



Fall 2022



## Coordinator's Corner

Welcome to the 2022-23 school year! Schools are getting back into their familiar routines after a few rocky years, and they are ready to go! There is still a bus driver shortage, so the need to get kids walking and biking to school is greater than ever. Schools and parents are getting very creative as they come up with ways to deal with the shortage - for example, walking school buses and bike trains are popping up everywhere. Studies show that kids do better in class if they've had physical activity before arriving. And as a side bonus, they are creating bonds with their fellow walkers and bikers.



In this newsletter, we prepare you for the return to the classroom with a 2022-2023 calendar and resources to help your school's travel policies and activities. We'll get to know Andrea Walker, a walking school bus volunteer in Arlington, who shares some useful tips for implementing a walking school bus in your community. We'll give you all the details on Walk to School Day on October 12, and we include funding opportunities that can support local SRTS efforts.

We also have an exciting new opportunity: the program is now hosting quarterly conference calls, and you're invited! The first one is **Wednesday, September 14 from 1-2:30 pm**. Read on to learn more.

If you have any questions or would like to learn more about the topics included here, please don't hesitate to reach out! Send us an email at [info@virginiasrts.org](mailto:info@virginiasrts.org).

Regards,

*Katherine Graham*

Katherine Graham  
Virginia SRTS Coordinator

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## VA SRTS Calendar for the 2022-2023 School Year

By incorporating Safe Routes to School activities into a school's or school division's official calendar, students, parents, and teachers can plan for SRTS events and grant due dates. Adding SRTS information to an existing calendar will help reduce conflicts with other events and highlight opportunities for partnership with other community activities.

In addition to including any of your school's unique SRTS activities, such as weekly or monthly walk and bike to school events, bicycle rodeos, and pedestrian safety activities, be sure to add statewide and national Safe Routes to School events to your calendar, including:

### September

- 14 – Quarterly Conference Call
- 29 – QuickStart Mini-grant Applications due
- 29 – Walkabout Mini-grant Applications due

### October - Walking Month!

- 12 – Walk to School Day

### December

- 1 – Nominations for Most Outstanding Crossing Guard Open
- 7 – Quarterly Conference Call

### January

- 20 – Nominations for Most Outstanding Crossing Guard Close

### February

- 2 – Walkabout Mini-grant Applications due
- 8 – Crossing Guard Appreciation Day
- 9 – Quarterly Conference Call

### March

- 2 – QuickStart Mini-grant Applications due

### April

- 6 – QuickStart Mini-grant Applications due
- 22 – Earth Day
- 26 – Barbara Johns Walk to School Day

### May - Bike Month!

- 3 – Bike to School Day
- 10 – Quarterly Conference Call

[Click here](#) to download a digital calendar file of the dates above.

## **\*NEW\* Join our Quarterly Calls!**

Interested in hearing about other SRTS programs across the state or learning how to get your own program started? Need some advice on improving pedestrian and bicycle safety in your neighborhood?

The LTACs will be hosting quarterly calls for teachers, school staff and administrators, parents,

local government, advocacy organizations, and others to discuss all things Safe Routes to School. A mix of presentation and discussion, these calls will be a place to collaborate to advance safe and active student travel.

Mark your calendars! The first quarterly call will be on **Wednesday, September 14** from 1-2:30 pm. [Sign up for our e-blasts](#) to receive the call information.

## Meet the LTACs

The Virginia SRTS program is supported by Local Technical Assistant Coordinators (LTACs) assigned to each of the three state regions. Their work involves both direct contact with local communities and VDOT District Offices, and broader activities that support SRTS statewide and locally. [Learn more about the LTACs and their regions.](#)



### Blue Ridge LTAC

Ayden Cohen  
[ayden@virginiasrts.org](mailto:ayden@virginiasrts.org)

Fun Fact: A hobby of mine is riding my bike to try new cafes and restaurants in other parts of the city I live in.



### Piedmont LTAC

Jim Elliott  
[jim@virginiasrts.org](mailto:jim@virginiasrts.org)

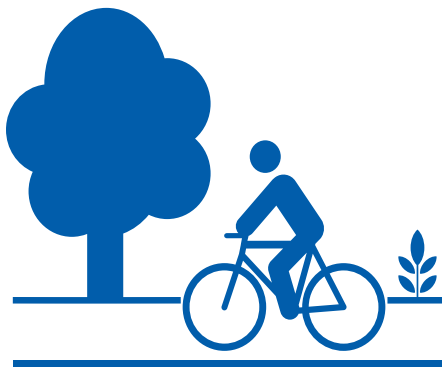
Fun Fact: My favorite hobby is backpacking. There's something about carrying my home on my back, and hiking through beautiful, wild places that puts things into perspective.



### Coastal LTAC

Sean Dajour  
[sean@virginiasrts.org](mailto:sean@virginiasrts.org)

Fun Fact: I enjoy live music, trying new teas, and supporting Mom & Pop businesses!



## ***Friends & Faces: Andrea Walker***

Andrea Walker is a volunteer for the walking school bus program in Arlington, Virginia. The program is an intergenerational Safe Routes to School initiative where seniors and children walk to school together. We recently sat down with Andrea for a conversation about her role with the Walking School Bus and the joy volunteering brings.



*Andrea Walker, walking school bus volunteer.*

### ***What was your commute to school like as a child?***

I would take the city bus in Miami - this was during the start of integration. My parents had me do my part to integrate.

### ***How long have you been involved with the walking school bus in Arlington?***

Since last summer, so that would be 2021.

### ***Were there any challenges or obstacles you had to overcome in the beginning?***

Not particularly. Lauren Hassel, who was the Arlington Public School's SRTS coordinator, along with Mary Dallao of Walk Arlington were putting together a walking school bus model pre-Covid. When Covid was becoming a background noise in summer 2021, I raised my hand to help them restart.

They had already put together the model, but I really wanted it to be intergenerational, so I said, "Let's have seniors walk kids to school."

### ***What inspired that idea?***

I was a member of the Arlington Commission on Aging (and part of its Age Friendly Arlington initiative) and a member of the County's 55+ program, which is an extraordinary recreation program for seniors. So the idea came naturally! It's a great way for kids to learn to talk with seniors and have conversations with an older generation.

### ***Right. Especially in this day and age where people tend to move further away from home. What are the volunteers' relationships like with the kids?***

The kids are absolutely lovely. I feel like we really did become grandparents, and all five volunteers shared this feeling. There is nothing like starting the day with a smile on your face. These children were just so much fun. One of the key things we tried to communicate to the kids is the importance of safety and surveying their surroundings when crossing the street. We were able to get a [SRTS QuickStart mini-grant](#) to purchase child-size reflective vests and reflective slap bands with the walking school bus logo on them. That made the kids more visible, and they loved the merch.

### ***I love how multifaceted the SRTS approach is. You're facilitating an intergenerational experience with the students, and at the same time you're teaching social and safety skills ...***

Yes! It is good for Arlington Public Schools too. This

was a pilot project – we spent from last August to April of this year, planning. Last November we met with Oakridge Elementary’s principal, Dr. Lynn Wright, who was wonderfully enthusiastic of the pilot. Part of her enthusiasm was that it would limit the reliance on the family car. In Arlington, students within the one-mile walk zone don’t have school bus service, so parents often drive their kids to school rather than walk. It could get pretty congested at Oakridge as parents dropped off their kids. And besides being eco-friendly, we were teaching kids safety and self-reliance—they could use their own two feet to get to school.

### ***What about the SRTS program brings you the most joy?***

One of the volunteers said there was nothing like one morning a week getting “a needed kid hit.” We’re older, and we don’t see kids unless our grandchildren live next door. It’s definitely a two-way street – we get to spend time with children, and the children learn a lot from us. It’s been pure joy doing this!

### ***Does the Walking School Bus happen both before and after school?***

For now, it’s just before school. The reason being is that extended day gets a little tricky. It does seem that parents are starting to walk their children home from school, rather than picking the kids up by car.

### ***What advice do you have for others interested in starting a walking school bus?***

First, put together a good team. It doesn’t have to be bunches of people — we’re a team of 5. Look



*Oakridge Elementary School’s principal, staff, and volunteers proudly display high-visibility vests for the school’s walking school bus.*

for like-minded people, and then get in touch with the school. The program is international, starting in Japan in 1996, I believe. A great deal of information is already out there so try to familiarize yourself with what’s already out there before you approach a school. Truthfully, the hardest thing is to recruit the volunteers, but once they’re on board, they’re so delighted to be the wheels on the bus.

Also, it’s important for families to feel comfortable, so all of the volunteers were vetted. We were vetted by Arlington Public Schools and the 55 + program.

Virginia SRTS has a [webpage that lists steps on starting a walking school bus](#), and [APS has a webpage with resources](#), too.

### ***Anything else that you would like to share?***

Exchanging ideas across generations and regular exercise is so valuable – that goes for both the kids and the adults!

## Walking School Bus Planning Advice

Are you thinking about launching a walking school bus this fall? Here's some advice from past [QuickStart Mini-grant](#) recipients.

The walking school bus program can start with one route and grow as popularity increases.—*Nathan Barge, Keister Elementary School*

It is important to get a group of committed parents who are willing to help plan and lead the walking school buses. Person-to-person contact is most effective for recruiting leaders. Also, it is important to get buy-in from the school administration and PTA.—*Tamara Gelboi, Ashlawn Elementary School*

Build momentum for the walking school bus by sending home flyers and hosting a pep rally before the bus begins.—*Elizabeth LeRoy, Barcroft Elementary School*

Get a good team. Our five-member team is the best. Our members cover all facets needed for an intergenerational Walking School Bus: APS's Safe Routes to School, WalkArlington, Arlington's 55+ program, and the County's Commission on Aging.—*Andrea Walker, Oakridge Elementary School*

Be proud of progress you make, even if it seems small.—*Michele Richoux, Lake Braddock Secondary School*

To learn more, check out [The Walking School Bus: Combining Safety, Fun, and the Walk to School](#).

## Start the School Year Out the SRTS Way!

The start of the school year is exciting and busy. New routines are being established, and the school is communicating regularly with parents. It's a great time for schools to encourage walking and bicycling for school transportation and communicate about policies, procedures, and activities that support safe school travel.

The following resources can help!

- [Zone In, Not Out: Arrival and Dismissal in the Zone](#) - Discusses best practices for arrival and dismissal procedures and provides tips for communicating with parents.
- [Zone In, Not Out: Safe Driver Pledge Kit](#) - Includes ideas to encourage participation, a sample announcement script, pledge forms, a pledge tracking form, and graphics that can be printed as bumper stickers.
- [Pedestrian Safer Journey](#) – Includes age-appropriate videos, handouts, and quizzes to help teach pedestrian safety to students ages 5-9, 10-14, and 15-18.

And don't hesitate to [contact your LTAC!](#)





*John C. Myers Elementary held a winter Walk to School Day in 2021 with SRTS-themed masks and a visit from school mascot, Jake.*

## **Get Ready for Walk to School Day on October 12!**

[Walk to School Day](#) is coming up, so you know what to do! Register your community's walking and rolling event at [walkbiketoschool.org/](http://walkbiketoschool.org/). **Virginia schools that register will all be entered into a drawing to win a skateboard and a helmet from the VA SRTS Program!**

Schools that participate in both Walk to School Day and Bike to School Day in 2022-2023 may be eligible to receive a Virginia SRTS Program-branded banner.

Read on to learn more about one of our favorite days of the year.

**What is Walk to School Day?** Walk to School Day is Virginia SRTS's signature fall event that raises

awareness of the benefits of walking and biking. The popularity of Walk to School Day continues to increase each year thanks to dedicated school staff, crossing guards, community partners, parents, and volunteers who help plan and host events at their schools.

**When is Walk to School Day?** Mark your calendars for Wednesday, October 12! Remember that all of October is Walk to School Month, and schools are encouraged to host events whenever is most convenient for them.

What if students can't walk to school? Even if students live too far or are unable to walk all the way to school, they can meet up with their classmates at a designated spot nearby and walk from there. Or the school can host a Walk at School event, where all students are invited to walk around the school grounds before class begins, during recess or enrichment classes.

**Why should my school participate in Walk to School Day?** Participating in Walk to School Day and hosting an event is the perfect way to encourage walking to school, teach safe pedestrian skills, reduce congestion during arrival and dismissal, and kick off a Safe Routes to School program for the school year. Most importantly, it's fun for everyone! Be sure to check out [our resources to help plan your school's Walk to School Day event](#). Keep walking, Virginia!



## Focus On Funding

Here's a list of upcoming grant opportunities.

### [Virginia SRTS Program, QuickStart Mini-grants](#)

- \$1,000
- Use for small-scale SRTS activities
- Applications due Thursday, September 29

### [Virginia SRTS Program, Walkabout Mini-grants](#)

- Technical assistance worth \$5,000-\$10,000
- Use for assessing pedestrian and bicycle conditions and building consensus about ways to improve them
- Applications due Thursday, September 29

### [America Walks – Community Change Grants](#)

- \$1,500 based on previous grant awards
- Use to fund projects that support active transportation and physical activity at the community level
- Applications open in September



### [Virginia Foundation for Healthy Youth—Healthy Community Action Team Grants](#)

- Up to \$93,000 for three years
- Use for community efforts to reduce and prevent childhood obesity, including through increased physical activity
- Applications due Monday, October 17

See our [Learn It. Do it. Live it! on Funding SRTS Projects](#) for time-tested tips for funding SRTS projects, a menu of common funding sources, and links to other valuable funding resources.

