

# Introducing...



The Wayfinders program is a student transportation initiative designed to empower older students to walk confidently and safely to school. By wearing traffic safety vests and walking preferred routes, these students set a responsible example for safe walking and increase visibility for student pedestrians.

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## Program Goals

The primary objectives of the Wayfinders program are to provide:

- **Confidence and Competence:** Teach older students to be confident and competent walkers.
- **Visibility:** Increase the visibility of student pedestrians.
- **Parental Assurance:** Provide peace of mind to parents regarding their children's safety.

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## Program Details

The Wayfinders program operates through the following mechanisms:

- **Safety Vests:** Students wear traffic safety vests to enhance their visibility.
- **Preferred Routes:** Students walk a preferred route to school, ensuring consistency and safety.
- **Role Models:** Participants set a responsible example for safe walking practices.
- **Inclusivity:** Wayfinders welcome other students to join them on their walk to school.

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## Benefits

The Wayfinders program offers several benefits, including:

- **Increased Visibility:** Enhanced visibility for student pedestrians, making them more noticeable to drivers.
- **Safety:** Improved safety with more "eyes on the street."
- **Positive Example:** Establishing a positive walking example for all students.
- **Parental Peace of Mind:** Providing reassurance to parents about their children's safety.

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## Proven Model

The effectiveness of the Wayfinders program is demonstrated through:

- **Driver Awareness:** The visual cue of vested students alerts drivers to the presence of pedestrians.
- **Safety Perception:** Both students and parents experience a heightened sense of safety.
- **Coverage:** It is recommended to have 8-16 students per school to ensure comprehensive coverage.

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## Participation Process

To join the Wayfinders program, students must have:

- **Permission:** Submit a permission form through their school.
- **Training:** Attend Street Safety Training session conducted by pedestrian safety professionals.
- **Skills Assessment:** Complete a Skills Assessment.

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## Contact Information

For more information or to get involved with the Wayfinders program, please contact: [info@ststb.ca](mailto:info@ststb.ca)

# THE PROGRAM



The 'Wayfinders' program teaches older elementary students (Grades 5 & 6 primarily) to be capable and confident walkers. This active and visible commute sets a positive example for families who drive to school and supports families who walk to school.

## WHAT DOES A 'WAYFINDER' DO?

'Wayfinders' are asked to wear a safety vest and walk a 'preferred route' to school. They are not there to protect or supervise other students. The only expectations are to set a responsible example, model safe walking procedures and be welcoming of students wishing to walk along with them.

'Wayfinders' will receive milestone awards (10 walks completed, 50 walks completed etc.) and will enjoy special privileges and perks (occasional pizza parties etc.)



## TRIED & TESTED

Experience in the Waterloo area shows having dozens of vested students commuting at the same time serves as a 'bright alert' to vulnerable sidewalk users. It also demonstrates 'trained eyes' on the street, contributing towards a greater sense of safety in the area.

## WHAT DO 'WAYFINDERS' NEED TO SUCCEED?

'Wayfinders' will receive thorough Street Safety Training. This will equip them with an understanding of safety around traffic, crossing a street, anti-bullying awareness and basic first aid training. These students will be our walking experts!

## WHAT IS A SCHOOL'S COMMITMENT?

A coordinator at each school will organize the recruitment and rewarding of students who participate in the program. Minimal organization is expected to be required since there will be no expectation that a student be at a specific place at a specific time ... just to be at school on time.

# THE BENEFITS



The proportion of children and youth who walk to school in Canada has fallen in recent decades<sup>1</sup>. Only 21% of Canadians aged 5 to 19 typically travelled actively for their school commutes<sup>2</sup>. However, actively commuting to school can result in healthier students, better academic performance, safer school zones and reduce traffic and pollution.



## BOOSTED HEALTH

Active travel can be a convenient routine for children to accumulate physical activity<sup>3</sup> and may lower the risk of chronic disease and related health issues. In addition, active school travel also provides mental health benefits as it can reduce stress, depression and anxiety while increase positive emotions and feelings of well-being. By fostering healthy habits early on, we aim to instill lifelong wellness practices in our students.

## BOLSTERED EDUCATION

Studies also show that active school travel enhances cognitive development and brain health (e.g. executive functioning<sup>5</sup>, memory and attention<sup>6</sup>) leading to improved academic performance in the classroom. Additionally active journeys to school can be sociable and help children develop autonomy and independence<sup>7</sup>. The 'Wayfinders' program encourages collaboration among students and promotes positive peer relationships by creating valuable social interactions, fostering a sense of community and teamwork. By incorporating physical activity into their daily routine, students are better prepared to face the academic challenges presented in the school environment.





# MORE BENEFITS



## INCREASED SAFETY

Parents' perceived safety concerns related to active transportation are a barrier to increased participation in active school travel.<sup>8</sup> More students actively commuting to school can improve the safety of school zones by reducing traffic volumes and improving walkability.<sup>9</sup> Larger groups of commuting children are more visible for drivers which can also reduce the risk of accidents.

Trained 'Wayfinders' (after receiving thorough Street Safety Training) model safe walking procedures, like using crosswalks and avoiding dangerous areas. Other students learn pedestrian safety skills and traffic awareness by walking regularly with these student volunteers.



We plan safe routes with less traffic and safer crossings, reducing the chances of accidents. Involving a leader at the school fosters a sense of responsibility, community and safety among everyone involved.

## REDUCED EMISSIONS

The program produces zero emissions. By choosing walking over driving, our students decrease their personal carbon footprint, contributing to a reduction in traffic volume, greenhouse gas emissions and air pollution. In addition, less drivers mean less hazards on the road that our students may come up against.



# GETTING STARTED



**FINDING SUPPORT** Communicate with parents and staff to gauge interest and support for the program.

**REACH OUT TO STSTB** Contact Student Transportation Services of Thunder Bay to let them know you're ready to bring the Wayfinders Program to your school or if you would like more information.

**RECRUITMENT & TRAINING** Recruit a school coordinator who in-turn will recruit your Wayfinders.

We will then rely on the school's Wayfinders Coordinator to select age appropriate and responsible candidates as Wayfinders. Permission forms, including information on what the program is about will be provided to parents/guardians of each candidate.

Once the permission slips are signed and returned, the Wayfinders will receive thorough Street Safety Training followed by a skills assessment before they can be allowed to represent the program.

**ROUTE CREATION** SSTSTB will Identify safe walking routes to school, taking walking hazards such as busy roads and lack of sidewalks into consideration. An on-site review of all routes will be conducted prior to launching the program.

**LAUNCH** Your fully trained Wayfinders are provided high-vis safety vests and hats, parents are informed of the start date, routes and safety procedures are shared, and parents are encouraged to have their children walk with their local Wayfinder!

**MONITORING** The Wayfinders Program is monitored through open communications between the Wayfinders and their coordinator, and the coordinator and STSTB in addition to surveys sent to Wayfinders, parents/guardians, and the school over the course of the school year. Feedback gathered from participants, parents/guardians and the school help facilitate continuous improvement and growth of the program.



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