Walk to School Day and Bike to School Day. She's worked with the Richmond City Health District (the health department) to organize a walkabout at Fairfield Court.

Tara also works closely with our teachers. This fall, we're going to be leading an eight-week small group activity for our fourth grade students to really practice bike safety skills, and she has provided the bikes, helmets, and other supplies for our students to use.

What advice would you give to schools starting a walking school bus?

This year, I have a new title at CIS, and am helping my colleagues at other East End schools launch walking school buses. It's an incredible opportunity to build community in the school.



Students in the Fairfield Court walking school bus.

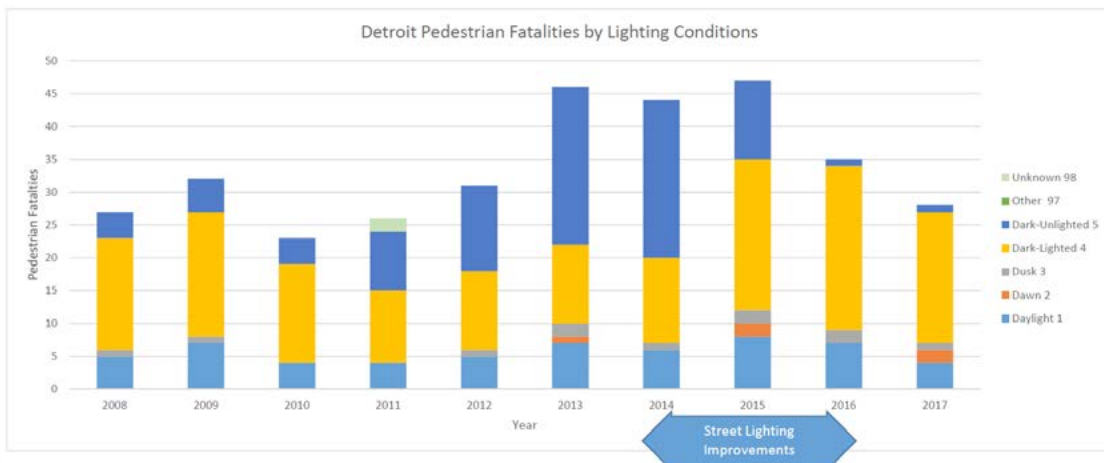
So much of the work that we do in schools, it's hard to measure the success. But the coolest thing about the walking school bus is there's so much immediate gratification. You know when a kid shows up for the walking school bus, you know when the kid shows up for school, and when they don't, you need to respond. It's so exciting to pull up the data each month and see the progress you're making.

One of the most encouraging things for me is that there was no incentive for the kids to participate, other than the relationships they built with each other and the community partners. It's all about relationships and consistency.

Research Says

This time of year, students often leave for school before dawn and arrive home after dark. Providing adequate lighting on school walking and bicycling routes is a critical safety consideration. Good lighting helps drivers see students walking and biking, makes it easier for student walkers and bikers to detect hazards and obstacles, and enhances personal security.

The experience of Detroit, Michigan illustrates the value of good lighting for traffic safety. For decades the City neglected to maintain streetlights, and by 2014 roughly 40% were not working. Fatal pedestrian crashes had been climbing since 2010, particularly those occurring in dark, unlighted conditions, which peaked at 24 in 2012 and 2013. In 2014, the City began rebuilding the system, completing installation of 65,000 new LED lights in December 2016. The new lights have corresponded with a dramatic decrease in pedestrian fatalities, from 47 in 2015 to 28 in 2017. The decrease has been even more dramatic in the case of pedestrian fatalities occurring in dark, unlighted conditions, which dropped from 24 in 2013 to 1 in 2016 and 2017. [Click here for more.](#)



What does this mean for Safe Routes to School programs? It is easy to overlook lighting conditions when the days are long, but when daylight hours start to dwindle, inadequate lighting conditions become more apparent. Use this time as an opportunity to go out and assess lighting conditions around your school and on school walking and bicycling routes. If you find gaps in lighting, work with your school community to bring them to the attention of the relevant authority, whether it be the local public works department, the school division, or some other entity.

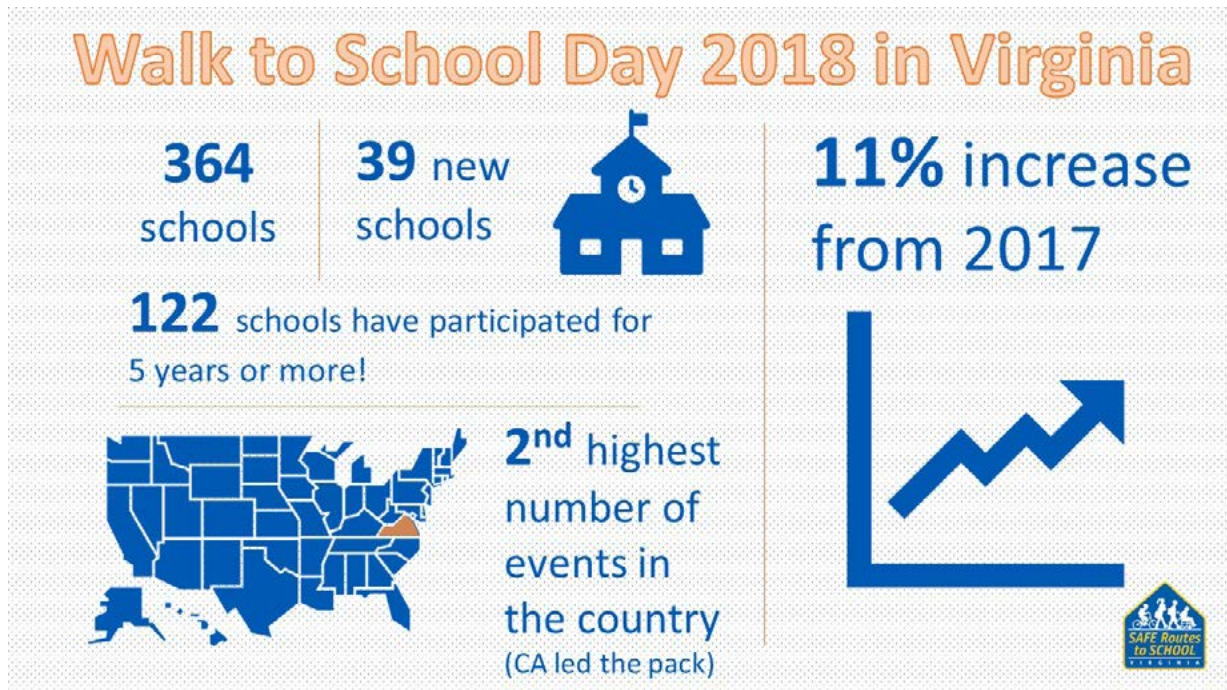
Regardless of lighting conditions, it's important to communicate to drivers that they should drive slowly and cautiously near the school and on student walking and bicycling routes, especially when it's dark out. It's also important to communicate to students and parents about what they can do to enhance their visibility as they walk and bicycle to school. For stu-

dent bicyclists, this means a white headlamp on the front of the bike and a red reflector and/or taillight, [as required under Virginia law](#). Wearing bright colors and reflective clothing can also help pedestrians and bicyclists be more visible to drivers in low-light or dark conditions.

Walk to School Day 2018 by the Numbers

The number of Virginia schools participating in Walk to School Day broke another record this year. We exceeded our goal of 350 events with a final total of **364!** Virginia events accounted for 6 percent of the national total, and California was the only state with more events.

It's certainly been an impressive fall, and we're looking forward to more record-breaking participation in other SRTS events such as [Crossing Guard Appreciation Day](#) (February 13, 2019) and [Bike to School Day](#) (May 8, 2019).



Student Travel Tally Week 2018



The Student Travel Tally is a quick, in-class survey that provides valuable information on student travel patterns and can help you monitor the success of your SRTS program over time. The Virginia SRTS program encourages schools to collect tallies annually during Student Travel Tally Week, which can be any week in September or October.

We're still reviewing the data submitted by schools that participated this fall. Look for a Fall 2018 summary on the SRTS website later this year. In addition to the statewide report, we also post reports from selected school divisions with high rates of participation.

However, there's no need to wait. Once all of your student tally information has been entered, you can begin generating reports on saferoutesdata.org by clicking on the "My Reports" tab in the menu across the top of the screen. There are three different options for Student Travel Tally Reports: one school for one time period, one school over two time periods, and a combined report for all schools within a school group during the same time period. You can share these reports with the schools, division leadership, city planners and engineers, and use the data for grant applications. If you have any questions about running reports, please [contact your LTAC](#).

Getting Ready for Crossing Guard Appreciation Day

Not all heroes wear capes-some hold a stop sign paddle and greet kids on their way to and from school.



It's time to recognize the Virginia crossing guards who are truly great. Do you have a crossing guard who goes that extra mile, making safe crossings fun, and encouraging lasting habits? Are they full of cheer on even the most-dreary, rain-soaked, day? Get ready to tell us about your favorite. A good crossing guard can help start everyone's day off on the right foot, so let's make sure they get the recognition they deserve!

Nominations open on December 1 for Virginia's Most Outstanding Crossing Guard Award. Nominating your crossing guard is easy: just fill out the online nomination form and be sure to include a photo. Last year Virginia's Safe Routes to School program received nominations for 71 amazing crossing guards for their dedication to the mission of helping kids get to school and back home, safely, every day.

Crossing Guard Appreciation Day is officially February 13, 2019 so perhaps you want to prepare an early Valentine for your favorite. But don't feel tied to that day-plan a celebration whenever it works for your community. You'll find lots of ideas on [our website](#) to show your crossing guards that you appreciate what they do for your school community. Thank you cards, flyers and stickers-it's all there!