



Institute for Transportation Research and Education
North Carolina State University

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Walking School Bus Program: Burn Fat not Gas

Raleigh, N.C. – Whether you participate in a walk to school program to help your child’s health or to save money on gas, you benefit either way. Recess has been eliminated at many schools, the prevalence of obesity in children has tripled, gas prices hit us hard and fast, and demands on our school bus service have risen due to gas hikes. Sending your children to school on a Walking School Bus is an alternative worth implementing. Jeff Tsai, director of the Pupil Transportation Group at the Institute for Transportation Research and Education (ITRE), has had a paper accepted by the Transportation Research Board (TRB) for presentation at their Annual Meeting January 23 in Washington, D.C. The paper is titled, “Creating and Operating a Walking School Bus Program”.

The Walking School Bus Program was designed to eliminate parent’s concerns over safety and security issues, cited as the top reason why school children are not walking to school. In addition, the Walking School Bus Program also eliminates traffic congestion in the pick-up/drop-off lane on campuses. A Walking School Bus is when volunteers walk a group of school children from one stop to another, until the children arrive safely at the school.

The Walking School Bus program has been implemented at Olive Chapel Elementary School in Apex. The program began in 2000 on International Walk to School Day and received so much participation that it continued and has been in place for five years now. The School now participates in “Walking Wednesday”, which takes place the first Wednesday of each month. Approximately 300 students walk to school in rain or shine each time. The volunteers wear yellow vests and carry whistles to distinguish themselves. They undergo background checks and are trained by the Apex police department.

Since its implementation, the program has been featured in *Better Homes and Gardens*, *Reader’s Digest* and *School Transportation News*. The students at the school are offered incentives to participate in the program, like t-shirts, patches and key chains.

The Walking School Bus schedule is created by the Transportation Information Management System (TIMS). TIMS is a Geographic Information System (GIS) based computer-assisted routing and scheduling software

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program that is traditionally used for designing school bus routes. TIMS is used by all school systems in North Carolina through collaborative efforts of the NC Department of Public Instruction, ITRE, Urban Institute at UNC-Charlotte, and North Carolina public school systems.

Tsai authored the paper with Katie Caggia, a physical education instructor at Olive Chapel Elementary School, and Diane Ward, a professor in the School of Public Health at UNC-Chapel Hill.

Having the paper accepted by the Transportation Research Board for presentation will bring significant recognition to the topic as the Annual Meeting is attended by more than 9,000 transportation professionals nationwide and abroad. Some or all of the papers presented at the national meeting will be published in the Transportation Research Record, and serve as a national resource for transportation-related decision making.

TRB is a division of the National Research Council, which serves as an independent advisor to the federal government and others on scientific and technical questions of national importance.

The Pupil Transportation Group at ITRE is the only one of its kind in the country, dedicated to addressing pupil transportation issues. The Group applies transportation engineering principles and technology to the operation and management of school buses in order to provide safe and efficient transportation for school children. The Group's goal is to challenge pupil transportation service providers to approach old problems with new ideas through progressive research accessing university and industry expertise.

ITRE, administered by North Carolina State University, is a non-profit organization that conducts research, education, and technical assistance projects on a wide variety of surface transportation issues with the goals of solving problems and creating new products, better services, and smarter workers. ITRE is located at NCSU's Centennial Campus. For more information about ITRE and Pupil Transportation services, please visit our Web site at www.itre.ncsu.edu.

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