HUTTO ISD
BUS RIDER HANDBOOK

A Guide to Safe and Successful Travel to School

Revised: 01/13/2025

The Hutto Independent School District provides transportation service to and from school for eligible students residing in the district. The State of Texas prescribes the conditions governing school bus operations and funds the service by allotting the district a given amount for the transport of eligible students. An eligible student resides two (2) or more miles from his or her school campus.

The Hutto ISD Transportation has walk-out policies of one-quarter mile for elementary school students and one-half mile for secondary school students. This means we will not extend the route to your location if there is a stop within the walk-out distance from your residence. These distances are measured by the district GPS mapping tools. Private roads, unpaved roads, roads in gated communities, and non-county adopted roads will not be traveled on by Hutto ISD buses. Students may have to travel longer distances to meet the bus under these circumstances. Transportation of students in the safest possible manner is the highest priority of the Hutto ISD Transportation Department. Hutto ISD is pleased to provide transportation to students in the most cost-effective manner that meets the level of safety and quality of service required to meet the educational needs of our students. We ask for your cooperation with school personnel in developing, assisting, and enforcing proper behavior habits for our bus riders. Your assistance is greatly appreciated!

This book provides the guidelines to ensure that a safe and successful experience is shared by all of our Hippo riders. We look forward to serving the community!

PREPARING FOR THE FIRST DAY ON THE BUS

The first day of bus riding can be an anxious time for younger students. The opportunity to get on the big, yellow bus with other children from the neighborhood for the first time is quite exciting. It can fill a child with a sense of accomplishment and independence, but it may also be intimidating. To reduce anxiety or intimidation, the parent should prepare the student for a successful ride by reviewing this book. Practice walking to and from the bus stop to improve the student's confidence in navigating the neighborhood. Drive to the stop from different directions to show the student what the stop will look like from inside a vehicle.

Finally, instruct the student on any friendly spots along the walk home. If a friend, neighbor, or relative lives between the bus stop and home, make the student aware of this location as a "safe spot" in case a need for assistance arises. Also, review what to do if bad weather occurs or a stranger approaches.

PARENTS AND BUS RIDERS

Parents, please take time to read and discuss the contents of this book with your students who ride the bus. Riding a school bus is a privilege provided by Hutto ISD and should be treated as such. Failure to follow the rules of the bus may result in a suspension or even termination of this privilege.

NOTE TO PARENTS OF PRE-K STUDENTS

To ensure the safety of our youngest riders, parents or a designated adult must be present at the bus stop in the mornings and afternoons to deliver and receive their students. If an adult is not present after school to receive the Pre-K student, the student will not be allowed to exit the bus and will be returned to school.

SMARTtag

The Hutto ISD Transportation Department has adopted SMARTtag to improve student safety, increase ridership awareness, improve communications with parents, and assist our department with record keeping. To ensure the system works at maximum capacity, all students will be issued a SMARTtag ID card and must scan it when loading and unloading the bus.

In the morning, bus drivers will not leave students unattended at their bus stops if a student forgets or loses their SMARTtag ID card.

It is important to emphasize that consistent use of the SMARTtag ID card is required; failure to do so may result in suspension from bus services. Should a student continue to neglect using their SMARTtag ID card, parents will be informed via email about the potential loss of riding privileges until compliance with the SMARTtag Program is achieved. There is no option to opt out of utilizing SMARTtag.

Once a parent is notified that their student is not in compliance, they have three days to comply with the SMARTtag program before suspension procedures may begin. Once suspended, a replacement card must be purchased and/or the student must be in compliance with the SMARTtag program in order to regain their bus riding privileges.

Parents or guardians may submit an online request form available on the main Transportation website page to purchase a replacement SMART Tag ID card, lanyard, protective sleeve, or a combination of these items.

ROUTE CHANGES

Requests to change routes or add stops will only be considered if the change will make the route shorter or safer, as determined by the Hutto Transportation Department routing guidelines.

BUS PERMITS

In order to ride a bus that is not the student's assigned bus, a bus permit must be secured in advance of the ride. Students who ride their regular bus but need to get off at a different stop must present a Bus Permit to their driver before unloading at the different stop. The parent or guardian of the student who needs to ride a different bus on a given day shall contact the campus to receive a Bus Permit. The campus will issue the permit, if available, to the student.

The student must present the completed and signed Bus Permit to the driver of the bus to be ridden. A student can have one (1) guest ride home from school on a first come, – first served, space-available basis. Some routes are too full to allow guests to ride the bus.

Assigned students shall have priority in riding home over students with a bus permit. Students with bus permits trying to ride a bus without space available will have to ride their assigned bus or will remain at campus with a school official to find another way home.

DISCIPLINE

The school bus is an extension of the classroom, and discipline will be administered by the School Bus Driver, a Bus Rider Safety Adviser, the Campus Administration, and the Director of Transportation. All school board policies that apply to student conduct and other student-related activities apply to the school bus.

SAFETY MEASURES

Bus Rider Safety Advisers, Campus Administrators, and the Director of Transportation are authorized to suspend students from riding the bus for violating the bus safety rules. The Bus Driver shall address all safety concerns with the students while they are riding the bus. The driver may confer with the student before or after the trip, change the student's seat, call for a campus official to assist with a situation, or call for law enforcement in emergencies. In any circumstance beyond seat change or discussion with the student regarding behavior, the driver will contact the parent or guardian to seek assistance in correcting the unsafe behavior.

If a safety violation is written for documentation purposes, the driver will submit the violation to the Director of Transportation. The Director will forward the violation to a Bus Rider Safety Adviser for review. The **FIRST INCIDENT** may result in a warning or consequences from the Bus Rider Safety Adviser or Director. The **SECOND INCIDENT** may result in suspension from one to three days off the bus or other consequences from the Bus Rider Safety Adviser or Director. On the **THIRD INCIDENT,** the driver will complete a Hutto ISD Student Bus Referral Form and submit it to the Director of Transportation. The Director will discuss the situation with a Bus Rider Safety Adviser. Consequences may result in a

one-week (five school days) to two-week (ten school days) suspension from the bus. A copy of the Bus Referral Form will be mailed to the parent. Severe or Extreme violations will be elevated to the **THIRD INCIDENT** level or higher as determined by the campus and the Director. Repeated violations or dangerous behaviors may result in the loss of all riding privileges for a student.

GENERAL RULES FOR BUS RIDERS

All Hutto ISD Bus Riders shall:

1. Follow all of the bus driver's instructions at all times.
2. Have their SMARTtag ID in their possession and ready to scan when loading and unloading the bus.
3. Board and Depart the bus at assigned stops only.
4. Ride the bus assigned to the student.
5. Have a permit to ride a bus that is not the assigned bus.
6. Dress and behave according to the rules of the school and district.
7. Be in the custody and care of the Transportation Department until delivered safely to school or home.

PROHIBITED ITEMS

These items are prohibited from all Hutto ISD Buses:

1) Tobacco of any kind, electronic cigarettes, or any vaping devices.
2) All items prohibited by federal, state, or local laws.
3) Live animals or insects
4) Glass Containers
5) Alcoholic Beverages
6) Weapons, explosives, fireworks, drugs, or chemicals
7) Open flames of any kind (matches, lighters, etc.)
8) Any object too large to be held in the student's lap. (Musical instruments larger than a trombone are not allowed on the bus. Large class projects that will not fit in the student's lap are not allowed on the bus. No items may be stored on a seat or in the aisle. No item shall impede another student's ability to ride the bus.)
9) Food, candy, and drinks, except bottled water, in the original container.

CAMERAS

Surveillance cameras may be used to record all activity on the bus. The recording is for safety purposes. Recordings shall only be viewed for disciplinary purposes if the driver or an administrator has a reasonable suspicion that an incident occurred. To protect the privacy of our riders, only district personnel shall view the video.

RIDE THE HIPPO WAY!

- Be Respectful
- Be Responsible
- Be Safe

PROCEDURE FOR WAITING FOR THE BUS

1) Be at the bus stop five (5) minutes before the scheduled pick-up time. The driver will not wait or honk the horn.
2) Stand on the sidewalk or back from the roadway while waiting for the school bus.
3) Stay off of porches and lawns, out of flower beds, and away from houses near the stop. Do not play or loiter in another person's yard.
4) When the bus approaches, form a line based on the driver's loading procedures and be prepared to load immediately.
5) Stand clear of the bus until it comes to a complete stop. Wait to hear the brakes pop before approaching the bus.
6) Students who are across the street from the loading zone must wait for the driver to point at them to cross the street. This will occur after the bus has stopped, the brakes have popped, the door has opened, and the loading lights have started flashing.
7) If the bus is missed, immediately try to go to the last stop in the neighborhood and meet the bus there, or go home or into school and call parents or tell the office personnel. We will try to send a bus to pick up students that miss the bus. In the event that a student misses the bus and another bus is unavailable, the parent is responsible for transporting the student.
8) If a student is late to the bus and the bus is rolling away, let the bus go and follow the procedure in #7 above. Never chase, beat on the side, or step in front of a moving bus.

LOADING THE BUS

1) Wait for the bus to stop and listen for the brakes to pop. When the bus door is totally open, you may begin loading.
2) From the line that has formed at the bus stop on the arrival of the bus, walk one at a time onto the bus.
3) Be patient and wait your turn.
4) Step up onto the steps and use the handrail.
5) Swipe your SMARTtag ID Cards on the reader.
6) Go down the aisle to your assigned seat.
7) Buckle your seat belt.

8) Step out of the aisle and secure your belongings.
9) Allow your seatmates to get in the seat as they arrive.
10) Secure all belongings in your lap or hold them in your hands.

CONDUCT ON THE BUS

1) Stay properly seated in your assigned seat at all times while the bus is moving.
2) Proper seating is when your bottom is on the seat bottom. Your back presses against the seat back. Your hips, thighs, knees, and feet are facing forward. Your hands are either in your lap or at your side.
3) You are to remain in your assigned seat for the remainder of the trip and shall allow other students to sit in their assigned seats.
4) Normal conversation with your seat partners is allowed using a low, inside voice.
5) Keep hands, feet, and belongings to yourself.
6) Proper language that is permissible in schools is expected to be used on the bus.
7) Windows shall remain closed, and all objects and body parts are to remain inside the bus.
8) Throwing objects is prohibited on the bus.
9) Refrain from writing, cutting, puncturing, damaging, or defacing the interior of the bus, including windows, walls, ceiling, and seats. The cost to repair the damage done to the bus will be the responsibility of the parent of the student.
10) Emergency exits, doors, and window latches shall not be touched except as directed by the driver or in an actual emergency.
11) Students are to avoid touching anything in the driver's dash area.
12) Respect other students' property by not touching it.
13) All rules of conduct for the district and federal, state, and local laws apply on the bus.
14) All riders are required to have their SMARTTag badge at all times to ride the bus.
15) On Hutto ISD buses that are equipped with seat belts, riders are expected to wear the seat belt for the entire duration of the ride to and from school.

UNLOADING THE BUS

1) Students shall remain seated until the bus has come to a complete stop and the brake has popped.
2) When the bus has stopped and the brake has popped, students getting off the bus at that stop will stand and gather their belongings. Any student sitting in a seat between the student and the aisle shall rise, let the student into the aisle, and return to their assigned seat.
3) The bus will unload in order according to the driver's directions – examples are: from the front row to the back row, left side or right side, girls then boys, etc.
4) Unbuckle the seat belt and walk down the aisle in an orderly manner.
5) Swipe your SMARTtag ID Cards on the reader.
6) Use the handrail to go down the steps.

7) Step down onto the ground.
8) Immediately, walk away from the bus and establish a ten (10') foot radius.
9) Students must have a bus permit from the school to unload at a stop other than the scheduled stop.
10) If an item falls under the bus while unloading, step away from the bus and walk toward the front, maintaining at least a ten (10') foot radius from the bus. Get the driver's attention and ask for help.
11) If the bus is rolling before the driver's attention can be gained, wait until the bus has cleared and gather the object when the area is safe and clear of other vehicles.
12) If an item is left on the bus and the bus has rolled away, call the transportation department to arrange retrieval of the item.

CROSSING THE STREET OR ROAD AFTER UNLOADING

1) When crossing the street after unloading from the bus, walk ten paces on the sidewalk or shoulder of the road in the direction the bus is facing to get at least fifteen feet ahead of the bus.
2) Wait at that point for the driver to signal by pointing at you. This is the signal to cross to the driver's side of the bus.
3) At the driver's signal, look both ways and step into the street when you see that all cars have stopped.
4) Walk to the driver's side of the bus and stop. Wait for the driver to signal by pointing at you that it is safe to finish crossing the street.
5) When the driver signals to cross, look both ways to see that all cars have stopped, then cross the street.
6) Cross streets at intersections when possible.
7) Never cross the street behind the bus.
8) Anticipate that cars will not stop for the bus loading lights and watch for cars while crossing the street.

ACCIDENTS AND EMERGENCIES

1) Follow the driver's instructions
2) If the bus must be evacuated, stay together and go where the driver tells you.
3) The following procedures will be used for evacuation in an emergency situation:
    a. The students in the row closest to the back of the bus will open the rear door when instructed by the driver, or if the situation demands, sit on the bottom of the bus floor and scoot themselves out of the bus and down to the ground.
    b. These students will assist other students in leaving the bus in an orderly manner, one at a time. All students will sit on the floor and scoot off the bus to reduce the impact on the ground. Assisting students will guide the evacuating students by resting their palms on the student's wrists and elbows as the student exits the bus and lowers to the ground.
    c. The evacuating students will follow the designated leader to the assigned collection spot and remain there until the driver or law enforcement/emergency responders instruct them to move.
    d. The order of evacuation is the nearest seats to the exit go first and move in order by row to the farthest seats.
4) Other exits may be used as instructed by the driver or demanded by the situation. These exits are:

a. Two (2) window exits on each side of the bus swing out when the latch is released
b. Two (2) roof hatches at each end of the bus
c. The front and rear doors
d. These exits will be evacuated as described in #3) a-d above.

EXTRACURRICULAR TRIPS

1) Bus Rules apply to all school-sponsored events.
2) Discipline will be the responsibility of the campus administration, the trip sponsor, and the bus driver.
3) The bus must remain clean at all times during the trip, and it shall be returned clean.

RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES ON THE BUS

1) The driver has the right to drive the bus without distraction or disruption from the riders.
2) With that right comes the responsibility of the driver to deliver the students safely to and from school and the responsibility to enforce the procedures in this book.
3) The students have the right to expect a safe ride to and from school each day.
4) With that right, the student is responsible for keeping safe by following the procedures in this book.
5) Deviation from the procedures in this book will constitute a violation of this book, and incident reports, disciplinary action, and consequences will follow for riders.

ROUTE INFORMATION

Route information can be gathered on the district website – www.hipponation.org. Click on the Departments, then Transportation, and Route Information. Type the address into the box when the map link appears.

WHAT TO DO IF YOU MISS THE BUS IN THE MORNING

If a student is at a stop five minutes prior to the scheduled arrival of the bus and remains until five minutes after the scheduled time and the bus does not come, the student should remain at the stop and call the Transportation Office, if possible. If it is not possible to call from the stop, the student should go home and call the Transportation Office. We will try to get another bus to pick up the student. Students should never start walking to school without notifying someone of their whereabouts.

WHAT TO DO IF YOU GET ON THE WRONG BUS

Sometimes, a mistake occurs, and a student gets on the wrong bus. When this happens, tell the driver immediately. The driver will contact the dispatcher at the Transportation Office, and we will safely deliver the student to their stop. Never get off at an unfamiliar stop.

WHAT IF A RIDER DOES NOT RECOGNIZE THE STOP?

If the bus pulls up to a stop that does not seem familiar to the student, the student should not get off the bus under any circumstances. If the bus goes through all of its stops and the student never recognizes a stop as the proper stop, the student should go to the bus driver when the bus is stopped and report that he/she is still on the bus.

The driver will call dispatch and notify them of the student's name and request the bus stop location for that student. The driver will deliver the student to the stop after the completion of the route. Dispatch will contact the person designated in our routing software as the primary contact to inform them that the student is still on the bus.

Riders should never get off the bus at an unknown stop and try to find their own way home. The student is safe on the bus, and we will deliver that student safely to the correct stop as soon as possible.

CONTACT INFORMATION

Contact us at (512) 759 – 2105 if more information is needed.