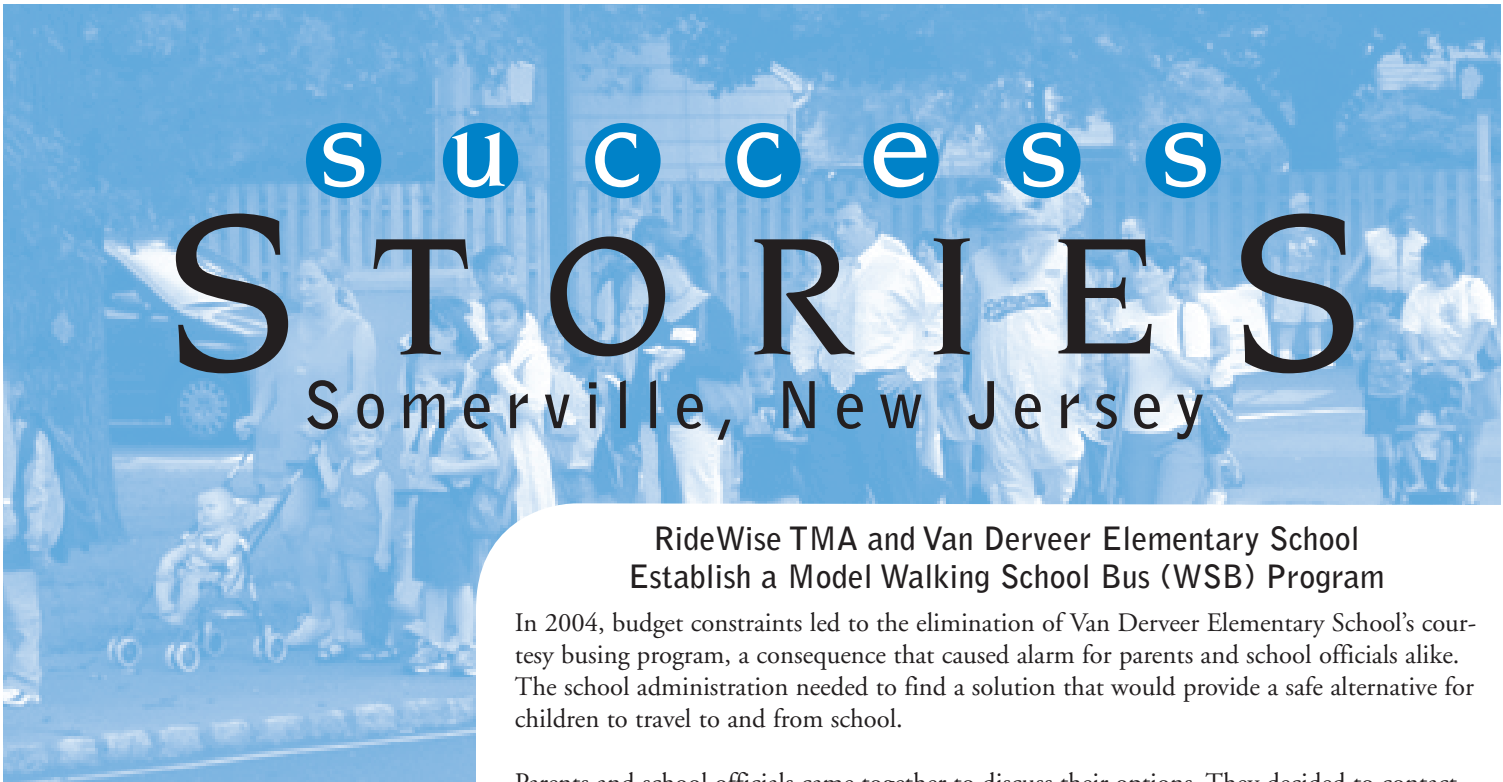




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STORIES

Somerville, New Jersey

RideWise TMA and Van Derveer Elementary School Establish a Model Walking School Bus (WSB) Program

In 2004, budget constraints led to the elimination of Van Derveer Elementary School's courtesy busing program, a consequence that caused alarm for parents and school officials alike. The school administration needed to find a solution that would provide a safe alternative for children to travel to and from school.

Parents and school officials came together to discuss their options. They decided to contact RideWise Transportation Management Association (TMA) of Somerset County, an affiliate of the Somerset County Business Partnership, which promotes transportation alternatives such as bicycling, walking, transit and carpooling to reduce traffic and increase community mobility.

RideWise quickly assessed the needs of Van Derveer School by plotting student addresses on a map, identifying clusters of students in different neighborhoods, inspecting potential walking routes for problems and mapping five routes that would best enable students to travel to and from school safely. The school principal asked for parents to volunteer as "route guides" to walk with students along the routes nearest to their homes. A schedule was developed to communicate the times that stops would be made at various locations on the designated safe routes. These schedules were distributed at a town meeting, at which parents were introduced to the program.

With RideWise's assistance, Van Derveer Elementary School effectively and quickly implemented a popular Safe Routes to School strategy called the Walking School Bus (WSB). Although Van Derveer's WSB program was designed to solve a problem that arose when courtesy busing was eliminated, it brought with it a wide range of benefits for children, parents, school and community.

RESULTS

The entire plan and implementation for the Van Derveer Walking School Bus took merely four weeks from beginning to end. Organizing such a program typically requires three to four months, depending on the extent of problem areas that need to be addressed before the walking routes can be mapped and published. The initial time investment is extremely valuable since many Walking School Bus programs grow in both popularity and size over time.

After two years, the Van Derveer Walking School Bus continues to be a tremendous success. This is largely due to the enthusiasm, attributed mainly to parents and teachers, for maintaining the momentum of the program through their own participation and creative ideas.

One such idea is "Walk to School Wednesdays," a program created to encourage the entire student body to walk to school. Turnout for the weekly event averages 300 students and the principal also walks one of the routes each week. The school uses rolls of raffle tickets to track the number of participants each week. Every student that walks to school that morning receives a raffle ticket from the principal as they enter the building. The winning number is

Key Facts

- Budget constraints led to the elimination of courtesy busing.
- Parents and school officials collaborated on solutions.
- RideWise of Somerset County, a Transportation Management Association (TMA), has been instrumental in developing and sustaining the Walking School Bus program.

Innovative Ideas

- Explore alternative solutions to busing that do not involve motor vehicles.
- Work with school principals and administrators to ensure success of the Walking School Bus (WSB).
- Begin in May or June to launch a program by September.
- Track weekly participation in Walk to School Wednesdays by using raffle tickets.



broadcast over the speaker system with the morning announcements and the student with the lucky number receives a prize.

Based on the success at Van Derveer, RideWise TMA has expanded Walk to School Day to other Somerset County schools – an intermediate school in Manville and an elementary/middle school in Bernardsville. RideWise helps schools to develop walking programs and provides them with tools to successfully continue the programs on their own.

LESSONS LEARNED

Through experience with school-based walking programs, RideWise has found that the support of school principals is critical for success. Working with the superintendent can also prove helpful. RideWise recommends that anyone interested in working with a school to start a Walking School Bus program should initiate contact with the principal and/or superintendent by May or June for a program to be launched successfully in September.

RideWise also discovered that parent commitment and participation are invaluable to a successful Walking School Bus program at any school. Ideally, “ownership” of the

program will be maintained through regular collaboration between school officials and parents or the Parent Teacher Association (PTA).

RideWise cautioned that for a successful Walking School Bus program to endure, significant lead-time is required for initiation and promotion. Collecting ongoing feedback via surveys from students and parents about their satisfaction with the program, and making recommended adjustments, are important steps for continued success. Tracking and evaluating progress through teacher and principal feedback is also helpful. All these steps require time, planning and attention, including continuous volunteer recruitment.

IMPLEMENTATION BASICS

RideWise conducts a thorough assessment of the specific needs of each school and then



makes a good case for the Walking School Bus program by highlighting its benefits to the school and other stakeholders in the community, as well as to potential grant funders.

Programs at each school are publicized vigorously through flyers, which are distributed to children and other community members. Posters that display the safe walking routes are displayed throughout the municipality in the weeks leading up to each Walk to School Day. Lists of the routes are also published in local newspapers. RideWise provides all promotional materials, while the school functions as the direct program contact. School staff members are also responsible for mailing materials and for speaking with those interested in participating.

RideWise provides their services through support from the New Jersey Department of Transportation (NJDOT). In addition, local businesses donate funds and prizes, while school staff and parents contribute time and ideas to keep the program lively and fun.

For more information:

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For more information about how you can begin your Walking School Bus program, please see *How to Begin a Walking School Bus*.

To find out more, visit www.ridewise.org or contact RideWise at (908) 704-1011.

To find the TMA covering your jurisdiction, visit www.driveless.com.



Borough of Somerville, Somerset County

Population (2000)	12,400
Area	2.4 square miles
Density	5,166 people/sq. mile
Public School Participant:	
Van Derveer Elementary School (grades K-5)	approx. 890 students



NJ Department of
Transportation

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