



SPARE THE AIR YOUTH

PARENT CHAMPION VOLUNTEER PROGRAMS

Bolstering youth engagement programs
by involving parents in events and activities

MARCH 2015



01

INTRODUCTION

Spare the Air Youth is a regional program that aims to educate, inspire and empower San Francisco Bay Area youth and their families to walk, bicycle, carpool, and take transit. A partnership between the Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC) and the Bay Area Air Quality Management District, Spare the Air Youth promotes effective ways to reduce transportation-related greenhouse gas emissions by providing a regional resource for students, parents, teachers and program providers.

SPARE THE AIR YOUTH IS PART OF MTC'S CLIMATE INITIATIVES PROGRAM.

LEARN MORE AT www.sparetheairyouth.org



Parent volunteers can significantly expand the program's reach by volunteering at events and coordinating with other parents.

INTRODUCTION

Volunteers are an essential part of school-based outreach programs, and their passion and commitment help programs thrive.

Parent volunteers can significantly assist Safe Routes to School (SRTS) or other youth outreach programs, whether by volunteering for an event, coordinating with other parents, or establishing a working group. Sharing information about the value of the program and the benefits of being active encourages other parents to support these programs.

Many SRTS programs rely on a Parent Champion model, where a parent volunteer acts as a liaison between their child's school and SRTS practitioners. An active Parent Champion organizes events, spreads the word to other parents and school staff, provides articles to the school newsletter, solicits more volunteer help, and can be vital to increasing the number of students who walk, bike, and carpool to school.

Because of the importance of Parent Champions in program success, some SRTS programs select schools to participate in programming and receive funding based in part on whether they have an active Parent Champion to help implement activities and events.

It can be difficult to recruit and retain Parent Champions, particularly at schools without strong parent involvement. Also, even the most enthusiastic Parent Champions may have trouble maintaining their involvement over multiple years without sufficient support, and eventually their children will move on from the school. This guidebook provides information and resources on how to recruit, train, and retain Parent Champions and how to sustain your Parent Champion program.

The background image shows a community event, likely a bike ride or fundraiser, taking place in a park. Numerous people are gathered, many with bicycles. In the foreground, a person is seated at a table, wearing a dark t-shirt with the text "Safe Kids" and "Volunteer" printed on it. To their left is a large, multi-wheeled bicycle rack filled with bikes. The scene is set outdoors with trees in the background and a canopy tent visible on the left. The entire image is overlaid with a semi-transparent orange filter.

02

IMPLEMENTING A PARENT CHAMPION PROGRAM

IMPLEMENTING A PARENT CHAMPION PROGRAM



Parent Champions greet walkers and bikers as they arrive at school.

Developing a Parent Champion volunteer program at a school can be divided into four steps: recruitment, training, retaining, and sustaining.

Prior to identifying candidates, develop a volunteer job description to clarify responsibilities and expectations of the person filling the position. It does not need to sound formal, but reliability is important and the description of responsibilities provides your volunteer with a clear description of what is needed from him or her.

Marin County Safe Routes to Schools' [Team Leader Description](#) identifies the role of a Team Leader, or Champion, as well as the role of SRTS program staff.

A Parent Champion Volunteer Job Description should include:

- **Benefits** of volunteering: promoting safe transportation and active lifestyles while having fun.
- **Responsibilities** such as educating parents about green choices, promoting events, soliciting incentives, and conducting ongoing outreach.
- **Information about your program**, including key events, a timeline of activities, contact information, etc. Include activities such as in-class education, even if the Parent Champion wouldn't be responsible for scheduling those.
- **Contacts** including the program director, project or site coordinators, education staff, and others involved.

IMPLEMENTING A PARENT CHAMPION PROGRAM



Parents participate in outreach efforts to meet other parents and become a part of their child's school community.

Don't feel like you have to do everything yourself!

Here are some useful resources for recruiting more volunteers:

- [SRTS Coordinator Manual](#) (Santa Clara County Public Health)
- [Parent Champion recruitment flyer](#) (Alameda County SR2S)

RECRUITING PARENT CHAMPIONS

Parents may be motivated by a passion for walking or biking because of traffic concerns, a desire to reduce their environmental impact, or an interest in making connections with other parents. To attract volunteers, explain the benefits of walking, biking, carpooling, and transit programs and how valuable parents are to keeping the program going.

Use a variety of approaches to recruit volunteers. A personal outreach is often most effective to identify Parent Champions. Gatherings where these connections can be made include:

- At Back to School Nights or Orientations
- During drop-off or pick-up times
- During PTA or other parent meetings
- During community events, such as block parties or Farmers Markets

Be visible! Publicize the volunteer needs. Recruitment materials can include:

- Flyers posted online, around school, or sent home in backpack mail
- School newsletter blurb
- Asking for recommendations

TRAINING PARENT CHAMPIONS

Make sure your Champions feel well-equipped for their roles. Provide an orientation and follow-up trainings throughout the year to help the Champion feel confident and engaged, while developing their skills. Regular group check-ins with all Champions can be a good way of sharing their experiences, resources, and struggles within the group.

Consider the following training logistics:

- Hold training sessions at a time that works for your parents; hold more than one if needed to include all Champions
- Provide refreshments to help maintain focus and show Champions they're appreciated
- Offer child care
- Bring together Champions from around the school district, city or county in one training, unless a single school has a lot of parent interest
- Organize carpools to training events
- Invite a translator for non English speaking participants
- Invite a respected member of the community if your trainer is not local to the school.

The [City of La Mesa SRTS](#) convenes Parent Champions from different schools for monthly information sharing meetings.

IMPLEMENTING A PARENT CHAMPION PROGRAM

RETAINING PARENT CHAMPIONS

Once you recruit and train a Champion, it is important to keep him or her involved. Volunteers can burn out if they take on too much or don't have adequate support. Providing resources and having regular check-ins with Champions will help avoid burnout and provide opportunities to address issues head-on.

Find a way to show appreciation for Champions. No or low-cost motivational tools can include:

- Certificates of appreciation
- Recognition in newsletters
- Volunteer appreciation lunch or dinner
- Staff listening to a volunteer's concerns or ideas and making program changes
- Involving volunteers in decision-making
- Offering letters of recommendation
- Making volunteering a social activity with regular meetings or outings

Michigan SRTS's presentation on 4 R's of Successful Walking School Bus Volunteer Organizing: Recruit, Reward, Retain, Refocus translates to general Parent Champion volunteers as well.

MAINTAINING A CHAMPION PROGRAM

Parent Champion turnover is inevitable; students transfer schools, families move, or Champions take on other commitments. Schools should prepare a plan to sustain activities when a Champion moves on.

The current Champion often knows who may be willing to help out. Event volunteers and walking school bus/bike train leaders are good candidates.

Give each new Champion a binder as part of orientation to help maintain knowledge. They can use this binder to keep activity records, outreach materials, volunteers, donations received, sample outreach materials, and/or contacts made.

Existing resources include:

- Santa Clara County Public Health's SRTS Coordinator Manual outlines ways to promote walking and bicycling.
- Marin County's SchoolPool Neighborhood Captain's Guide helps volunteers organize walking school buses, bike trains, and carpools.
- Marin's Safe Routes to School Guidebooks suggest ways to lead Walk & Roll Wednesdays, the Go Green Challenge, Golden Sneaker Contest, and other activities.

Beyond Parents

Grandparents or retired seniors can be great resources as they have time to volunteer and would like to be involved if they have a grandchild at the school. Being physically, mentally, and socially active has proven health benefits for seniors. Connecting multiple generations also helps to build community and provide students with an experience they may not have otherwise.

Seniors can serve in a variety of ways:

- Walking school bus leaders
- Tabling at regular events
- Crossing guards
- Neighborhood monitors

The City of La Mesa's SRTS and Intergenerational Volunteer Program Toolkit is a good as a resource for finding ways to include seniors.

03

CHAMPION MATERIALS



CHAMPION MATERIALS

Many existing materials and resources can help Parent Champions establish and grow programs at their school.



Student-created flyer for Cocoa for Carpools event, Alameda County Safe Routes to School

PROMOTING THE PROGRAM

A variety of materials can help educate parents about the program and promote it. A brochure or flyer should include information about key events and activities, online resources, and contact information for city/district staff, police, and anyone else. Brochures can also include walking and bicycling tips for students and parents.

Sample brochures are available from:

- [Alameda County Safe Routes to School](#)
- [Solano County Safe Routes to School](#)
- [San Mateo County Safe Routes to School](#)
- [Santa Clara County Safe Routes to School](#)
- [City of Pico Rivera Safe Routes to School](#)
- Marin County Safe Routes to School's [Back to School flier](#)

Sample videos are available from:

- [Marin County Safe Routes to School](#)
- [Alameda County Safe Routes to School](#)
- [Solano County Safe Routes to School](#)

ONGOING OUTREACH

Outreach during Back to School events and activities is helpful as families set travel patterns at the beginning of the year, but outreach should continue throughout the school year. There are several ways to conduct ongoing outreach to grow your program. Some ideas include:

- Inform parents via newsletter or list serve of upcoming events and bike/walk safety tips.
- Have the principal or students announce upcoming events or provide bike/walk safety tips during morning announcements.
- Have a table at the Spring Open House event, if your school has one.
- Hand out fliers promoting the program during morning drop-off.
- Create a Facebook page, Twitter account, or other social media presence, or use your school's account, to keep in touch with parents about the program in real time.
- Principals often send out a regular eblast that can include promotion of green travel events and challenges.

BENEFITS OF WALKING AND BIKING

Since parents make the decisions about their children's transportation choices, providing information to them about the benefits of walking and bicycling or reducing vehicle miles traveled can promote active transportation. Providing tips and rules of the road for walking and bicycling with children can alleviate parents' concerns and encourage them to consider using active modes. The following resources provide information you can send to parents to help them decide to allow their child to walk or bike.

- [Benefits of SRTS programs](#) (Silicon Valley "Let's Get Moving" Summit).
- The SRTS National Partnership's [Making Our Communities Healthy Through Biking and Walking](#) and the [Putting Traffic Safety First](#) have many case studies of how successful SRTS programs have benefitted communities.

Safety and Traffic Benefits

- Neighborhood streets become safer and more welcoming as more people walk and bike.
- Collisions and near-misses are reduced.

- Children learn important skills and gain a sense of independence.
- Walking School Buses and Bike Trains provide safety in numbers.

Environmental Benefits

- Walking and biking reduces congestion in front of schools.
- Walking and biking reduces pollution and improves air quality.

Better air quality leads to a decrease in asthma rates (currently the leading chronic illness of children under 18).

Health Benefits

- Walking or biking to school helps children get the recommended 60 minutes of physical activity each day, as suggested by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's [Guidelines for Physical Activity](#).
- Lowers the risk of being overweight or obese, which can lead to Type 2 diabetes, heart disease, and cancer (Source: [Active Living Research. Walking and Biking to School, Physical Activity and Health Outcomes](#). May 2009).

- Walking and biking strengthens bones and muscles.

- Walking and biking improves mental health

See also San Francisco Safe Routes to School's [Walk to School Every Day Health Facts](#) and Marin County Safe Routes to School's [Fantastic Reasons to Walk & Ride](#) - It's Healthy and Health Facts. The California Safe Routes to School Technical Assistance Resource Center also has a lot of good links about [Healthy Development](#) on their website.

Academic Benefits

- When students walk or bike to school, they arrive focused and ready to learn.
- [Healthy kids miss less school.](#)

Community Benefits

- Being outdoors walking or bicycling allows children and their parents to encounter neighbors on the way to school, increasing the feeling of community and social support.
- More people walking and biking leads to more 'eyes on the street' and a sense of community and safety.

CHAMPION MATERIALS

TEACHING STUDENTS TO WALK AND BIKE SAFELY



Traffic Safety Resources

- The Sonoma County Safe Routes to School program uses a [Student & Parent Pledge](#) focused on promoting responsible walking and bicycling.
- The City of Palo Alto provides a [Safety Tips Handout](#) that includes information for safe biking, walking, driving, and shared paths.
- The San Jose Street Smarts program provides resources on [School Safety for Biking, Walking and Driving](#) and [Do's and Don'ts of School Zone Safety](#).



Bicycle Safety Education

- The Active Living Resource Center's [Bicycle Safety: What Every Parent Should Know](#) teaches parents about bicycle safety, including common crash types and finding the right size helmet.
- Fire Up Your Feet developed this set of [Safe Bicycling Tips](#).
- Sonoma County Safe Routes to School's [Top Tips for a Safe Ride](#) discusses how children learn.
- The National Center for SRTS has a [Bicycle Safety](#) page that includes resources to [Help Your Child Be a Safe Cyclist](#).
- Marin County provides tips for [how to buy a bike](#).
- Pennsylvania SRTS's [bicycle safety](#) video.



Pedestrian Safety Education

- Sonoma County Safe Routes to School's [Top Tips to Stay Safe while Walking](#) discusses how children learn.
- Fire Up Your Feet developed this set of [Tips for Walking Safely to School and in Life](#).
- The National Center for SRTS provides information about [Teaching Your Child to Walk Safely as They Grow and Develop](#).
- The National Center for SRTS has a [Pedestrian Safety Resources](#) page that includes [Tips for Parents and Other Adults for Teaching Pedestrian Safety to Children](#).
- WalkBostons has a [pedestrian safety webinar](#).

Age-appropriate bicycle safety education:

Children ages 4 to 7

- Learn to recognize the shapes, colors, and meanings of standard road signs.
- Learn left and right (use stickers to help students remember) and how to look both ways before crossing the street.
- Should cross the road with an adult.

Children ages 8 to 11

- Learn basic bicycle safety such as stopping, turning and signaling, riding in a straight line.

Adapted from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration's [Bicycle Safety Activity Kit](#).

CHAMPION MATERIALS



Students hold up safety signs at a Walk & Roll to School Day event in Alameda County.



Bike lights are a fun giveaway that promote safety.

SUGGESTIONS FOR ACTIVITIES

Parent Champions can support and grow the program at their school through events, activities, and ongoing outreach. It is also useful to involve the PTA or other parent group as they often act as a bridge between parents and school administrators. The PTA can help organize activities and potentially help with fundraising.

Other parent and student organizations can help with events and should be engaged in activities:

- English Learners Advisory Committee (ELAC)
- School Safety Committee
- Associated Student Body (ASB)/Student Leadership Team
- Green Teams or Environmental clubs

EVENTS

Events can range from a large, one-time event to more frequent, smaller events throughout the year. The type, size, and frequency will depend on volunteer availability. This section discusses typical events and resources for volunteers.

For all events, volunteers may help in the following ways:

- Design and distribute fliers
- Provide pedestrian and bicycle safety tips and suggested routes to school
- Lead a walking school bus or bicycle train from a neighborhood
- Participate in a phone tree for last-minute event changes
- Greet students when they arrive
- Set up a mode chart, hand out stickers, or tally the students participating to track participation
- Provide refreshments and small giveaways for students and parents
- Thank walkers and rollers in morning announcements and invite everyone to participate in the next event

CHAMPION MATERIALS

Walk to School Days

[International Walk to School Day](#) is held around the world each October and can be celebrated as a one-day, week, or month event to raise awareness about safer and improved streets, healthier habits, and cleaner air.

The event in October is a great opportunity to kick off more regular Walk to School Days at your school and hold events monthly or weekly throughout the year. Weekly walk to school days can be called Walk on Wednesdays (WOW) or Feet First Fridays.

Walk to School Day Resources:

- [International Walk to School Day](#) event materials
- Alameda County Safe Routes to School's [Walk & Roll to School Day Toolkit](#)
- Marin Safe Routes to School's [Walk & Roll to School Days Guidebook](#)
- Sonoma Safe Routes to School's [Walk & Roll to School Day Guidebook](#)
- Spare the Air Youth's [Walk & Roll to School Day](#) resource page

Bike to School Days

National Bike to School Day is held in May in coordination with National Bike Month. Bike to School Days promote bicycle safety and encourage riding to school.

The day, week, or month of May can kick off other biking activities throughout the spring, summer, and following school year. More frequent events often combine walking and biking to school, such as Walk & Roll to School Days.

In addition to the suggestions on the sidebar, volunteers can help promote helmet use and look for helmet donations for students who do not have one.

Bike to School Day Resources:

- [National Bike to School Day](#) event resources
- Traffic Safe Communities Network of Santa Clara County Public Health Department's [Bike to School Week Resource Manual](#)
- Alameda County Safe Routes to School's [Bike to School Day](#) materials
- Spare the Air Youth's [Walk & Roll to School Day](#) resource page

Carpool to School Days

Carpool to School Days include families who live too far to walk or bike, and they accomplish the goal of reducing congestion and pollution. Carpooling events can work at any grade level and are a great way to increase the number of families sharing rides to school.

Carpool to School events can be held once a year to promote ridesharing with information and resources, or more frequently, like walk/bike to school days.

In addition to the suggestions on the previous sidebar, volunteers can help calculate the carbon emissions saved.

Carpool to School Day Resources:

- High school students in the Alameda County Safe Routes to School program organize [Carpool to School Days](#) in winter months. In the [Cocoa for Carpools](#) event, volunteers hand out tickets for cocoa to students who arrive in a carpool.
- Sonoma County Safe Routes to School's [Carpool to School Day flyer](#) and [participation form](#)

CHAMPION MATERIALS

Back to School Events

The beginning of the school year is a great time to promote transportation options as this is when families set their travel patterns for the school year. There are often many events planned and resources sent home, providing a great opportunity for a “Back to School Blitz” to spread the word about your program.

Volunteers can support the program at the beginning of the school year through the following events:

- Set up a table at Back-to-School Night with materials and volunteers to answer questions about transportation issues
- Have the principal or police officer write a letter to parents encouraging them to set travel habits that promote physical activity, reduce congestion, increase school safety, and improve air quality
- Put together a take-home packet including walking and biking route maps, and carpooling and transit information

The Spare the Air Youth website has resources from around the Bay Area to help with your [Back to School Blitz](#) efforts.

ONGOING ACTIVITIES

Parent Champions can continue to grow the program by organizing activities throughout the school year that promote walking, biking, and carpooling to school.

Walking School Bus

A Walking School Bus is a group of students walking to school together with adult supervision. A walking school bus provides a fun and healthy alternative to driving to school. Parents take turns walking with students, making it more convenient for families to participate. Many resources are available to help you get a Walking School Bus started at your school:

- Sonoma County Safe Routes to School's [Walking School Bus Leader Training](#)
- Solano County Safe Routes to School's [Walking School Bus program](#)
- San Francisco Safe Routes to School's [Walking School Bus and Bike Train Flier](#)
- National Center for Safe Routes to School [How to start a Walking School Bus Webinar](#)

- Michigan Safe Routes to School's [The 4 R's of Successful WSB Volunteer Organizing: Recruit, Reward, Retain, Refocus](#) presentation.
- Spare the Air Youth's [Walking School Bus & Bike Train](#) resources

Bike Train

A Bike Train is a group of students riding to school together with adult supervision. Bike Trains provide a fun and healthy alternative to driving to school, and riding together improves safety. Bike Trains should have an ‘engine’ and a ‘caboose’ - one adult up front and one at the back. There should be roughly one adult for every three to five kids, so you may need additional adults in the middle of your train, depending on the number of kids riding. These resources can help you start a Bike Train at your school:

- Safe Routes to School National Partnership's [Organizing Bike Trains](#) tip sheet
- San Francisco Safe Routes to School's [Walking School Bus and Bike Train Flier](#)
- Spare the Air Youth's [Walking School Bus & Bike Train](#) resources

CHAMPION MATERIALS

Carpool/Ridesharing

Organizing carpools helps to alleviate traffic congestion, reduces pollution, and provides an opportunity to engage students who live too far to walk or bike to school. Several ridematching services have been developed to help parents organize carpools to schools. These resources include:

- Metropolitan Transportation Commission's Ridematching Service [511 SchoolPool](#)
- Marin County Safe Routes to School's [SchoolPool Guide](#)
- City of Palo Alto's [Carpool to School](#) program
- Spare the Air Youth's [Carpooling](#) resource page



The 511 SchoolPool website provides ridematching services.

Map your Routes

Route maps can be used to track and display daily walking and bicycling trips, special events, or ongoing walking school buses or bicycle trains. Maps can be used to promote routes at your school and encourage others in your neighborhood to walk or bike as well. These resources can help you track and share your routes to school:

- National Center for Safe Routes to School's [Map-a-Route](#) online tool
- Fire Up Your Feet's neighborhood map and [Environmental Activity](#)



Principals can join the Walking School Bus for special events.

Additional Activities

- Walk Bike to School's [50+ Event Ideas](#)
- 511 Contra Costa's [Going Green Activity Wheel](#)
- California Safe Routes to School Technical Assistance Resource Center's [List of Low-Cost SRTS Activities](#)

Sample Champion/Leader Toolkits

- Marin County Safe Routes to School's [Team Leader Toolkit](#)
- Santa Clara County Public Health Department's [SRTS Coordinator Manual](#)
- Michigan Safe Routes to School's [Handbook](#)
- National Center for SRTS's [Walking School Bus Training Module](#)
- Spare the Air Youth's [SchoolPool Guidebook](#)
- Minnesota Department of Transportation's [Walk and Bike to School Day Events Webinar](#) and [Encouragement Programs: Trip Tracking and Competitions Webinar](#)

THIS GUIDEBOOK WAS PRODUCED FOR THE SPARE THE AIR YOUTH PROGRAM,
A PARTNERSHIP OF THE BAY AREA AIR QUALITY MANAGEMENT DISTRICT
(BAAQMD) AND THE METROPOLITAN TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION (MTC).
LEARN MORE AT WWW.SPARETHEAIRYOUTH.ORG.

SPARE THE AIR YOUTH PROGRAM TEAM:

Yvonna Cazares, BAAQMD
Kristina Chu, BAAQMD
Leslie Lara-Enriquez, MTC
Ursula Vogler, MTC

PRODUCED BY:

Alta Planning + Design
Brett Hondorp
Hannah Day-Kapell
Cat Cheng
Parisi Transportation Consulting
David Parisi



METROPOLITAN
TRANSPORTATION
COMMISSION



BAY AREA
AIR QUALITY
MANAGEMENT
DISTRICT

alta

