

Walking School Bus



HOW TWO CHINATOWN SCHOOLS CREATED A CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE WALKING SCHOOL BUSES

The Jean Parker and John Yehall Chin Walking School Buses

Early weekday mornings during the school year, before most local businesses have opened for the day, a group of bright-eyed youngsters and coffee-sipping caretakers gathers in an otherwise quiet corner of Woh Hei Yuen Park, between Jackson and Powell Streets. At 8:20 AM sharp the Walking School Bust begins. Under the watchful eye of the adults, the Walking School Bus sets off for its destination, Jean Parker Elementary. Half an hour later, the process repeats itself, with a different group of students and mildly caffeinated adults gathering in nearby Portsmouth Square to “board” the “bus” bound for John Yehall Chin Elementary.

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A cherished tradition of students, caretakers, and community residents, the Jean Parker and John Yehall Chin Walking School Buses are a welcome sight as they wind their way through the colorful and bustling streets of Chinatown, a culturally rich enclave that is home to generations of Asian-American families. The school buses provide an invaluable service not only in that they ensure kids get to school safely, but also in building a stronger sense of community. To encourage involvement from multi-generational families and caretakers, organizers of the buses speak both Chinese and English. While all of the students speak English, many older family members or recent immigrants may not yet be comfortable with speaking English. A warm and welcoming “Zaoshang hao!” (Good morning!) can make all the difference.

ROUTING SAFELY

The Jean Parker and John Yehall Chin Walking School Buses traverse some of the busiest streets in San Francisco, so organizers took great care in planning the route to avoid the area’s busiest intersections and limit crossings of major thoroughfares such as Broadway. Bus leaders wear safety vests and carry stop signs to provide an extra level of visibility at crosswalks.

Safely hosting a walking school bus of this size in this community would not be possible without the hard work of San Francisco’s Safe Routes to



Safe Routes to School
SAN FRANCISCO



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School and San Francisco Bicycle Coalition Community Engagement Coordinator Janelle Phung. You might think of Janelle as the “bus dispatcher”, who helps ensure the buses function safely and efficiently. So who “drives” the Jean Parker and John Yehall Chin buses?

MEET THE BUS DRIVERS

Community support is key to making these walking school buses possible. In her role, Janelle Phung coordinates and connects community members and school staff like Matt Young. Matt is John Yehall Chin Elementary School’s Liaison who has an incredible track record in drumming up volunteers and linking community organizations to help organize Safe Routes To School walking school buses.

“John Yehall’s Walk to School is a fun event for the kids. Most of the students already walk to school so it’s nothing new to them. One reason why students want to participate in the Walking School Bus is that they like to choose prizes for participating. I have prizes like scented erasers, squishies, and other little toys that I purchase online. They enjoy these small rewards and that’s what motivates them to attend. As for parent attendance, they usually stay to make sure their kids are safe. I also try to have a teacher or two to participate and they enjoy seeing the kids have fun outside of school.”

— **Matt Young**, *SRTS Liason at John Yehall Chin Elementary School*

Meanwhile, at Jean Parker Elementary School, Elizabeth Brooks has her own methods for gathering participation.

The Walking School Bus is important for Jean Parker because it provides a goal for the families to participate, which is to win the Golden Shoe for the classroom and to win a gift card for the teacher. I think it builds a sense of the parents coming together to show which class participated the most. Each month they always remind each other to remember to meet at the park on Wednesday.”

— **Elizabeth Brooks**, *Jean Parker liaison secretary*

START A BUS OF YOUR OWN

Walking school buses are a fantastic way to teach kids about community, how to navigate city streets safely, and the importance of environmental awareness. Plus, it gives them exercise and ensures they’ll get to school on time! For parents and caretakers, it’s a wonderful opportunity to get some fresh air while seizing a little more quality time with our children and their classmates.

- Find out how you can create your own unique walking school bus with our helpful [How-To Guide!](#)
- Check out the national site, walkingschoolbus.org, for more ideas.
- Find useful safety tips at saferoutesinfo.org
- And find other resources at walkSF.org

