

DISTRICT NEWS RELEASE

HAYS CONSOLIDATED INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Date: March 25, 2024, 5:50 p

Wreck Information Update Webpage: www.hayscisid.net/tgesbus

Update Regarding Tom Green Elementary School Bus Accident – Monday, March 25, 2024

Here is additional information regarding the Tom Green bus accident:

Staff and Student Hospital Update

All students have been released from the hospital as of Monday afternoon. One staff member remains who is an early childhood education teacher at Tom Green Elementary. She is going to recover, but her physical recovery will take time because of the nature of her injuries. The affected students and staff, along with the entire Tom Green campus, appreciate the continued outpouring of support, care, love, and prayers they have been receiving.

Bus Driver Update

Our hero bus driver continues to recover at home. Superintendent Dr. Eric Wright was among the many Hays CISD employees and elected officials who have visited her at home. We will be forever indebted to her, and the other adults on the bus, who, though injured, placed the children above themselves and their own well-being. Dr. Wright said today of the bus driver and the other adults that, "their actions saved lives."

It is also imperative that we continue to thank the first-responders who arrived from multiple counties and agencies, and that we acknowledge the many bystanders who witnessed the accident and rushed to help without concern for their own safety.

Driver of the Car Who Was Killed

The Texas Department of Public Safety released the name today of the driver of the car behind our bus who was also killed in the accident. DPS has identified him as Ryan Wallace, age 33, from Bastrop. Though he was not part of the field trip or affiliated with our school district, we want to extend our deepest condolences to his family and loved ones.

Principal Email to Tom Green Parents (School Resumes with Adjustments Tuesday, March 26, 2024)

Tom Green Elementary School Principal Jennifer Hanna is sending information to parents of students at Tom Green about how the rest of the week will look for students. Parents of Tom Green students can check their emails. School resumes on Tuesday, March 26, 2024, but extra-curriculars are cancelled the rest of the week. The parent emails

have specific information about continuing counseling services and excusing absences for those who are not yet able, either physically or emotionally, to come to back to school.

How People Can Help

A former Tom Green Elementary teacher, Molly Andrews, who is a community member and member of the Tom Green Elementary School Campus Leadership Team, has set up a Go-Fund-Me account. The money raised will be used to help students and staff with expenses related to healing, off-setting funeral expenses for the student who passed away, and other unexpected expenses incurred by families affected by the accident. To help, please visit: <https://gofund.me/a3c4c9e8>.

Family of [Ulises Montoya](#) has set up a Go-Fund-Me specifically for his funeral expenses and other needs of the family as they process this unspeakable loss. To help, please visit: <https://gofund.me/026b0f7e>

Bus Seatbelts

I have more specific numbers regarding our bus fleet than what I had on Saturday morning, the day after the accident.

The bus involved in the accident was not equipped with seatbelts. It was a 2011 model bus. The district began buying buses with seatbelts in 2017, when the state law changed for buses purchased in that year and later. These are actually 2018 model, and later, buses purchased beginning in 2017.

Hays CISD has 109 buses that operate on daily routes. Of that number, 15 buses are older models that do not have seatbelts. The district has 21 new buses that have been delivered from the manufacturer and are undergoing outfitting with cameras and other GPS equipment. These buses will be in service in the coming weeks. Once this occurs, all 109 buses that operate daily routes will have seatbelts, and six buses in our reserve fleet (spare buses), will have seatbelts.

Regular route buses are the first choice for field trips, but sometimes field trips interfere with the regular routes and require use of buses from the spare fleet. Additionally, when a regular bus is out for maintenance, we typically run a spare bus in its place.

The bus involved in the Tom Green accident was a regular route bus for the school, operated by the children's regular driver. The schedule would have placed the group back at school in time for the bus to be used for the regular route.

The district has an overage of spare buses – 87 of them, because during COVID-related supply chain concerns, we did not auction off old buses as quickly as they were replaced with newer buses. All of these buses would not need to be replaced. Some could just be auctioned to reduce the fleet size. On any given day, about 40 of the spare buses are in service for various duties. Ideally, we would replace and keep in-spare about 40 – 50 buses with seatbelts. We will also be discussing the purchase of additional “trip buses,” which are more like coach buses than school buses and they have storage underneath for heavy equipment like band instruments.

School buses cost about \$160,000 each. Trip buses cost more. So, these items are likely going to have to be funded by a bond issue that goes to the voters for approval. This is what we will be discussing with our community-member based Facilities and Bond Oversight Committee. This process will take time. Even when and if voters approve a bond, it generally takes a significant number of months to receive a new bus after it is ordered.

We still don't know whether a seatbelt would have made a difference in this accident and there is much debate about putting seatbelts on school buses at all. However, for us, the debate is settled because Texas is one of the

eight states that require them for newer buses. The Texas law requires buses purchased after 2017 to be equipped with them.

Until we can get seatbelts on all of our buses, we don't want parents or students to feel unsafe. With or without seatbelts, school buses are among the absolute safest vehicles on the roads.

Wearing Green for Tom Green – Hornet Strong!

Thank you all who wore green today, in our district and across the region, in support of our Tom Green family. We have some wonderful photos from campuses around Hays CISD that will be posted on our district social media on Tuesday.

The district response to this crisis is ongoing. Additional information will follow in the coming days.

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