

Hamilton-Wentworth Student Transportation Services

Operational Procedures



Title: COURTESY RIDER / EMPTY SEAT
Procedure: HWSTS-OP-0106-10
Adopted: August 26, 2010
Revised: May 21, 2020

1.0 Scope

HWSTS is committed to providing transportation services for eligible students to and from their home school.

In consultation with the school principal/designate and the bus operator, HWSTS is committed to providing a tool for ineligible students to access existing school bus service. Access is only available in accordance to the guidelines set by the Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board (HWDSB) and the Hamilton-Wentworth Catholic District School Board (HWDCSB) and at no cost to the Boards.

Hamilton-Wentworth Student Transportation Services

Operational Procedures

2.0 Responsibility

2.1 The HWSTS Staff are responsible for:

- Maintaining up to date reference tools outlining the partner Board approved courtesy rider / empty seat process
- Ensuring planned student transportation services adhere to partner Board approved courtesy rider / empty seat process
- Liaising with partner Board designated staff in the event of discrepancies / emerging issues
- Communicating directly with parents and other system stakeholders regarding courtesy rider / empty seat process
- Utilizing all available tools, resources and best judgment in a customer centric approach.

2.2 The HWSTS Partner Boards are responsible for:

- Providing HWSTS with the most current, up to date information pertaining to student transportation courtesy rider / empty seat process
- Providing direction to HWSTS for any discrepancies / emerging issues brought forward

3.0 Procedure

Hamilton-Wentworth Student Transportation Services

Operational Procedures

3.1 Parameters

The following parameters must be met for a courtesy/empty seat to be permitted:

- that available space exists on an existing bus route
- that the student use an existing stop location
- that the request is consistent for every am/pm of every school day
- that transportation is intended for a ride to /from school only

3.2 Terms of Service

Courtesy/empty seat riders must adhere to the following terms of service:

- that permission to ride a courtesy/empty seat shall not be considered to constitute a precedent or to establish a right for transportation
- that permission to ride the school bus may be withdrawn at any time if the seat is needed for an eligible student
- the permission to ride is granted for no longer than the remainder of the current school year and all requests must be reapplied for annually

3.3 For the Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board (HWDSB):

Hamilton-Wentworth Student Transportation Services

Operational Procedures

The Transportation Policy includes the following statement: "Courtesy Transportation – Courtesy transportation may be provided for students of the Board subject to the Courtesy Transportation Procedure and at no cost to the Board." This document provides the operational courtesy transportation procedure referred to in the policy.

Not all schools will have the opportunity to provide Courtesy Transportation.

Several schools in the system do not have any students that are transported. Schools that have transportation may find that there are few if any seats available for Courtesy Transportation.

In some schools additional riders could be accommodated without any increase in cost or negative impact on current service. In these situations, the Board will extend Courtesy Transportation subject to the availability of seats and the basic operational procedures detailed below. Availability of seats may be sporadic from school to school and may change on a regular basis.

3.3.1 - Basic Operational Procedures

The Principal will authorize courtesy transportation subject to all of the following conditions:

- permanent available space exists on an existing bus route, no changes to the route are required and no significant change to pickup or drop off times is required
- that for existing eligible riders:
- their time on the vehicle will not normally exceed sixty minutes and/or
- the vehicle will not unnecessarily be delayed in completing other subsequent runs
- the non-eligible rider gets on the bus at an existing bus stop location

Hamilton-Wentworth Student Transportation Services

Operational Procedures

- extension of courtesy transportation to be implemented in October at the earliest
- requests to ride under the courtesy transportation procedure be sent in writing to the school principal in accordance with the Courtesy Transportation Application Protocol
- granting permission to ride the vehicle does not create any additional cost to the Board
- courtesy transportation privileges may need to be withdrawn:
 - should the seat be required for a student eligible under the Transportation Policy
 - if adjustments to the existing route are required
 - should changes to pickup times be necessary for operational reasons or
 - for behavioral issues

3.3.2 - Determination of Capacity

The Transportation Department will determine the number of permanent empty seats.

- current loading factors will be relied upon: although they may need to be adjusted depending on the mix of ages and grades on the same bus
- where a bus travels on one route to multiple schools, principals will collaborate on the method of distribution of courtesy transportation between them
- when the numbers of empty seats vary between morning and afternoon runs, the lowest number of seats will be used for courtesy transportation

3.3.3 - Courtesy Transportation Application Protocol

Hamilton-Wentworth Student Transportation Services

Operational Procedures

Requests to ride under the courtesy transportation procedure must be sent in writing to the school principal in accordance with the following parameters:

- applications may be submitted by the parent/guardian or adult student

- The applicant must sign to acknowledge that, should courtesy transportation be extended, courtesy transportation is based on the following conditions:

- Transportation may be withdrawn with 48 hours notice

- Transportation may be granted for a period up to the end of the current school year and that a new application must be submitted for each school year

- Transportation service shall not be considered to constitute a precedent or to establish a right for transportation

3.3.4 - Courtesy Routing protocol

- Applications must be submitted to school principal

- If approved, school principal will:

- Inform parent/guardian/adult student

- Forward copy of approved application to Transportation Department

- If denied, school principal will inform parent/guardian/adult student

- the decision of the school principal is final

3.3.4 - Allocation Criteria

Hamilton-Wentworth Student Transportation Services

Operational Procedures

It is anticipated that the courtesy transportation procedure will, at times, result in the dilemma that the demand for seats exceeds the supply. Therefore, a board-wide allocation criteria is required in order to address this issue on a **consistent basis** across the system.

There will also be circumstances when courtesy transportation privileges will need to be withdrawn to permit an eligible rider access to transportation service. Consequently, the criteria will also be applied in reverse in the event that courtesy transportation must be removed from a student for operational purposes.

Where the number of applications for courtesy transportation exceed the number of permanent empty seats the principal will apply the following criteria, in the following order, when extending courtesy transportation:

- Medical conditions
- Age of student (youngest first)
- Traffic/environmental concerns
- Distance from the board designated school
- Social circumstances

3.4 For the Hamilton-Wentworth Catholic District School Board (HWCDSB):

Hamilton-Wentworth Student Transportation Services

Operational Procedures

Under the current Transportation Policy, if a student is not eligible for transportation services, the parent/guardian can apply for an empty seat on an existing school bus.

Approval will not be granted by the principal until it is assured the vehicle has room to accommodate the students and will not be required to add a vehicle at a later date due to overcrowded condition on the vehicle. The review and approval process is generally not confirmed until the beginning of November. Parents/guardians can request an empty seat anytime throughout the school year.

Younger students and siblings are generally reviewed first. Students who are approved to access an empty seat will be advised by the school and will be required to use existing stops on the vehicle. Under no circumstances will additional stops be added to the vehicle unless instructed to do so.

Although “Empty Seat Status” has been granted in the past, it does not guarantee that the student will be permitted to ride for the current school year and will not necessarily be approved for the current school year.

If the bus does become overcrowded at any point during the school year, and students who are eligible for transportation require space on the bus, then the students who have been granted “Empty Seat Status” will be required to find an alternate means of getting to and from school. Parents/guardian will be notified that their student is no longer permitted to ride the school bus.

4.0 Definitions

Hamilton-Wentworth Student Transportation Services

Operational Procedures

Term	Definition
HWSTS	Hamilton-Wentworth Student Transportation Services Consortium
HWSTS Staff	All partner Board staff designated to the Consortium to support student transportation operations.
Courtesy Seat	Term used within the HWDSB referring to the process whereby a non-eligible student is granted access to transportation services
Empty Seat	Term used within the HWCDSB referring to the process whereby a non-eligible student is granted access to transportation services