

South Hackensack school head interested in launching 'walking school bus'

Friday, November 07, 2014

BY [JENNIFER VAZQUEZ](#)



Safe Routes to School Coordinator Meeta Patel discusses a plan for a walking school bus program at Memorial School during the district's community information session on Oct. 27. Superintendent and school Principal Gregorio Maceri, right, is interested in forming the program after a successful student turnout during the district's International Walk to School Day participation.

SOUTH HACKENSACK — After a "successful" student turnout during the district's participation in the International Walk to School Day, Superintendent and Memorial School Principal Gregorio Maceri is interested in forming a walking school bus program for students.

On Oct. 8 many schools participated in an international event aimed at encouraging children to walk to school in order to promote a healthier lifestyle.

Memorial School had 70 of its students participate — approximately a quarter of its enrollment, according to Maceri. The turnout was the catalyst for Maceri to propose a similar program year-round.

A walking school bus is a group of children walking to school with one or more adults following a predetermined route.

Maceri suggested that if the program launches, older students could potentially be involved in assisting younger ones on their walks to school.

"Our little guys really look up to our big guys," he said, adding if older students are involved in the program it will teach them further responsibility.

One of the parents at the meeting suggested high school students from the town assist as part of their community service requirements.

Mayor William "Bill" Regan and committee member Vincent Stefano supported the idea.

"I'm really excited about this idea," Stefano said, adding that when he was younger, the walk to school was something he looked forward to every day, calling it a time to "hang out with your buddies."

"This is a great concept that will bring all the different sections of our town together," Regan said.

Safe Routes to School Coordinator Meeta Patel was present during the district's October informational meeting on Oct. 27 to talk to residents about the benefits of walking to school and implementing a walking school bus program.

Safe Routes to Schools "programs are sustained efforts by parents, schools, community leaders and local, state and federal governments to improve the health and well-being of children by enabling and encouraging them to walk and bicycle to school," according to the National Center for Safe Routes to School's website.

According to Patel, walking and biking to school promotes self-confidence,

independence, exercise and social health.

Parents in the audience were receptive to the idea of having several walking school buses, with some volunteering to lead a route group.

Since the township is not continuous a parent in attendance who does not live in the Memorial School section asked what students who live on the other side of Route 46 can do.

According to Patel, other towns do have satellite locations where parents can drop their children off with a designated group so they can then walk to school.

Additional questions included how long a group will wait for a student and safety concerns.

Patel said that Safe Routes to Schools is willing to work with the school on designing a number of routes, policies and provide the district with the necessary forms and permission slips.

Maceri and parents were interested in possibly piloting the program once more information was gathered.

"Let's start small. Let's start somewhere," Patel said.