

Path to Success Led by a School District

Lemoore Union Elementary School District, Kings County: *Overcoming the lack of parent volunteers by building relationships*

Lemoore is a small rural community of about 25,000 people, situated in the heart of the fertile San Joaquin Valley. It has a deep connection to agriculture, as well as to the Lemoore Naval Air Station. In 2010, the City of Lemoore partnered with Lemoore Union Elementary School District to deliver a non-infrastructure Safe Routes to School (SRTS) grant for students in grades K-8th. In 2011, the school district used a portion of the SRTS grant to hire a part-time Walking School Bus Coordinator to oversee activities at all four neighborhood elementary schools. A Walking School Bus is a group of children walking to school with one or more adult volunteers. Find out more about Walking School Buses at www.walkingschoolbus.org

The Walking School Bus Coordinator set out to recruit parent volunteers at the start of the academic school year. Parent volunteers in this district must go through three separate



clearance checks: a TB test, live scan fingerprinting, and a California Department of Justice background check. The financial burden of these clearances (nearly \$80 per person) was seen as a potential barrier, so the district offered to pay for each volunteer to get cleared with Safe Routes to School grant funding.

Removing the financial burden of the clearances, however, was only part of the solution to recruit enough parent volunteers to implement walking school buses at each school. Historically, it has been challenging to recruit parent volunteers at these schools. Therefore, there is a great need to build relationships over time and develop trust between school staff and the parent community. For more information on how to do this effectively and in a culturally appropriate manner, see the webinar *Keys to a Successful Safe Routes to School Program: Recruiting and Retaining Volunteers* at www.saferoutesinfo.org

The Walking School Bus Coordinator collaborated with each school administration to put parent surveys in student backpacks, spoke at every school related event, put a press release in the local newspaper, posted information on the school district website, and saturated each school with flyers. A handful of volunteers showed interest and were

provided with an informal training on how to implement a Walking School Bus. In addition, each volunteer was given a traffic safety vest, a stop sign, and a whistle.

This informal Walking School Bus training gave parents the pedestrian safety education needed for them to feel comfortable walking their children to school, many of them up to 1¼ mile away. The schools were later given large plywood walking school buses that their students could use on special occasions to help promote walking to school. The buses were made by a local artist, Deborah Krick, and funded by the grant.



Other parents saw these colorful Walking School Bus “advertisements” and asked if their children could join. As the student participation increased, the parent volunteers organically changed their Walking School Bus routes in order to pick up more kids. In several cases the walking school bus route has grown to ten students per adult volunteer and participating students received a laminated card attached to their backpack and prizes (i.e. charms, shoelaces, umbrellas, etc.) after completing 20 trips to and from the school.

These incentives (paid for by the SRTS grant funding) bolstered student enthusiasm. The Walking School Bus Coordinator believes holding potluck events is important so all the parent volunteers can meet each other and celebrate their achievements. Trust and rapport building have been essential components of a successful Safe Routes to School program in Lemoore, California.



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