



CITY OF NEW YORK
**MANHATTAN COMMUNITY BOARD
FOUR**

424 West West 33 Street,
Suite #580 New York, NY
10001
tel: 212-736-4536
www.nyc.gov/mcb4

JEFFREY LEFRANCOIS
Chair

JESSE R. BODINE
District Manager

August 8, 2022

Hon. Eric Adams
Mayor
City Hall
New York, NY 10007

David C. Banks
Chancellor
Department of Education
52 Chambers St., New York NY, 10007

Re: Improve Student Bus Service

Dear Mayor Adams and Chancellor Banks,

Manhattan Community Board 4 (MCB4) appreciates the New York City Department of Education and Office of Pupil Transportation's presentation in response to our letter regarding student busing at the Arts, Culture, Education & Street Life (ACES) Committee meeting on Monday, July 11th, 2022. MCB4 at its July 27th, 2022 Full Board meeting, voted 39 in favor, 0 opposed, 0 abstaining, and 0 present but not eligible to improve student bus service and public transparency on the efficacy of bus service provided by OPT. The goal is to ensure that students of our district and beyond, including students living in shelters, receive adequate bus service that they are entitled to.

The New York City Department of Education provides yellow bus transportation for approximately 150,000 eligible students in public, charter, and nonpublic schools. Eligibility for yellow bus service is determined by criteria including students grade level, walking distance between school and a student's home, medical condition, housing status and safety assessment. K-12 students living in city shelters and students designated as Special Education are exempt from grade and distance requirements. Approximately 90% of student bus service is provided by private bus companies. The complex system of

private contracts leaves student bus transportation vulnerable to competing vendor demands that have resulted in union strikes in 1973 and 2013.¹ The other 10% of bus service is provided by NYC School Bus Umbrella Services, Inc. (NYCSBUS), a city-operated nonprofit established in 2020 to take over routes for students with disabilities.

In more recent years, yellow bus service has been heavily impacted by rising costs, congestion, and the Coronavirus pandemic resulting in a significant increase of driver shortages, paraprofessional shortages, bus delays, buses breaking down, longer bus rides, and longer waits for students to receive a bus route. At the ACES meeting on April 11th, 2022, CB4 resident Sara Catalinotto of Parents to Improve School Transportation (PIST) discussed the current “crisis” of yellow bus service experienced by her own child and many other students and families. 56% of respondents on a PIST survey of D75 families indicated they have had to find alternative transportation this school year. At the Community Education Council District 2 Students in Temporary Housing meeting on January 12th, 2022, Iris Gersten, STH Liaison discussed how students attending PS 33, PS 51 and PS 111 were unable to get busing after they were relocated from shelters located in MCB4 to outer borough shelters in December 2021. Most of those students had to transfer schools resulting in a substantial loss of learning and disruptions to our school communities.

There is a great need for improvement in student busing and outlined below are recommendations based on MCB4’s engagement with stake holders.

Incentives for New Drivers

James Sarkis, Deputy Director of Finance at OPT discussed how bus companies have had success recruiting new drivers by offering compensation incentives, such as paying drivers to complete training and bonuses. These incentives would be especially beneficial at a time when so many are affected by inflation and rising rents. We encourage the DOE to continue to influence school bus companies to use incentive strategies to attract new drivers.

Create Pipelines for Bus Drivers

To help foster a steady influx of drivers, it would be beneficial for the DOE and OPT to partner with vocational schools and other related nonprofits to create a pipeline for those interested in this field. These partnerships would also expand the pool of trained drivers necessary to alleviate staff shortages as they arise.

Transparency of Bus Service

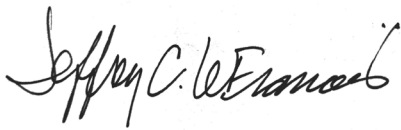
The DOE website gives insufficient data about ridership and the efficacy and quality of bus service. We encourage the DOE and OPT to 1) share bus service data and 2) create more pathways for families to report bus service-related issues. The current hotline call-in system has not been successful in addressing many busing concerns since families have

1. ¹ Page 4 of Appleseed doc, https://www.nyappleseed.org/wp-content/uploads/NYA_YellowBusReport_April2022_Final-1.pdf

reported not being able to get through and/or have language barrier issues. Community engagement with those on the front lines is crucial in improving bus service.

In conclusion, MCB4 strongly supports and encourages improved school bus service and transparency on the implementation and dissemination of those services. Additionally, as MCB4 continues to be a home for many students residing in shelters, we recognize and support students right to request “emergency transportation” when relocated to other city shelters.² We know that school attendance matters and wish to reduce any barriers children may have to daily and punctual attendance. We are grateful for our relationship with the DOE and look forward to continued efforts to provide a quality and equitable education for all New York City students.

Sincerely,



Jeffery LeFrancois
Chair
Community Board 4



Allen Oster
Co-Chair
ACES Committee



Kit Tollerson
Co-Chair
ACES Committee

cc: Hon. Brad Lander, NYC Comptroller
Hon. Mark Levine, Manhattan Borough President
Hon. Erik Bottcher, City Council

² <https://www.schools.nyc.gov/docs/default-source/default-document-library/a-801-9-5-2000-final-combined-remediated-wcag2-0>