

This is a supporting document only and is not intended to be used as-is. Feel free to use any quote(s) by copying them into your own communications.

Messages about Active School Travel from Parents, for Parents

Based on interviews collected by Green Communities Canada

Originally published March 2011

Updated June 2011

Green Communities Canada was interested in hearing from parents who have changed their travel choices to and from school as a result of being involved in Active & Safe Routes to School (ASRTS) programming, so we collected parent input via one-on-one interviews, recent reports and even a blog. After ASRTS strategies addressed barriers to active school travel, the following parents became as supportive of the walk to school as they were of their children's very first steps.

NOTE: all quotes and clips presented here are approved for use with Active & Safe Routes to School programs by approved partner organizations in Canada. Any use outside these parameters must be approved by Green Communities Canada. Contact asrts@greencommunitiescanada.org for approval inquiries.

Testimonials given in French have been translated to English by Green Communities.

Reasons for allowing children to use active school travel

All quotes shown here were extracted from original interviews

"Ideally, I would walk (my kids to school) every day. (In the) winter it's easier if the canal is open because we can cut across the canal."

~Rick Keller, Ottawa, ON

« L'autonomie est une valeur importante pour nous. Elle est très fière d'aller à l'école en vélo. Elle est autonome, elle gère son horaire, tant le matin qu'en après-midi. »

~Catherine, Montréal, QC

(Adapted from excerpt above)

"We value personal autonomy. She's very proud that she bikes to school. She's independent and manages her own schedule, mornings and afternoons."

~Catherine, Montréal, QC

"With the canal frozen we can walk it in about 15 minutes. There used to be a little ferry that you could take for a dollar...years and years ago..."

~Anja Liddy, Ottawa, ON

"She's an energetic child and enjoys being outside."

~Anja Liddy, Ottawa, ON

“My kids LOVE walking to school. I mean, I only have one child in school right now, but the other two always want to walk (with my oldest) to school; it doesn’t take much encouragement to get kids out and active; that’s their natural state, is activity so walking to school is not a big challenge.”

~Alana Bresson, Dominion, NS

“My son hated the bus and in grade 6 he decided he would walk to school. It was a 40 minute walk for me – one way – and an hour, on a good day, for him. He went by himself across some very busy streets and through some less than desirable areas. I worried, but felt the sense of accomplishment and independence as well as the exercise and playing with his friends after school rather than leaving right away on the bus was worth the risk...I would have felt better if other parents would have let their children join him. Although some children wanted to, no parents would let them.”

~Diane, from *People for Education* blog

“Yes, initially, I was afraid to have my daughter in junior kindergarten participate – I thought it would be challenging for her. My older daughter in Grade 2 participated right from the beginning and now (my) younger daughter sees this and wants to participate, too. She has even made friends on her Walking School Bus and now feels bad if she *doesn’t* walk.”

~ *Final Report on the Active and Safe Routes to School Project*, Halton District School Board, ON

“My children come home so excited about the program; they are so excited there must be a lot of hype at the school to get participants. (The Walking School Bus) goes right by (the) front door, so my children are able to sit on the front step and wait for it to come by.”

~ *Final Report on the Active and Safe Routes to School Project*, Halton District School Board, ON

“She always wanted to walk. For some reason it made her feel better, I guess, and she was always asking, “Mommy, Mommy, can I please walk?” So I decided to let her walk instead, most of the time.”

~Sandra Brooks, Brampton, ON

“(Walking to school) is better for them. And it’s cheaper than paying for the gas to drive. It’s healthier.”

~ Brenda McDonald, Mom and Walking School Bus Driver, Surrey, BC

“Some mornings I do (join my son for the walk) and some mornings I’m not able to. That’s why having the walking school bus is really helpful for me...I just get him dressed and out the door and then I know he’s safe with them...crossing the roads and all that...so it makes it a little bit easier for me.”

~Catherine Ableton, Surrey, BC

“I’ve realized that I’ve acted as a barrier to my own daughter’s fitness in the past. I consider myself a pretty active and hands-on parent but when it comes to getting my daughter to and from school, on many days, I found myself coming up with reasons (more like excuses) to drive her to and from school –it was pathetic. My eight year old is not the problem. I am! She is the one waiting by the door asking if we can bike or walk and I am the one with the excuses, and I think this scenario plays out in more homes than we’d like to admit. I am now working diligently on not being a barrier to her fitness.”

~Tracy Briggs, School Travel Planning Facilitator, Regina, SK

Walking is a social experience

It provides opportunities to talk with children and get to know other parents

“It’s a good time for conversation, more so than hanging around the bus stop, which tends to be more of a distracted play time with a lot of the other kids.”

~Rick Keller, Ottawa, ON

“When we walk, it’s a great chance to have that “tell me one great thing about today” chat.”

~Shari, rural mom who walks to bus stop with her children, from *People for Education* blog

“My children get excited to see their friends, and for us [her and her husband] it provides a good opportunity to interact with other parents. I have gotten to know other mothers, which has created opportunities to set up play-dates.”

~ *Final Report on the Active and Safe Routes to School Project*, Halton District School Board, ON

“Parking at this school is horrible; I see it much safer to come to school on foot than trying to negotiate through a packed parking lot and surrounding street. I have offered to have my friends drop their children off at my house in the mornings (instead of at the school) to take them on the WSB. I told her [friend] that she can get a little more time in the morning and the children can see their friends a little more as well. It seemed like a good way to get her to try it out.”

~ *Final Report on the Active and Safe Routes to School Project*, Halton District School Board, ON

“(Walking to school together) provides bonding time with the children. You get to know who your kids are, know where they are and know who they hang out with.”

~ *Final Report on the Active and Safe Routes to School Project*, Halton District School Board, ON

“I lived in Surrey, so I walked to school quite a bit. I remember meeting up with my friends, and going to the 7/11 and getting slurpees before school.”

~ Brenda McDonald, Mom and Walking School Bus Driver, Surrey, BC

“School is the foundation of a community. And when parents are involved, it just strengthens that. And it looks good with the students too, because they see their parents getting involved with their schools, talking with teachers, and also being out there and walking with them instead of driving.”

~ Brenda McDonald, Mom and Walking School Bus Driver, Surrey, BC

“So we encourage the parents to get involved more...it doesn’t cost anything.”

~Guy McDonald, Dad and Walking School Bus Driver, Surrey, BC

Walking through the seasons
Weather shouldn't be a stopper!

“Living near the canal, it's frozen in the winter, so it makes it a lot easier to cross the ice and it cuts about half an hour off our journey, so when we do walk to school it's almost always in the winter.”

~Anja Liddy, Ottawa, ON

“Weather can be a big factor with parents. In that regard, winter can actually be a good time to start the program, as it gives some families the opportunity to see others out and active in the winter months. In fact, the program got better and better in the winter, and both parents and students noted they actually got warmer walking, as opposed to sitting in a cold car, waiting for it to heat up.”

~ *Final Report on the Active and Safe Routes to School Project*, Halton District School Board, ON

“He had wonderful stories of adventure - climbing snowbanks and trees.”

~Diane, from *People for Education* blog

“I think as long as you're dressed warm, as long as you're bundled up and your body is completely covered, then you're okay.”

~Sandra Brooks, Brampton, ON

“We walk just about all winter long even if the weather is severe. Once in a while we'll give them a ride if we happen to be using the car to somewhere, but, I'd say at least 90 or 95 per cent of the time our kids are walking to school.”

~Bruce Krentz, Thompson, MB

“I make sure that we've got lots of really warm clothes around at home - they're not necessarily expensive clothes but we've got lots of options for them and I find that they sort of manage that themselves...sometimes they'll get cold one day but the next day I'll notice that they're wearing a lot more stuff.”

~Bruce Krentz, Thompson, MB

“Ideally, I would walk (my kids to school) every day. (In the) winter it's easier if the canal is open because we can cut across the canal.”

~Rick Keller, Ottawa, ON

“(My walking tips include) making sure the pants are tucked into the boots instead of overtop, or even for the younger kids like mine, having extra clothes at the school or in the bag already just in case.”

~Catherine Ableton, Surrey, BC

“Dress proper...just dress for the weather.”

~ Brenda McDonald, Mom and Walking School Bus Driver, Surrey, BC

“Yes, I take her every day and I make sure she gets dressed up warm. I bundle her up...we just live close by here; it only takes us 8 to 10 minutes. I always walk with her every day.”

~Andrea Cook, Thompson, MB

Active school travel benefits overall physical and mental health

« Elle y rencontre des ami(e)s, elle se sent plus confiante, elle y fait une partie de son activité physique de la journée, bref, que des bienfaits! »

~Mélyssa Brochu, Sherbrooke, QC

(Adapted from excerpt above)

“During our walk, she meets up with friends, gets some of her daily physical activity and feels more confident... The rewards are endless!”

~Mélyssa Brochu, Sherbrooke, QC

“You’re doing something good for them, and for their activity; it teaches them to get out and be active and (you’re showing them it) is part of their lifestyle ...they don’t have to drive everywhere”

~Alana Bresson, Dominion, NS

“I wanted to get them out and moving a little bit more; they spend a lot of time on screens and a lot of time when they aren’t active and I know it’s really important for kids to get out and get moving so this is a way to sort of introduce them to that. It’s not a far walk to school so there’s no reason why they don’t get out and get moving.”

~Bruce Krentz, Thompson, MB

“I find that we’re a little scattered or we’re a little bit stressed out maybe as we leave the house and it doesn’t take too many steps past the end of the driveway before everybody starts to relax and we start to chat a little bit and by the time we get to school we’ve had a good ten or fifteen minutes together.”

~Bruce Krentz, Thompson, MB

“Having them walk and bike when they can to school has been excellent for them in terms of getting a little bit more activity every day. I think they’re happier when they get to school and even when they get home. I know when they walk it’s a great feeling for them.”

~Bruce Krentz

“At this school, they encourage parents not to bring in McDonald’s for their children for lunch. They should encourage the WSB in the same way. Overall, the healthier kids are, the better off they are.”

~ *Final Report on the Active and Safe Routes to School Project*, Halton District School Board, ON

“My mom likes the (Walking School Bus) because it gets some exercise for me.”

~ *Final Report on the Active and Safe Routes to School Project*, Halton District School Board, ON

“My father likes the bus because he can get some fresh air”

~ *Final Report on the Active and Safe Routes to School Project*, Halton District School Board, ON

“It’s definitely a great daily exercise for any child to be able to walk to school so I think overall, in the long run, it’s going to be healthier overall in every way possible.”

~Sandra Brooks, Brampton, ON

“If walking everyday was part of their routine and it helped them mentally prepare for school, help them decompress a little bit, (...) it’s all going to be positive.”

~Rick Keller, Ottawa, ON

« (Ma fille) qui chiâlait au début que le 1,1km était trop long, est maintenant une championne de la marche vers l'école. Elle y arrive plus réveillée, plus prête à avoir une bonne journée, oxygénée par sa promenade. »

~ Mélyssa Brochu, Sherbrooke, QC

(Adapted from excerpt above)

“(My daughter), who used to complain that 1.1 km was too far to walk, is now a walk-to-school champion. Thanks to all that fresh air, when she arrives at school she's more alert and ready to have a great day.”

~ Mélyssa Brochu, Sherbrooke, QC

« Elle est plus calme depuis qu'elle a intégré cette activité physique à son quotidien. »

~Catherine, Montréal, QC

(Adapted from excerpt above)

“Ever since (my daughter) added this physical activity to her daily routine, she's been calmer.”

~Catherine, Montréal, QC

“She was always pointing out the kids who walked and she would say, “Mom, see they’re walking. Why can’t I walk?” So she wasn’t too excited when I was driving her, of course. ”

~Sandra Brooks, Brampton, ON

“It just makes her feel better about herself, it’s rewarding for her and it’s motivating and I think she feels happy when her teachers says, “Good job! I’m so happy to see you walk!” and it makes her feel good and like she’s accomplishing something. ”

~Sandra Brooks, Brampton, ON

“I think it just teaches them to be disciplined and how certain changes in their lives can make a huge difference physically and emotionally, I think.”

~Sandra Brooks, Brampton, ON

Children are ready to learn, parents are ready to work

“Physically, it’s a great way to start. I walk to work, or bike to work, and I know from experience it’s a great way to kind of start to think through what is ahead of you in the day.”

~Rick Keller, Ottawa

“Overall, (my daughter) has had better grades but I’ve never associated the two (active travel/grades) together. Perhaps it has had something to do with her grades, yeah. ”

~Sandra Brooks, Brampton, ON

“(My son) is really active anyway, so it really helps him to burn off a little energy before he gets (to school). He’s very excited...(the WSB) makes him want to just get there.”

~Catherine Ableton, Surrey, BC

“(My children’s general state when they were driven was) more tired. Not as energized.”

~Brenda McDonald, Walking School Bus Driver, Surrey, BC

“Usually...he didn’t want to get out of the car. There was usually an argument. So now, getting ready (he says things like); ‘Hurry up! Get me ready! The Walking School Bus is coming!’ He’s much more excited and I don’t have to argue with him most mornings to get (to school).”

~Catherine Ableton, Surrey, BC

“You know, I think they were less relaxed when they got to school in the morning when we took the car. It seemed like we were always in a rush to get out of the house and in a rush to get to the school; and like a lot of the other schools the drop off zones were a little bit chaotic and it just wasn’t a relaxing, peaceful way to start the day.”

~Bruce Krentz, Thompson, MB

“I think it’s great for the kids. They were just saying the other day that they feel sort of happy when they get to school – not overjoyed...they were kind of joking around saying it wasn’t the greatest thing ever – but they find that they are relaxed and they’re sort of in a good frame of mind; so I think it’s absolutely great for them. I think, too, that it’s great that they get a little bit of time to spend with their friends. They walk with me in the mornings but when they walk home at lunch and after school they spend some time with some of their friends and it’s a good time together walking and talking and doing what kids do.”

~Bruce Krentz, Thompson, MB

We enjoy our walk to school because...

“I enjoy holding her hand and walking and just being goofy as we walk the trip to school every day.”

~Sandra Brooks, Brampton, ON

“(I like the) change of pace and actually...incorporating (my children) into my walk to work.”

~Rick Keller, Ottawa

“It’s not a far walk, so it was nice to get out; and get a good start, run a few errands and walk home and get a little fresh air and it was all good!”

~Anja Liddy, Ottawa

« Quel bienfait! »

~ Mélyssa Brochu, Sherbrooke, QC

(Adapted from excerpt above)

“It’s been so rewarding!”

~ Mélyssa Brochu, Sherbrooke, QC

“In the long term I can see that there will be fewer kids getting the buses from the shorter distances that they’re getting them from (now).”

~Alana Bresson, Dominion, NS

“The kids LOVED seeing one of our newer (and younger) teachers skateboard to school in the fall. They thought that was pretty darned cool :-D”

~ Shari, rural mom who walks to bus stop with her children, from *People for Education* blog

“I enjoy being around the kids...and telling jokes and hearing about how their evening was.”

~Brenda McDonald, Mom and Walking School Bus Driver, Surrey, BC

“Their smiles, their laughs.”

~Guy McDonald, Dad and Walking School Bus Driver, Surrey, BC

“Getting out, fresh air, exercising.”

~ Andrea Cook, Thompson, MB

“It’s been one of the greatest things that we’ve done over the last couple of years. I would encourage people to do it. Walk with your kids if you can if there is some way that you can swing that. It’s really some special time together and it also starts to get people out and get them moving and it shows your kids that it’s okay to walk; that you don’t always have to take a car to wherever you go. It’s quality time together.”

~Bruce Krentz, Thompson, MB

Video Interviews

Interviews conducted by video and were of high enough quality to share can be viewed at these links.

[Catherine Ableton, Brenda McDonald and Guy McDonald; Surrey, BC](#)

Our thanks to Kevin McBride of McBride Pictures.

[Fousséni Aliou; Montréal](#)

Interview in French

Other Video Resources

[The Walking School Bus](#) - Halton District School Board

[Stepping It Up: How to Get Active on the Trip to School Through School Travel Planning](#) - Metrolinx

[Stepping It Up: Kids Say Walking to School is Healthy, Fun, and Good for the Environment](#) – Metrolinx

Photos



Fousséni Aliou – Montréal, Québec



Anja Liddy – Ottawa, Ontario



Andrea Cook – Thompson, Manitoba



Bruce Krentz – Thompson, Manitoba



Sandra Brooks – Brampton, Ontario