



***Children at Lewis Lemon Elementary participated in the first
Walking School Bus on Monday, April 22, 2013***

Instead of riding the bus to school the morning of April 22, students at Lewis Lemon Elementary School participated in the first coordinated Walking School Bus activity. The bus is powered by feet – *no gas required*. The bus has no wheels, seats or walls. The walking school bus is a form of active and healthy transportation where adults “drivers” walk students on a set route to school, picking up children along the way at designated “bus-stops.” The walking school bus concept is part of the Winnebago County Health Department’s “We Choose Health” grant.

The walking route was mapped and assessed by the City of Rockford, Rockford Police Department and other community organizations. Signage along the route marks the “bus route” and “stops” so kids and parents will know where to meet the walkers. Grant money will support a position through the YMCA to coordinate walkers, and volunteers will assist in student safety.

Rockford Public Schools switched to a geographic zone-based plan for elementary school students, starting with kindergarteners, in the 2011-12 school years. This year, kindergarten and first grade students attend the school within their geographic-based zone – a school that’s, ideally, closest to their home. That means more students are walking to school.

Nutrition and physical activity are not only directly related to students’ health but also to a student’s academic performance. “Exercise first thing in the morning is a great way to wake up and start the day,” said Winnebago County Health Department’s We Choose Health Coordinator Kyle Auman. The walking school bus will also help alleviate traffic congestion as parents and buses battle for space in front of the school.

Partners for the Walking School Bus Initiative are the Rockford Police Department, YMCA, City of Rockford, Rockford Metropolitan Agency for Planning, Rockford Housing Authority, Youth Services Network, Rockford Public Schools, and the Winnebago County We Choose Health Partnership. This project is part of the Illinois Department of Public Health’s We Choose Health Initiative, which is made possible by funding from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

“These new partnerships are very exciting. We want our community to see that we are coming together as organizations and to encourage people in the community to join together in the same way,” Auman said.

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