

## **Innovative effort aims to boost student health, campus safety Walking School Bus program has legs**

By Melinda Larson

Hanford Sentinel, Saturday, Aug. 13, 2011

Safe, economical, convenient and fun is how the Lemoore Union Elementary School District describes its new Walking School Bus program that will begin with this school year.

"A Walking School Bus is a group of children walking to school led by a volunteer adult," said Leanne Venema, the district's Walking School Bus coordinator. "The group walks a designated route to the school each morning and afternoon, leaving the school and making stops along the way to drop children off at their homes. The process is reversed in the afternoon."

The program is funded by a two-year, non-infrastructure grant. All four elementary schools – Cinnamon, P.W. Engvall, Lemoore and Meadow Lane – will have three to four routes based on the "Safe Routes to School" maps. The success of the program depends on the help of volunteers.

"It can be as simple as two parents taking turns walking to their children to school," Venema explained. "Or it can be more structured with volunteers, schedules and meeting points. We are going to keep the program flexible, and the children and parents can use the Walking School Bus when they need it."

Since many parents don't have the time to walk their children to school, the Walking School Bus offers an opportunity to share the task with other adults.

"Many parents are reluctant to let their children walk to school alone," Venema said. "With a Walking School Bus, trusted adults would join in and supervise."

With the grant paying for background checks, it could mean more qualified volunteers for the school district.

"The net gain to the school district will be a much larger qualified volunteer base that will remain even when the grant runs out in two years," she said. "It is a huge help in qualifying the economically disadvantaged who are willing to help, but can't afford to."

In addition to creating a volunteer base, saving gas money and reducing traffic congestion around schools, walking to school is a healthy alternative.

"In 1969, half of all kids walked or biked to school," Venema said. "Today, fewer than 15 percent of children do so. This trend has led to concerns about student health, traffic congestion, air quality and safety. The introduction of the Walking School Bus into the Lemoore Union Elementary School District means the community is doing something about those concerns."

Walking School Buses are expected to make their debut Sept. 1. Adult volunteers will wear safety vests and carry stop signs and whistles.

"When you see the kids walking together in the mornings or afternoons this school year, be vigilant with your driving and give them a honk with the car horn to show them your support," Venema said.

## **Teleconferencing approved for council members**

By Alex Cantatore - Civic Desk

Turlock Journal, Friday, August 12, 2011

After two years, the Turlock City Council on Tuesday elected to reenact a procedure allowing council members to teleconference in to council meetings.

The measure succeeded by a 4-1 vote, with Vice Mayor Amy Bublak opposed. She argued against allowing teleconferencing, stating the practice reduces interaction.

"You don't actually participate as well," Bublak said. "You're kind of behind, so you don't interject when you should."

The practice was effectively barred except in case of emergency at an April 28, 2009 meeting of the Turlock City Council, by a 3-1 vote. Bublak and then-council members Ted Howze and Kurt Spycher supported the ban, while Mayor John Lazar was opposed.

Councilwoman Mary Jackson was not present at that 2009 meeting, as she had recently given birth to twins. She had requested the council discuss teleconferencing at their April 14, 2009 meeting, in hopes of teleconferencing to council meetings during the first few weeks after birth.

Revisiting the issue was requested by Councilman Bill DeHart.

In order to teleconference, council members will still be required to phone in from a venue open to the public and Americans with Disabilities Act accessible, so as to comply with Brown Act open meeting laws. Also, notice of the meeting must be posted at the location 72 hours in advance, should members of the public wish to attend.

On Tuesday, the Turlock City Council also:

Received an update on a 9/11 memorial celebration, which will be held on Sept. 11 at Turlock's Fire Station No.1.

The event, which will be keynoted by John McParland of the Oakland Fire Department, will begin at 8:46 a.m. to coincide with the timing of the first plane striking the World Trade Center. Further details of the program remain in development. Began the process to update the city's Water Code, in part increasing the delinquency charge for late water payments from \$10 to \$25.

The code changes, which require a final vote at the Aug. 23 council meeting, will also discourage water theft, make installation of water connections more business-friendly, allow "flow through" fire sprinkler systems at residences, and require Turlock purchase well sites large enough to accommodate wellhead treatment systems. Recommended hiring an instrumentation technician in the Utilities Division, filling a vacancy resulting from the 2009 hiring freeze. The position, which Turlock will attempt to recruit for internally before engaging in open recruitment, will pay \$56,304 salary, with \$37,608 in benefits.

Per the staff report, the additional employee is needed to meet the demands of maintaining water and sewer related infrastructure. Issued a proclamation in honor of the Ansel Adams Exhibit, which will serve as the first exhibition at the reconstructed Carnegie Arts Center. [Received a presentation from the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District on the Healthy Air Living Outreach Campaign.](#)

