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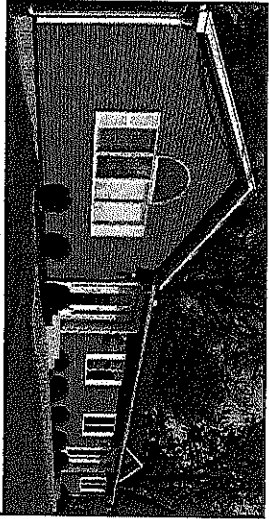
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Irene E. & George A. Davis Found.
One Monarch Place, Suite 1300
Springfield, MA 01144

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Staff, parents and students of Brightwood Elementary School, along with providers from Baystate Brightwood Health Center, officers from the Springfield Massachusetts State Police, and many other community partners, gathered in May to accept a national Oberstar Safe Routes to School award for their work on the Walking School Bus project in Springfield's North End. Karen Pohlman, MSN, APRN, FNP, community program manager at Baystate Brightwood Health Center, who initiated the program, is shown holding the award.

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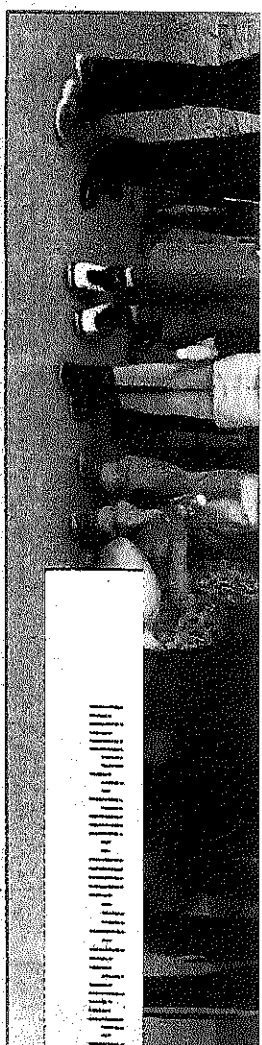
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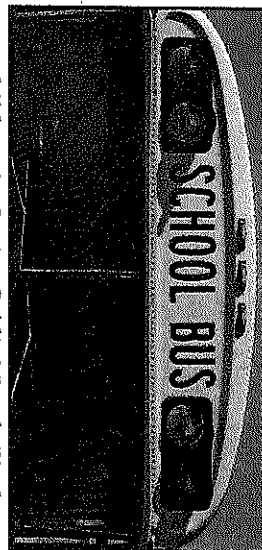


Karen Pohlman, MSN,
APRN, FNP, community
program manager at
Baystate Health
inspiring the future.

WALKING SCHOOL BUS TURNS THE TIDE IN SCHOOL ABSENTEEISM IN SPRINGFIELD

By Karen Pohlman, MSN, APRN, FNP
Community Program Manager, Baystate Brightwood Health Center

Chronic absenteeism – defined as missing 10% or more of school during the school year – is a warning sign of academic risk.




Through a community collaboration in Springfield, called the Brightwood Walking School Bus, we have found a promising practice in combating school absenteeism at Brightwood Elementary School. The program, which I initiated as community program manager at Baystate Brightwood Health Center, is making strides not only in reducing absenteeism, but positively impacting tardiness rates and increasing exercise opportunities for

children in Springfield's North End. The Walking School Bus is a multi-focal, low cost, sustainable program that helps to impact healthy lifestyle habits by increasing exercise opportunities and helping children achieve and maintain positive school attendance practices. Designated leaders, made up of parents and community members, supervise the children on their daily

walk to school, Monday through Friday of each school week. The Brightwood Walking School Bus program, initiated in 2010 to impact school attendance and increase exercise opportunities for children, has shown consistent and improving attendance data. What the numbers tell us is that average daily school attendance at Brightwood Elementary School has increased for participants in the Walking School Bus program, which has also had a positive impact on tardiness. And, I am happy to report that linking Baystate Brightwood Health Center with community resi-

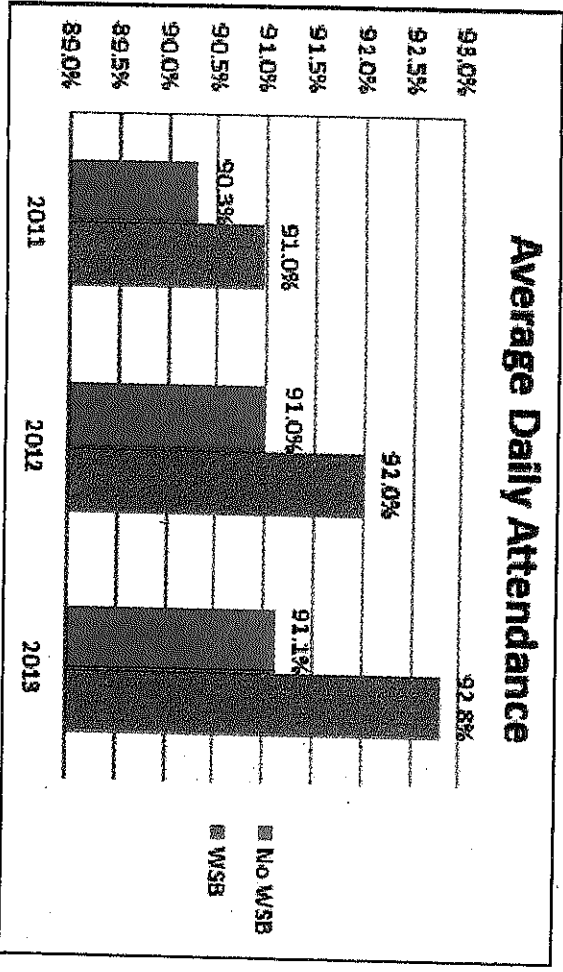
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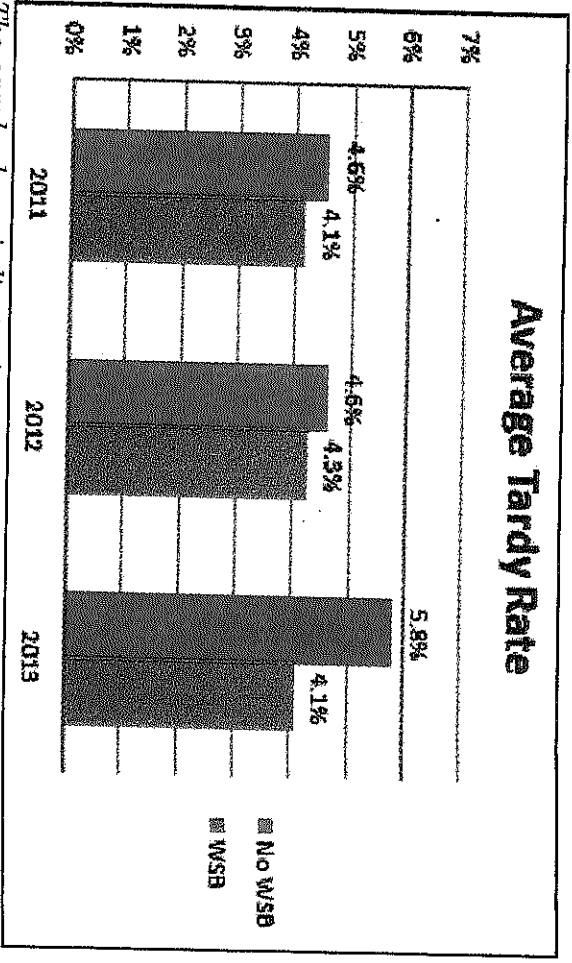
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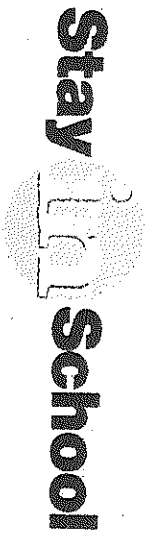
dents in innovative programs such as the Walking School Bus illustrates a cohesive partnership that results in advancing healthier lifestyles.



The above graph shows average daily attendance by participants and non-participants in the Brightwood Walking School Bus program over three years. The difference in year 2013 average daily attendance is statistically significant at the 0.05 level, meaning there is something other than chance causing the Walking School Bus students to have a higher average daily attendance.



The graph above indicates increasing trends of tardiness among the students at Brightwood Elementary School and the percent tardy has stayed flat for the Walking School Bus participants, indicating a positive impact of this program.



Show up. Every day. It matters.