

4.4 WALKING BUDDIES

This is a great way for older students (Grade 5 and up) to walk to school in safety with their friends. Students who walk together look out for each other and enjoy the responsibility this entails. We recommend that parents review traffic and personal safety with participants regularly and make sure there is a system in place to ensure that the participants stay safe if their buddy is not available on a scheduled day. For example, if there is an active walking school bus in the neighbourhood, the student can join in if she has no one else to walk with, or if a parent arrives for an unexpected reason to pick the students up, have a code word that must be said to allow the other participant to take the ride home.

The Active and Safe Routes to School program in Alberta offers the following great ideas for Walking Buddies. (Reproduced with permission from their Resource Manual available at www.shapeab.com.)

Big Buddies

Establish a buddy walking system. Older students take on the responsibility of picking up younger students on their way to school as they walk along the designated safest routes. At the end of the school day, the older students wait at a specified place inside or outside of the school. This can be designated as the Walking Bus or Walking Group stop or meeting area and can include pictures or posters from the various walking groups with their names or their slogans. The older students then walk home with the younger students. Once again, provisions must be made for situations where the older buddy is unable to escort the younger students to or from school. Substitute older buddies, or parents, should be available to make sure that each young child has a safe walk to and from school.



—Balmoral Hall School
(Winnipeg)



Walking Buddies

Friends from the neighbourhood or friends from the same class arrange to walk together to school. This is particularly effective for older students, as they support each other in making the decision to walk and they enjoy the trip to school. Parents need to make sure their children manage their time well and are ready to meet their friends at the assigned time. Children can sign a pledge form and be rewarded for participating at a year-end celebration.



Photos: Nick Gaudin, Teacher,
École Howden (Winnipeg)

4.5 WALK-A-BLOCK ZONES

This strategy works well for families who live too far from their school to make walking all the way feasible, or for working parents who drop their children off at school on their way to work. Work with local municipal traffic staff to identify safe and legal parking spaces a few blocks from the school. This will encourage driving parents to park their car in these spots and walk the remaining blocks with their children, or allow their child to join an active Walking School Bus or meet their Walking Buddy.

Children and parents will enjoy the short walk, and traffic congestion will be reduced in the immediate school area where it is important to be clear for school buses and other walking or cycling students. Some schools even barricade the street in front of the school to prevent cars from driving and parking there.

Walk-a-Block Zones help to diffuse the traffic throughout the school neighbourhood, making the immediate area around the school safer. However, because they also impact the traffic in the broader community, it is a good idea when deciding where to set up your drop-off zones to consult with the immediate neighbours and other community members who might be affected when they are leaving home in the morning or returning at the end of the day.