

# The Van Hise Walking School Bus

## *Principles, Rules, and Organization*

*The Van Hise Walking School (Hedgie) Bus Program, sponsored by the school's Parent Teacher Organization (PTO), is designed to encourage the community to work together to get children to and from school actively and safely. Children who participate in the program walk in groups led by adult volunteers ('leaders'). Adult leaders are asked to think about safety first, acting like responsible adults when leading children to and from school. At the same time, parents are to instruct their children to act responsibly while 'riding' the Walking School Bus, and have respect for and listen to the directions of the adult leaders.*

**Guiding Principles.** The Walking School Bus is a volunteer program, that will work at its best if every participating family is involved. Our goal is to encourage kids to walk more and parents to drive vehicles less, with neighbors helping each other. Let's do it in an organized, fun, and safe way! We also do not encourage competition among or between routes. We want to encourage belonging all along the way.

**How does it work practically?** The route participants come up with a weekly schedule that determines which days the group is walking (i.e., every day / M-W-F / morning and afternoon / only morning / etc..) and which adults will take each turn. For example, if a route has kids of 5 families that walk every day, each family could be in charge of 1 day per week, and trust that the other families will lead the kids to school the other days. Ideally, each family will take a turn walking with the group once every one or two weeks, so all the adults get to know all the children, and the children get comfortable with the adults. Often parents like to walk along with the group even if another adult is in charge of the WSB on specific days – that's great too, as this contributes to making stronger bonds in the neighborhood!

### **Hedgie Bus Safety Measures**

- Leaders wear **reflective vests**
- Route members have **flags** to mark the beginning and end of the group
- Adult/kids **ratio** – 1:6/8 (depending on age of participants)
- Leaders **model safe behavior**
- Establish a **buddy system** (younger kids paired with older ones)
- All participating families sign “**Parental Consent Form**”
- Kids **respect** safety rules and leader in charge

## Getting to school in the morning

Each route of the Hedgie Bus will leave from the start station and go by the route stops at the time determined on the schedule by the families involved. The timing is determined so that the Hedgie Bus will get to school on time at the pace of a kindergartner. Families are responsible for making sure their kids are at their bus stop at the correct time. If some kids are not at a stop, the Hedgie Bus will continue walking to ensure that everybody will get to school on time. Once the group reaches school, the route leader can help punch their 'ticket'. There is a reward system for the kids who participate - see below!

**Incentives for the kids:** name tags with punch tickets (the 'mile markers' - after 20 walks, each child gets a colorful toe token to hang on a chain on their backpacks. At the end of the year kids get a small Walking School Bus token for their backpacks too. Supplies are kept at school), recognition for individuals, theme days (colors, attire, animals, ...), making up games as you walk (I spy, environmental cops, etc.), occasional route - or program parties. And did we mention the benefit of being fit and ready to learn at school every day!

**Inclement weather plans.** In case of light rain, the Hedgie Bus can run, unless your route decides otherwise. Please help your kids choose the appropriate gear for the weather (raincoats, boots, umbrellas, etc.) and maybe have a change of clothes for school. This will ensure that the kids will be comfortable on their walk and during the school day. In case of severe weather, the walk may be canceled. Thunderstorms should warrant a cancellation of the walk. Your adult leader will be in touch with you. Some routes have a plan for these occasions too, like a carpool set up – please organize this within your route.

**Sickness.** If the designated route leader becomes ill, she/he is responsible for contacting an alternate leader for the day. If your child becomes sick, please let the day leader know if your route has an afternoon walk.

**NOTE:** Please remain flexible and responsible for your child's arrival at school on time.

## Getting home after school

**Gathering after school.** At the end of the school day, the kids should promptly gather at the school location designated as meeting point to join their route leader. Parents may wish to put an extra snack or drink in their kids' backpack for the walk home, as well as weather-appropriate gear (sunhat, raincoat, etc).

**Change of plans.** It is imperative for the afternoon route leaders to have a very accurate daily list of the kids who will walk home from school. If your plans change (i.e. your child becomes ill or has a last-minute appointment), please make direct contact with the designated leader for that day and let them know of the change. If you cannot reach the day leader, contact your route leader or Anne in the school office at 204-4800.

**Arrival at home.** Route leaders will release kids to their parents at home (or at the designated stop), so please make sure you are available at arrival time. Kids will not be left outside their home if their parents are not home.

(Revised 8/15)

