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| **Fwd: VDOT SRTS Winter 2018 Newsletter** |

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But it's also an opportunity to take stock of everything you've accomplished this year for Safe Routes to School, thank the people who helped make it happen, and 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 SRTS events and learn what the latest research has to say about pedestrian safety. You'll also find information about our upcoming 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@virginiasrts.org](mailto:Info@VirginiaSRTS.org).  Regards,  Rob Williams  Virginia SRTS Coordinator |  |  |  |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | | ***Friends and Faces***  A walking school bus can give 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.   |  | | --- | |  | | *Students in the Fairfield Court walking school bus.* |   **How does the walking school bus work at Fairfield Court?**  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 percent and tardies decreased 62 percent.  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!  **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 I'm helping my colleagues at other East End schools launch walking school buses. It's an incredible opportunity to build community in the school.  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.  [Back to Top](https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0?ik=27281ceb81&view=pt&search=all&permmsgid=msg-f%3A1618930415828704625&simpl=msg-f%3A1618930415828704625#m_-1155557702967991674_m_7769128694043163628_m_8049563588015873134_Top) |  |  | | --- | | ***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](http://r20.rs6.net/tn.jsp?f=001k1CeF_MYbAgwioUxZ3UcVJhgWBvCpss__H6NKG9NX_XdQZ6gmsiCd-AbJ2f-7klymrWMnQmna7oc00X92O-WVYl4TU0o5x05kXxhxkzVGQluOdpdAXpmSVSOpJv0IcmCLfOrXq-vFbOMcefpLMHC1XMD6lu4cbQ53dWSdQ4la-_eRuh7doWA4fiqfdEFWSfdDs2EqtVKnS6NfeN-WqAUbTzDKQ-yszlfm2K7f6pO890q4dOYBiA4M0mfKmY6I7_E65Z0QgmBJvxTbiGdJYukBeMXMukEnkDH7TiZSnUIX2dZ0vHdoWbQzHmBT0OuhfBeKVM6m6Lj-TMIp5vM8UThcsIYYHpEwkoMY9EKFVhLzYPkI7nKm3r1EaRsQq3A4uVJYc9h6WrKywkpwAtMZTHA0pN9GXYhIeV-DCbLIbxtDZ4=&c=uXkOd9zHZGTotKF-U3fbUbaTGmleSY5dprGTA8hdOnBrU3qvh_zjvA==&ch=9jEyBMmX-zfT9Blqq3Pjc-jweSNE_8M9LurR0yrnO5-zqi9ApSZ5MQ==) (February 13, 2019) and [Bike to School Day](http://r20.rs6.net/tn.jsp?f=001k1CeF_MYbAgwioUxZ3UcVJhgWBvCpss__H6NKG9NX_XdQZ6gmsiCdyZTMWnDQOxXO-t4fRDqTx-vSVIz7jRlE4DvR7pLu4VcsTgsWO8dMYsFivQfuIzDVzKfL_36-GzfDAHY8sDt7t52_FQWriiIExaIJVEPfcvL4pxzfBgQ1YZgYQp2rXr5wzcRltnlt6S_lNWciEyUrLWJCm5jc4RNV7AoOriunAbIhkAdan1l1W8WJnf9xQxwHzKUeCH14v24NSOksm2bJz5y5hABV7RqPw5nSFO0WzFUpp3ozuURk9HFp4U0GJM4xxZfXVbHBKDDialX1NT35gIDIJAaZ19gmZcFOhFEDfRWOFF1evo-1uApmrZ03t8h9SyZ3RWDWsvmjLTAw1_PatMAyucU6IYmrKl_FtXYGEhc&c=uXkOd9zHZGTotKF-U3fbUbaTGmleSY5dprGTA8hdOnBrU3qvh_zjvA==&ch=9jEyBMmX-zfT9Blqq3Pjc-jweSNE_8M9LurR0yrnO5-zqi9ApSZ5MQ==) (May 8, 2019). | | | | | | | |