

# Ride the Bus

PROGRAM TOOLKIT



SCHOOL BUS





## Introduction

**A Ride the Bus program aims to build skills and confidence about how to ride the bus, as well as normalizing bus riding families and children.**

In 2018, organizations in Klamath County partnered to develop a “Meet the Bus” program that introduced second-grade students to the local public transportation system. The primary partners were Basin Transit Service, Klamath Falls City Schools, Klamath County School District, and Commute Options. This Ride the Bus Toolkit is inspired by the “Meet the Bus” program, and can help Safe Routes to Schools (SRTS) practitioners and others who work on youth transportation issues state-wide to promote public transit.

With an original focus on increasing walking and biking trips, and increasingly incorporating school buses, SRTS programming historically has not emphasized public transportation. Exposure to public

transportation at a young age can make students more likely to see it as a viable transportation option as they get older and can form “transit habits.”<sup>1</sup> Educating children about sustainable options is important as they develop preferences and begin to make their own choices.

This Toolkit is intended to help practitioners provide children and their families with basic information about taking public transportation and promote transit use for family trips in general. A major goal of a Ride the Bus program is to build skills and confidence about how to ride the bus. The program also aims to help families understand that taking the bus is a safe and normal transportation option to get to school or elsewhere in their daily lives.

<sup>1</sup> Smart, M. J., & Klein, N. J. (2018). Remembrance of Cars and Buses Past: How Prior Life Experiences Influence Travel. *Journal of Planning Education and Research*, 38(2), 139–151. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0739456X17695774>

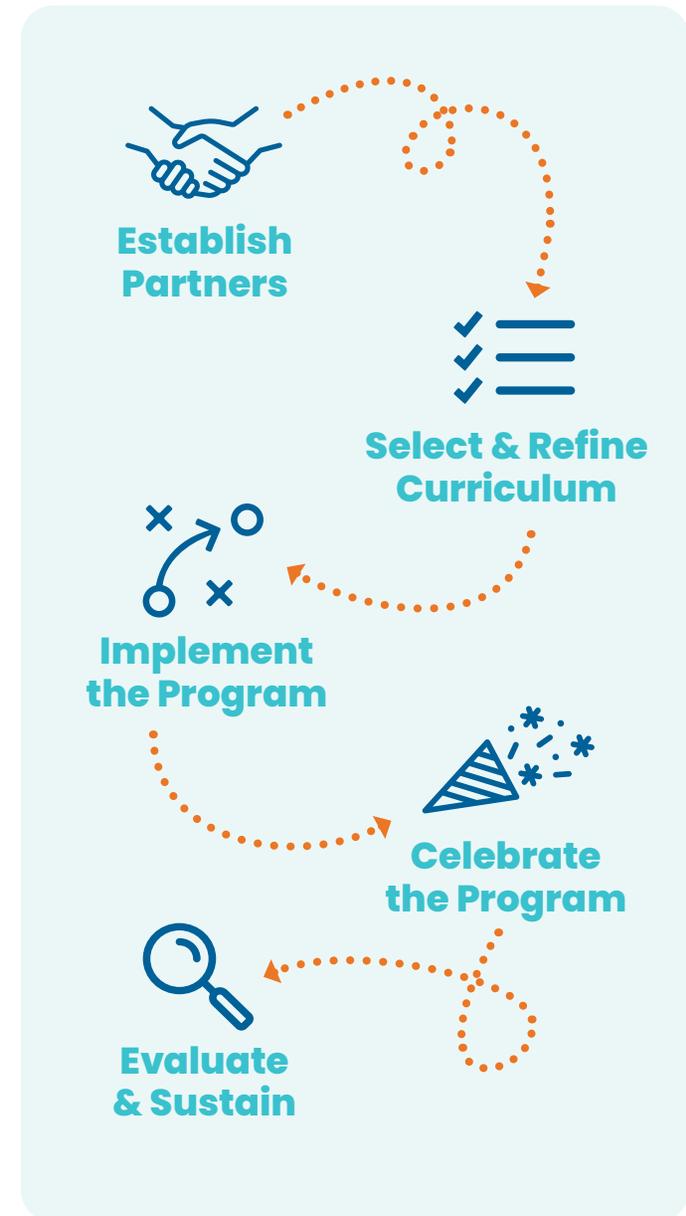


## Introduction (cont.)

This Toolkit provides practitioners who work with youth a clear set of steps and resources for incorporating Ride the Bus programming into education and engagement programs. Curriculum and other materials in the Toolkit can be customized to apply to the local transportation system and the specific needs of each community.

This Toolkit consists of five steps for developing Ride the Bus programming:

1. Establish partners
2. Select and refine curriculum
3. Implement the program
4. Celebrate the program
5. Evaluate and sustain





## Step 1: Establish Partners

**At the local level, Safe Routes to School practitioners run education and engagement programs to make it safe, easy, and normal to walk and bike to school.**

Partnerships with schools, school districts, transit agencies, and/or city agencies may be needed to gain the support and buy-in from school staff or to assist with curriculum customization and training. Consider involving the following groups:

- City, county, and regional staff may have connections and can leverage outreach
- School districts and schools can lead curriculum roll-out and they have direct access to school families
- Transit agency representatives can offer expertise, feedback on curriculum, facilitation of curriculum, and training(s) for SRTS practitioners and/or school staff

Begin by pitching the idea at schools where contacts and relationships have already been established. When connecting directly with area partners, including schools or city, county, and regional agencies, discuss their existing efforts and explore opportunities to include Ride the Bus programming in school curriculum.

Exploratory meetings with potential partners can envision what success means for a Ride the Bus program. Work together to identify:

- Primary goals and needs of the district and other partners
- Potential partnerships or resources that could support the curriculum
- Existing interest and capacity of the school and district
- Existing communication channels

During outreach, maintain a list or database of communities and stakeholders contacted, and keep a record of key notes from each interaction.

Once partners are established, schedule a meeting to provide them with more information and decide on the program parameters and format. Options for delivering the curriculum may include:

- Providing information to parents directly
- Grade-specific assembly curriculum
- In-class presentation curriculum
- On-bus field trip



## Step 2: Select & Refine Curriculum

### Option 1: Provide information to parents directly

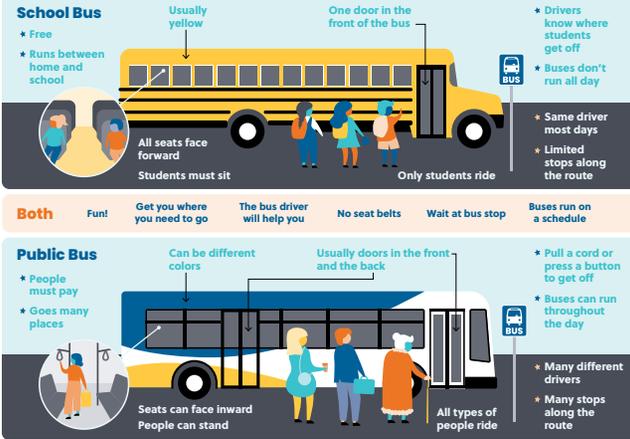
If school staff capacity and in-classroom time is limited, the best approach may be to spread awareness of the local bus system and benefits of public transportation to parents directly. Work with teachers to distribute the one-pagers included in this Toolkit:

**Public Bus vs. School Bus (Appendix A):**  
A cheat sheet outlining the difference between the yellow school bus and public bus options available in Oregon communities.

**How to Ride the Public Bus (Appendix B):**  
Steps to take when preparing to take a trip on the bus.

Consider providing information to parents at the beginning of the school year during orientation activities and events. Families set transportation habits during the first few weeks of the year, so back-to-school materials help form good habits from the start.

**APPENDIX A**  
**Public Bus vs. School Bus** 



**School Bus**

- Free
- Runs between home and school
- Usually yellow
- One door in the front of the bus
- All seats face forward
- Students must sit
- Only students ride
- Drivers know where students get off
- Buses don't run all day
- Same driver most days
- Limited stops along the route

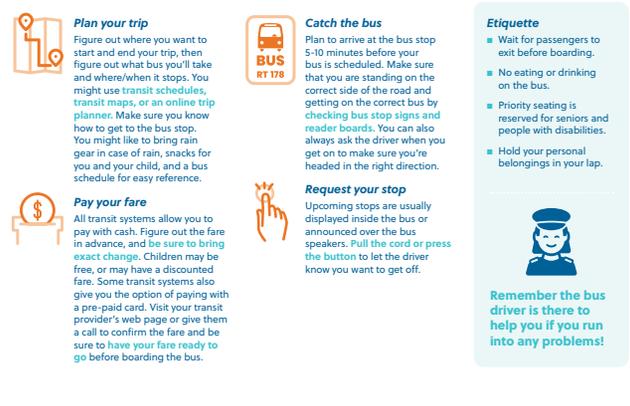
**Both**

- Fun!
- Get you where you need to go
- The bus driver will help you
- No seat belts
- Wait at bus stop
- Buses run on a schedule

**Public Bus**

- People must pay
- Goes many places
- Can be different colors
- Usually doors in the front and the back
- Seats can face inward
- People can stand
- All types of people ride
- Pull a cord or press a button to get off
- Buses can run throughout the day
- Many different drivers
- Many stops along the route

**APPENDIX B**  
**How to Ride the Public Bus** 



**Plan your trip**

Figure out where you want to start and end your trip, then figure out what bus you'll take and when/where it stops. You might use transit schedules, transit maps, or an online trip planner. Make sure you know how to get to the bus stop. You might like to bring rain gear in case of rain, snacks for you and your child, and a bus schedule for easy reference.

**Catch the bus**

Plan to arrive at the bus stop 5-10 minutes before your bus is scheduled. Make sure that you are standing on the correct side of the road and getting on the correct bus by checking bus stop signs and reader boards. You can also always ask the driver when you get on to make sure you're headed in the right direction.

**Pay your fare**

All transit systems allow you to pay with cash. Figure out the fare in advance, and be sure to bring exact change. Children may be free, or may have a discounted fare. Some transit systems also give you the option of paying with a pre-paid card. Visit your transit provider's web page or give them a call to confirm the fare and be sure to have your fare ready to go before boarding the bus.

**Request your stop**

Upcoming stops are usually displayed inside the bus or announced over the bus speakers. Pull the cord or press the button to let the driver know you want to get off.

**Etiquette**

- Wait for passengers to exit before boarding.
- No eating or drinking on the bus.
- Priority seating is reserved for seniors and people with disabilities.
- Hold your personal belongings in your lap.

**Remember the bus driver is there to help you if you run into any problems!**



## Step 2: Select & Refine Curriculum (cont.)

*K-5 Grade-Specific  
Assembly Curriculum*  
pg. 7

*In-Class Curriculum*  
pg. 11

### **Option 2:** *Present during the school day*

A Ride the Bus presentation could be led by the SRTS practitioner, school staff, the local transit agency, or a combination of partners. A collaboration between the SRTS practitioner and transit agency representative can take the burden off of the teacher and provide subject matter expertise. The lead presenter should have experience and skills working with kids. The transit agency representative can provide local insight and more opportunities for hands-on transit experiences.

School partners may need to complete background checks before on-site involvement is allowed. A train-the-trainer approach should be considered if funds are limited. SRTS practitioners can work with teachers and assist the school staff in leading the curriculum.



*Photo by NeONBRAND on Unsplash*



## K-5 Grade-Specific Assembly Curriculum

### Activity 1. Introduction

🕒 20-25 minutes

Delivering a training in an assembly format can get students excited about public transportation, while teaching basic bus riding skills and vocabulary. The assembly should reach an entire grade level. The entire assembly may take up to an hour, including the introduction, vocabulary, and video components outlined below.

#### ***That's Me! (3-5 mins)***

Students raise hands or jump forward and say **"that's me!"** if something you say is true for them. The questions with asterisks (\*) are better suited for younger students as 4th and 5th graders may not find them engaging.

- I like to go places with my friends and family\*
- I mostly get to school by:
  - Walking*
  - Biking*
  - Carpooling (sharing a car with people who don't live with me)*
  - Taking the (yellow) school bus*
  - Taking the public bus*
  - Driving alone with my parent*
  - Skateboarding*
  - Other?*

- I have ridden the public bus before
- I know where a bus stop is near my house
- I know that walking and riding are good for my body
- I know my address and phone number\*
- I like to go places like the park and the movies
- I know what a pedestrian is
- I know I can take my bike on the bus
- I'm excited to learn about how to ride the public bus



## K-5 Grade-Specific Assembly Curriculum (cont.)

### Activity 1. Introduction (cont.)

🕒 20-25 minutes

### School Bus and Public Bus Comparison (10 mins) →

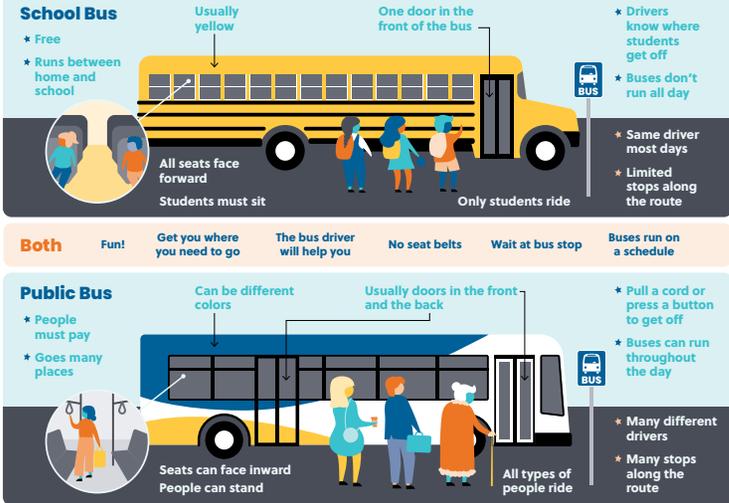
Use the **Public Bus vs. School Bus (Appendix A)** one-pager to explain the differences. Call out different features of each and have students say if it's a feature of a public or a school bus, or both.

### Importance of the Bus (5-10 mins)

Describe the benefits of public transportation

- Riding the bus = more walking = more exercise
- Independence
- Fewer cars = less pollution
- Community
- More time for activities
- Saving money

APPENDIX A  
**Public Bus vs. School Bus** 



**School Bus**

- ★ Free
- ★ Runs between home and school

Usually yellow

One door in the front of the bus

All seats face forward  
Students must sit

Only students ride

- ★ Drivers know where students get off
- ★ Buses don't run all day
- ★ Same driver most days
- ★ Limited stops along the route

**Both** Fun! Get you where you need to go The bus driver will help you No seat belts Wait at bus stop Buses run on a schedule

**Public Bus**

- ★ People must pay
- ★ Goes many places

Can be different colors

Usually doors in the front and the back

Seats can face inward  
People can stand

All types of people ride

- ★ Pull a cord or press a button to get off
- ★ Buses can run throughout the day
- ★ Many different drivers
- ★ Many stops along the route



## K-5 Grade-Specific Assembly Curriculum (cont.)

### Activity 2. Vocabulary

 20 minutes

#### Basic Terminology (20 mins)

As you say each word, define the word and demonstrate the action. Consider creating signs with each of the words to hold up as you say them. Next, have the students repeat the word and perform the associated action. Run through the words and actions at least twice.

| Word/Phrase                                | Definition   | Action   |
|--|--|--|
| <b>Pedestrian</b>                          | Someone who walks or gets around using their feet, a wheelchair, or another mobility device.   | <i>Walking in place</i>  |
| <b>Vehicle</b>                             | Something with wheels you can ride on or in to get around. Most are powered by motor – cars, trucks, buses – with the exception of bicycles. Bicycles are also vehicles because they follow the same traffic laws as cars. | <i>Run in place while turning an imaginary steering wheel and making noises like a car</i> |
| <b>Cord (pulling the cord)<sup>1</sup></b> | Usually hanging above the windows on the bus. This is what you pull in order to tell the bus driver you want off.  | <i>Hand above head, pull down motion</i>   |
| <b>Route</b>                               | The path taken to get from one place to another.   | <i>Use finger to make zig zag motions in the air</i>                                       |
| <b>Fare</b>                                | Money or a pass used to pay for your ride on the bus.  | <i>Pair up and pretend to hand your partner money or a pass</i>                            |
| <b>Schedule</b>                            | What time the bus will get to different stops along its route.   | <i>Check watch on wrist</i>  |
| <b>Priority Seating<sup>2</sup></b>        | Seating in front is meant for seniors, families with young children, or people with disabilities or in mobility devices.   | <i>Pretend to sit down by squatting</i>  |

<sup>1</sup> Replace with pushing a button if local bus system does not have cords.

<sup>2</sup> This concept could be confusing for younger students who have never been on a public bus. Consider only using this term with 4th and 5th graders.



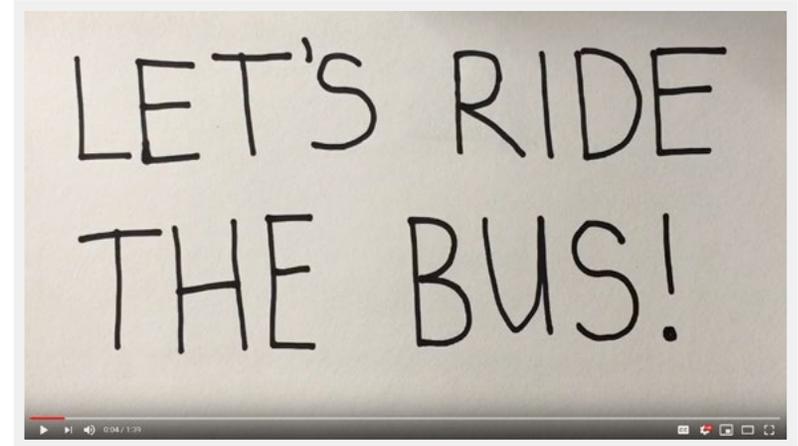
## K-5 Grade-Specific Assembly Curriculum (cont.)

### Activity 3. Videos

🕒 5 minutes

If the assembly room has access to a TV or projector, show the students the “Let’s Ride the Bus” and “7 Transit Safety Tips” videos from Commute Options.

- **Let’s Ride the Bus:**  
<https://youtu.be/6CVqllcXos4>
- **7 Transit Safety Tips:**  
<https://youtu.be/LJi2DKMrbks>





## In-Class Curriculum

An in-class curriculum is intended for a smaller group of students with a more in-depth and conversational approach. Class sizes could range from 10-30 students for the following activities and a total of 40 minutes should be allowed for activities 1, 2, & 3.

If a bus field trip is desired, this can happen on a separate day and could take up to 2 hours of class time, depending on bus schedules, frequency, and destination. If partnering with the transit agency, consider coordinating an out-of-service bus experience if time or chaperones are limited.

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### Activity 1. Introduction

🕒 15 minutes

#### ***That's Me! (5 mins)***

Students raise hands or jump forward and say **"that's me!"** if something you say is true for them.

- I have ridden the public bus before
- I know where a bus stop is near my house
- I know my address and phone number
- I like to go places like the park and the movies
- I know I can take my bike on the bus
- I'm excited to learn about how to ride the public bus



## In-Class Curriculum (cont.)

### Activity 1. Introduction (cont.)

🕒 15 minutes

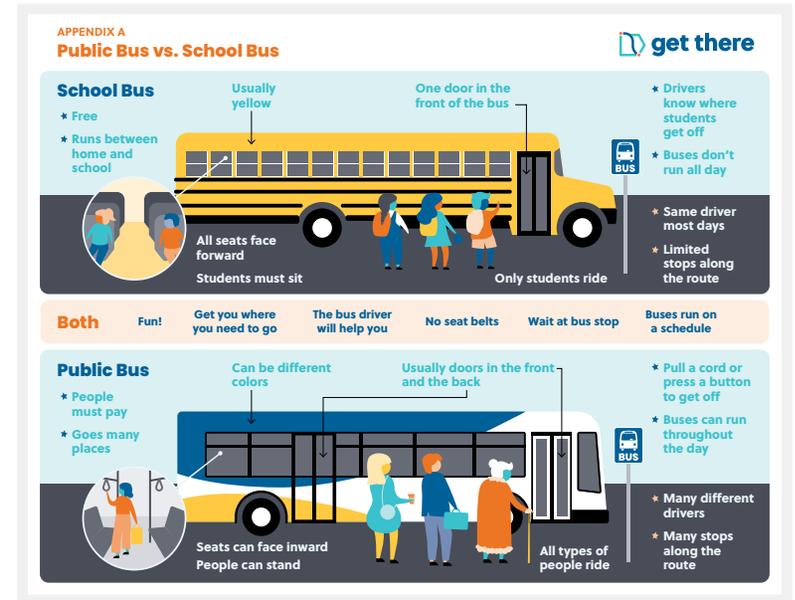
### School Bus and Public Bus Comparison (5 mins) →

Use the **Public Bus vs. School Bus (Appendix A)** one-pager to explain the differences. Call out different features of each and have students say if it's a feature of a public or a school bus. Pass out the one-pager at the end of lesson for students to take home to their parents.

### Importance of the Bus (5 mins)

Describe the benefits of public transportation

- Riding the bus = more walking = more exercise
- Independence
- It's a great way to get around for the planet (fewer cars/less pollution)
- Community
- More time for activities
- Saving money
- It's fun!





## In-Class Curriculum (cont.)

### Activity 2. Coloring Activities

🕒 20 minutes

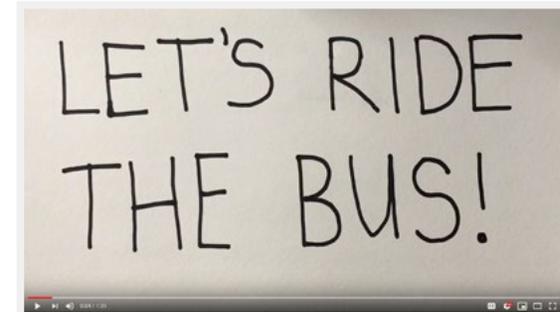
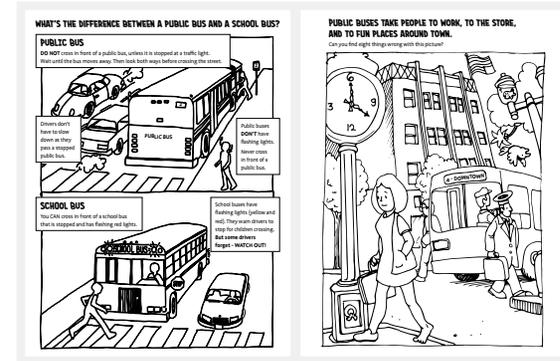
Have students work on the coloring sheets and explain the goals of each ([Appendix C](#)) →

### Activity 3. Videos

🕒 5 minutes

If the assembly room has access to a TV or projector, show the students the “Let’s Ride the Bus” and “7 Transit Safety Tips” videos from Commute Options. →

- **Let’s Ride the Bus:**  
<https://youtu.be/6CVqllcXos4>
- **7 Transit Safety Tips:**  
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## In-Class Curriculum (cont.)

### Activity 4. Bus Field Trip

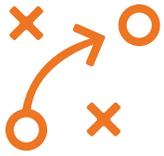
🕒🕒 2 hours

Organizing a field trip on the local public bus is a great way to expand on the knowledge that the students gained during class time and contribute to their comfort and confidence when using public transportation. Considerations for a field trip using the public bus are outlined below:

- Confirm and follow school policies on field trip permission slips
- The final destination should be fun and age-appropriate (e.g., *park, movies, library, bakery*)
- Only include a transfer if wait times will not be too long
- Identify the trip plan/schedule and have it printed out for all chaperones
- Plan the trip for the middle of the day to avoid the commute rush
- Have a high chaperone-to-student ratio (*i.e., follow the school chaperone policy*)
- Arrive at the bus stop several minutes early to talk about different elements/features of the stop and to prepare the students for the next steps
- For smaller transportation providers, consider warning the agency about your field trip
- Lead by example - demonstrate safe, quiet, and respectful behavior when on the bus
  - *Have bus pass/money ready to go*
  - *Let passengers exit before boarding*
  - *Find a seat quickly and quietly*
  - *Keep personal belongings on your lap or between your feet on the floor*

#### Takeaways for parents:

- One-pagers
- Suggested bus field trip/route
- Local bus pass(es) (if donated by the transit agency)



## Step 3: Implement the Program

Once partnerships have been established and the format of the program has been decided, work with school staff and partners to implement the Ride the Bus program. Implementation will vary based on the format:

### Providing information to parents directly

- Coordinate with school staff to determine the best timing to distribute the one-pagers
- Consider including the one-pagers in a back-to-school packet, as backpack mail, or handing them out at parent teacher conferences

### Grade-specific assembly

- Review curriculum and customize based on the decided grade level (e.g., remove “priority seating” in the vocabulary lesson for younger grades)
- Confirm that the assembly space is large enough for students to get up and move during the activities

### In-class presentation

- Determine how much class time the teacher will dedicate to the Ride the Bus curriculum
- Condense the curriculum if less than 35 minutes is allotted
- Print multiple one-pagers for students to take home to their parents

### On-bus field trip

- Inform school staff of the value of pairing the curriculum with a hands-on public bus experience
- Discuss feasibility and schedule/trip plan preference
- Work with the transit agency as needed to ensure a smooth trip



## Step 4: Celebrate the Program

*Promoting the Ride the Bus program in the community is a great way to expand the reach of the messaging and increase other opportunities for promoting transit.*

Publicizing the successes of the program community-wide can lead to interest from other school districts or individuals.

### **Communication & Media Channels**

Advertise the program through school or City newsletters, e-news, and social media. Focus on back-to-school time as a great opportunity to set transportation habits and the summer as a good time to try taking transit for a low-key trip to a favorite destination. Emphasize the benefits of participation for students, caregivers, and the community. Include photos and quotes from students/teachers where possible. Be sure to review and adhere to school photo release policies before sharing any photos taken at schools or through the Ride the Bus program.





## Step 5: Evaluate & Sustain

Evaluate and track the progress of your program to communicate successes and adapt accordingly:

### 1. Track participation

Keep track of the number of students present at assemblies and during in-classroom presentations. Keep a count of the number of materials distributed to students/teachers to be able to communicate the reach of the program.

### 2. Gather stories/quotes

Encourage students to share their activity experiences, record their thoughts and stories, and be prepared to share them. Be sure to adhere to school photo release policies, should you like to include photos with the stories or quotes.

### 3. Follow up & communicate successes

Work with school staff to identify students that have gone on a public bus trip with their family. Include stories of successes when promoting the program, so other families can picture themselves riding the bus also.

### 4. Adapt curriculum

Ask for feedback from students, teachers, and caregivers on activities, content, and handouts. Adapt curriculum to fit the needs of partnering schools.

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All seats face forward

Students must sit



Only students ride

- ★ Drivers know where students get off
- ★ Buses don't run all day

- ★ Same driver most days
- ★ Limited stops along the route



## Both

Fun!

Get you where you need to go

The bus driver will help you

No seat belts

Wait at bus stop

Buses run on a schedule

## Public Bus

- ★ People must pay
- ★ Goes many places

Can be different colors

Usually doors in the front and the back



Seats can face inward  
People can stand



All types of people ride

- ★ Pull a cord or press a button to get off
- ★ Buses can run throughout the day

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## How to Ride the Public Bus



### Plan your trip

Figure out where you want to start and end your trip, then figure out what bus you'll take and where/when it stops. You might use **transit schedules, transit maps, or an online trip planner**. Make sure you know how to get to the bus stop. You might like to bring rain gear in case of rain, snacks for you and your child, and a bus schedule for easy reference.



### Pay your fare

All transit systems allow you to pay with cash. Figure out the fare in advance, and **be sure to bring exact change**. Children may be free, or may have a discounted fare. Some transit systems also give you the option of paying with a pre-paid card. Visit your transit provider's web page or give them a call to confirm the fare and be sure to **have your fare ready to go** before boarding the bus.



### Catch the bus

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### Request your stop

Upcoming stops are usually displayed inside the bus or announced over the bus speakers. **Pull the cord or press the button** to let the driver know you want to get off.

### Etiquette

- Wait for passengers to exit before boarding.
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**Remember the bus driver is there to help you if you run into any problems!**