



Cville Kids Walk to School

**A Small-City Transportation
Transformation**

Alabama Association of School Boards
“Leadership for Community Engagement”
General Session
Monday, October 5, 2026

About Us



Dr. Royal Gurley

Superintendent
Charlottesville City Schools
Charlottesville, VA



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Charlottesville, VA

Charlottesville City Schools

10

Schools
Pre-K thru 12th

4,300+

Students
850+
Staff

10 sq mi

Charlottesville, VA

Home of the University of
Virginia

39% White

25% Black

14% Multiracial

14% Hispanic

8% Asian

52%

Students who are
economically
disadvantaged

43

of languages
students speak at
home

The Campaign

- **The Issue:** A complex national bus driver shortage that cannot be solved with just money.
- **The Shift:** Transitioning to a model with fewer school buses for Fall 2022.
- **The Longview:** Normalizing walking to school across the community.

Strategic Goals & Objectives

Primary Goal

As our division adopts a transportation model with less emphasis on buses, *students travel safely to school*

Objective 01

Family Preparedness

Families understand Fall 2022 changes and have a plan.

Objective 02

Community Trust in the Division

Even as we cannot “buy” the bus drivers we need, build confidence that the division is investing wisely in pedestrian/bike safety

Objective 03

Walk Zones

Gain community support for new walk zones.

Key Messages

The bus driver shortage is a national, complex issue that cannot be solved with “a little money.”

Collaboration

Cville Schools welcomes the community to help us identify transportation problems and solutions

Positive Impact

Expanding our walk zones (also called “family responsibility zones”) will have positive impacts on Charlottesville in the short and long-term.

Investment

We are investing time, tools, and money into supports to get children to school in other ways.

Action

The community can support students walking to school by reporting infrastructure problems and driving safely.

Key Audiences

Staff

Needed to be informed in order for the process to be successful and trusted by the community

Current Students and Families

Especially those no longer eligible for the bus

Future Students and Families

Watching this process unfold as a measure of competence, sensitivity, and solutions-oriented approaches

City Leaders

School Board, City Council, other local elected leaders

Drivers and public transit users

Student safety requires the cooperation of everyone on the road!

UVA community

Potential volunteers

Strategy 1: Outreach with emphasis on equity impact

- **Direct Outreach:** Held in-person Walk & Talk events.
- **Cultural Awareness:** Addressed cultural and language differences impacting community needs.
- Staff walked all new routes to school to identify safety/traffic concerns



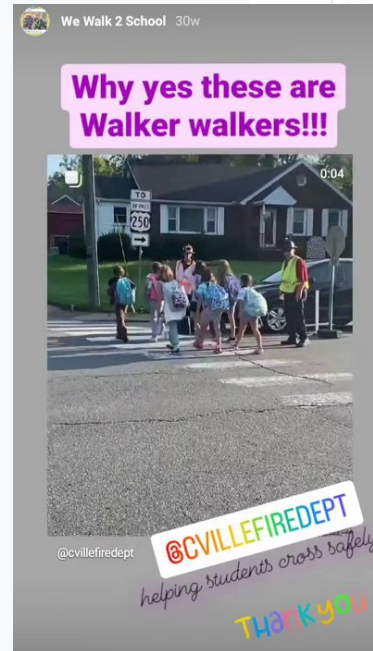
Strategy 2: Multiplatform communications

- Divisionwide messages and customized communications
- Engagement with local media
- Public spreadsheet on status of requested street safety improvements
- Recruitment materials to double crossing guard team to 19
- Add pedestrian safety to PE curriculum
- Organize walking groups for high-density neighborhoods
- Create how-to guide for staff answering questions



Strategy 3: Mobilize the community

- Ask every family to make a plan that doesn't involve the bus
- Bring walk/bike advocates into planning and use their feedback to implement immediate infrastructure improvements
- Distribute 500 "Go Slow! Cville Kids Walk to School" yard signs at school open houses
- Encourage older students to take public buses (parents volunteered as guides!)
- Mail postcards to residents/businesses along walking routes
- Partner with police to post pedestrian safety messages



Results

- Immediate:
 - Attendance was stable
 - Staff-led walking school buses were strong
 - Back-to-school headlines in local media were “Students hit streets to head to school”
- Long-term:
 - The yard signs are still everywhere 4 years later!
 - 18% of students now walk to school (compare to 10% in 2017)



2023 National School Public Relations Association (NSPRA) Gold Medallion Winner for Public Engagement/ Parental Involvement



**CVILLE KIDS
WALK TO SCHOOL**

A Small-City Transportation Transformation

Charlottesville City Schools
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Pre-K-12 School Division | 4,500 students, 9 schools
Number of Communications Staff: 2 (plus 1 Super Superintendent)

2023 NSPRA Communication Awards
Gold Medallion Entry: Public Engagement/
Parental Involvement Campaign

The logo is circular with a gold border. Inside the border, the text "CHARLOTTESVILLE" is written in a circle. In the center, there is a gold medallion with the words "CITY SCHOOLS" in bold, capital letters.

What's changed for Charlottesville since 2022

“Cville Kids Walk to School” was created quickly in response to a crisis. There will always be crises, but, as much as possible, we are working to shift our communications and engagement strategy to be proactive rather than reactive.

What does public engagement look like when there is no crisis?

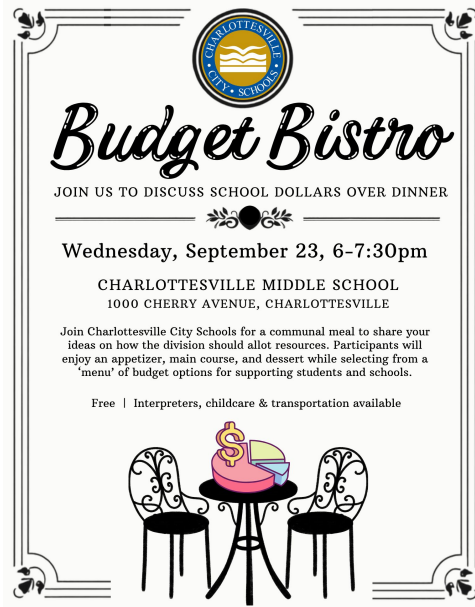
Budget Bistro

120 members of community came out to learn about our academics, programs, and supports, and share their ideas on how the School Board should allocate resources in next budget cycle.

Appetizer: Visit division staff at outreach tables

Dinner: Dine with student ambassadors

Dessert to go: Greet Board members as you exit



Other ideas

SIMPLE

- **Choosing playground equipment:** At recess, students review final options for a new playground design at their school then vote. Final decision rests with the students!

COMPLEX

- **Rezoning schools:** Maps of new zones iterate based on rounds of community feedback (surveys and public meetings). Final decision rests with the Board.
- **Renaming schools:** Committee gathers rounds of feedback from students, staff, alumni, and community member. Final decision rests with the Board.



Recommendations

- Decide what the public's role is in any given community engagement process.
- Communicate early and often.
- Think of who is not in the room and strategize how to incorporate their voice.
- Cultural differences show up on any important issue. Dialogue helps gain mutual understanding.
- Create a library of responses to parent concerns
- When leadership makes a sudden decision or change of course on an important topic, it is harder to achieve genuine public engagement.

IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation



IAP2's Spectrum of Public Participation was designed to assist with the selection of the level of participation that defines the public's role in any public participation process. The Spectrum is used internationally, and it is found in public participation plans around the world.

INCREASING IMPACT ON THE DECISION 					
	INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	EMPOWER
PUBLIC PARTICIPATION GOAL	To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.	To place final decision making in the hands of the public.
PROMISE TO THE PUBLIC	We will keep you informed.	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will look to you for advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	We will implement what you decide.

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It never hurts to think positive.

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Royal A. Gurley, Jr., Ed.D.
@royalgurley

...

We are not facing a challenge, we have been presented with an opportunity to make our city better. During these adverse times, we get to see the heart and core values of our school community. Thank you to everyone that walked with us today!



3:20 PM · Jul 22, 2022

4 Retweets 35 Likes

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