

## **Local Law No. 158 Transportation of Students in Temporary Housing Task Force**

[Local Law No. 158](#) creates a task force regarding the transportation of students in temporary housing (STH). Executive Director of Students in Temporary Housing is Chairperson for this task force. A report of recommendations is due to the mayor and speaker of the council no later than 12 months after the final member of the task force is appointed. The report is due in February 2024.

The goal of the task force is to resolve the challenges that delay or prevent students in temporary housing from receiving transportation to and from school. Members of the task force identified four broad strategies to achieve this goal, and developed specific recommendations within each:

- A. Improve Communications Between City Agencies (NYCPS, DHS, DSS, etc.), Schools, Families, and Shelters
- B. Strengthen and Repair Data Systems to Align Student Information Across Agencies
- C. Ensure All Schools Have a Trained Liaison to Support School Responsibilities
- D. Prioritize Staffing of Bus Drivers and Broaden Transportation Options for Families

There are several regulations that hold NYCPS accountable for ensuring the transportation of students in temporary housing.

According to NYC Public Schools [Chancellor's Regulation A-780](#), homeless children and youth must have equal access to the same free education, including a public preschool education, as other children and youth, and may not be segregated from the mainstream school environment, and they must be enrolled in school even if they have missed application or enrollment deadlines during any period of homelessness. In order for students to "access" such education, they must be able to get to their school. Oftentimes, this means that a bus needs to pick up the student from their place of residence or from a designated nearby pickup location.

According to NYC Public Schools [Chancellor's Regulation A-801](#), pupils in grades K - 12 who have been placed in temporary housing (homeless shelters, hotels, etc.) are exempt from age and distance requirements for so long as they reside in that temporary housing. At any time that a student is placed in temporary housing a request for emergency transportation can be placed immediately with the OPT.

Chancellor's Regulation A-780 further provides that all homeless students, in preschool through grade 12, are eligible for free transportation during the period of homelessness, through the remainder of the school year in which they become permanently housed, and for an additional year if the student is in the terminal grade at school. For homeless students in K-6 residing in shelters, the Office of Pupil Transportation ("OPT") must arrange or provide busing or a comparable alternative mode of transportation, other than public transportation. For students in temporary housing other than shelters, busing or a comparable alternative mode of transportation will be provided if available. All students in temporary housing are eligible for free Metrocards. In order for students to take advantage of the free transportation available to them, the transportation must be promptly routed, reliable and adaptive to changes in the student's place of residence. Additionally, in cases where students are housed in domestic violence shelters, additional precautions must be taken to ensure student and family privacy.

## **A. Communications**

For students in temporary housing, school is an important stabilizing factor in their lives. Under the [McKinney-Vento Act](#) and [Chancellor's Regulation A-780](#), a student in temporary housing has the right to a free public education, to stay in their current school or choose to attend a zoned school or school that permanently housed children in the same area are eligible to attend, transportation (busing or MetroCard) services to and from school, and continue to receive special education services regardless of school transfer, among other things. Furthermore, students in temporary housing are eligible for free transportation through the end of the school year in which they become permanently housed, and for an additional year if the student will be entering the final grade in their school.

Parents/guardians of students in temporary housing under current policy may also be entitled to a MetroCard to accompany their child to and from school under the following conditions: their child is in the process of being routed on a bus, their child receives a MetroCard to travel to/from school or if the parent/guardian's transportation preference is public transportation.

Although the NYC Public Schools is committed to serving students in temporary housing and exhausting all efforts to ensure families receive the necessary transportation services, there appears to be a knowledge gap amongst NYCPS shelter-based staff and shelter staff which often leads to delays in initiating transportation for eligible students. Families have also expressed the lack of clarity on how to request transportation for their child and how they can obtain a MetroCard from their child's school. The lack of clarity on transportation eligibility and how to access transportation is concerning and calls for improved guidance and resources available to supporting shelter staff and families.

Additionally, roughly 40% of families are placed in shelters located in a different borough from where their children go to school. This can lead to issues such as absences caused by delays in setting up busing, very long commutes, and children transferring schools mid-year, which is associated with negative educational outcomes. Families and shelter providers need clarity about the process for requesting shelter transfers so that families can be closer to their children's school."

The communications subcommittee is dedicated to supporting shelter staff and families so that they have the necessary resources and information and the opportunity to participate in year round training/info- sessions that will be helpful not only during the school year but to prepare them for key dates such as the first day of school and Summer Rising.

The total number of STH eligible to receive MetroCards	78,057
The total number of STH who were assigned busing	10,062

**Challenge 1: Transportation rights & eligibility for students in temporary housing and students transitioning to permanent housing is unclear to shelter and NYCPS STH supporting staff. There is also confusion on the process to arrange transportation for students in DHS shelters (automatic process) versus other temporary housing (busing exception request process).**

Recommendation 1A: Provide regular training to shelter-based NYCPS staff and shelter provider staff about transportation for students in temporary housing. Roles receiving training should include: NYCPS STH shelter-based staff, charter and non-public school staff, HRA, DHS, HPD, HERCCs and DYCD shelter and any other temporary housing providers (e.g. Health & Hospital, CBOs, etc). Training sessions should include:

- STH Transportation eligibility
- Process for arranging busing for students in DHS shelters and other temporary housing (non-DHS) shelters i.e. HRA-DV, HPD, H&H, OEM, doubled-up, etc.
- How to access parent/guardian metrocards
- Escalation protocols
- Information about requesting a shelter transfer to be closer to the child's school
- Roles & responsibilities of shelter and NYCPS STH shelter-based staff
- How supporting staff and families can access their child's route information
- Process for securing transportation for summer
- How to access prepaid rideshare option

Recommendation 1B: NYC Public Schools should create a step-by-step guide outlining the process for arranging transportation and the role & responsibility of shelter staff and NYCPS STH shelter based staff in supporting the family in DHS shelter or other temporary housing throughout this process. For example, How to chart.

Recommendation 1C: NYC Public Schools should develop a one-pager(s) for shelter and NYCPS STH shelter based staff which includes transportation rights for all students in temporary housing, eligibility for students in temporary housing and students transitioning to permanent housing. The one-pager(s) should be specific to students in one of the following: DHS shelters, HRA-DV shelters, HPD shelters, HERRCs, other temporary housing or transitioning to permanent housing.

Recommendation 1D: NYC Public Schools should create a guidance document specific to STH Parent/Guardian MetroCards. The document should include: MetroCard eligibility, card specifications i.e. days of the week and times card may be used, information related to MetroCards (if available) to families outside of these hours for students to be able to participate in programs outside of the school day, how schools can order additional MetroCards and escalation protocol for schools not receiving a response/delays in receiving their shipment.

Recommendation 1E: All guidance & resources should be made available to schools and families on the NYC Public Schools websites (schools.nyc.gov; infohub.nyced.org). Access to these resources should also be made available to shelter providers.

**Challenge 2: Families need clarity on transportation rights & eligibility, process for requesting transportation for their child , how to request a MetroCard from their child's school, who to contact at the shelter or school for support in arranging transportation, as well as shelter transfers. Many families also face challenges accessing NYCSA as many don't use email, email addresses change frequently, phones and phone numbers frequently change, phone service is suspended, literacy and tech literacy challenges, etc.**

Recommendation 2A: NYC Public Schools should revisit how guidance and bus route information is currently shared with families and identify an alternative process on how families can access their child's route information outside of NYCSA.

Recommendation 2B: STH shelter-based staff must ensure that parents are promptly notified of the bus route information for their child. For example, sending texts/alerts to families, delivering bus route notification letters (generated by OPT or STH staff) to parents, or a phone call/meeting with the parent. In shelters where there is not full-time STH shelter-based staff, the Regional Managers should ensure that Bus Route Notification Letters are generated (by OPT or STH team) and promptly sent to shelter provider staff, and the shelter provider staff should regularly distribute them to families. MOUs will be pursued as needed.

Recommendation 2C: The Office of Academic Policy and Systems (OAPS) should give access to NYCPS STH staff to generate creation codes to set up the NYCSA accounts for families.

Recommendation 2D: STH shelter-based staff and schools should ensure that parents/guardians in temporary housing have a NYC Schools Account (NYCSA) set up.

Recommendation 2E: NYC Public Schools and DHS providers should host monthly informed sessions (in-person and/or virtual) for families and reshare guidance with families on process for signing up for a NYC Schools Account (NYCSA), how to navigate NYCSA, and where they will be able to access their child's bus route information.

Recommendation 2F: NYC Public Schools should create a one-pager for families that includes transportation rights & eligibility, how to request transportation and who they can contact for support on the school/shelter level. Guidance should be made available in all NYCPS languages and publicly available on the [NYCPS STH webpage](#).

Recommendation 2G: NYC Public Schools should update the NYCPS Find a School tool ([schoolsearch.schools.nyc](http://schoolsearch.schools.nyc)) with contact information for school-based STH liaison & the school transportation coordinator.

Recommendation 2H: NYC Public Schools and DHS shelter providers should share information with parents about the availability of shelter transfers to be closer to a child's school and connect them with the appropriate person who can help with a shelter transfer request if the parent is interested. DHS should make clear in its policies and communications to shelter providers that families can request to be transferred to a different shelter to be closer to their child's school and that parents are not required to show proof of travel hardship or school enrollment (shelter staff already have access to school enrollment data). If the shelter is located in a different borough or community school district from where the child attends school, that should be sufficient reason for the shelter provider to request the shelter transfer and for the DHS Program Administrator to approve it, subject to space availability.

**Challenge 3: There is a delay in receiving updates of shelter closures/openings and displacement of families which leads to delays in requesting/arranging transportation for students eligible for busing.**

Recommendation 3A: NYC Public Schools should develop a one-pager for shelter providers, NYCPS shelter-based staff and OPT that outlines responsibility & action items required to help avoid delay in transportation for families. This includes informing all parents about school selection options and transportation options, updating CARES transportation fields, completing busing exception requests, and updating residential addresses in ATS.

**Challenge 4: Families, shelter, school and NYCPS supporting staff are unclear on transportation eligibility for the Summer Rising program and the steps required to ensure students eligible for busing are routed. Guidance is also needed on how shelter, school and NYCPS supporting staff should prepare families for the first day of school (FDOS), Summer Rising Program, and for when families transition into permanent housing.**

Recommendation 4A: NYC Public Schools should ensure that busing is routed for students in temporary housing who are participating in Summer Rising at least a week before school ends so that school staff have time to share bus route information with parents. In the case that a student enters the system on or after the week before school year's end, NYC Public Schools will make sure that family information is collected to promptly communicate bus routes.

Recommendation 4B: Schools and STH shelter-based staff should be tasked with making sure that all parents are told about bus route info for their children. Where busing has not been routed, schools and STH staff should tell parents about how to access prepaid rideshare. (See Bus Route Subgroup for recommendations about expanding transportation options for Summer Rising).

Recommendation 4C: NYC Public Schools should outline related policies/expectations of shelter providers (DHS, HRA/DV, HPD, H&H, etc.) to ensure that transportation is in place for students in shelter before the start of the school. This should include ensuring that NYCPS or shelter provider staff discuss transportation options with all parents in shelter several weeks before the start of school year (including busing for 3-K and Pre-K, prepaid rideshare if busing is not promptly available) and help parents access desired transportation option (e.g., DV shelter staff submits a 'Ticket' with the NYCPS to request busing for a student).

Recommendation 4D: NYC Public Schools should ensure all parents in shelter are informed of their transportation options, parents have a status of their child's busing exception requests submitted and families are aware of when a bus route is assigned.

Recommendation 4E: NYC Public Schools should ensure that NYCPS or shelter provider staff inform parents where they can get a MetroCard and who to contact if they are not promptly provided one.

Recommendation 4F: NYC Public Schools and shelter providers should ensure that before families in shelter transition into permanent housing, parents are informed that their children can stay in their same schools and can receive busing for the remainder of the school year (depending on grade level and IEP status) and provided assistance in requesting busing (i.e. completing ticket on Support Hub). A tip sheet should be developed for shelter staff to use as families exit shelter.

## **B. Data Sharing & Technical Supports**

Research has shown that students experiencing homelessness have [substantially higher rates of chronic absenteeism](#) than their stably housed peers. This is a major challenge for students in temporary housing in NYC. According to the [NYC NYCPS End-of-Year Attendance and Chronic Absenteeism](#) report, in school year 2021-22, 53.9% of students in temporary housing were chronically absent compared to 38.8% of students not in temporary housing. Further, the [NYC NYCPS Students in Temporary Housing](#) report indicates high rates of [student mobility](#) (school transfers) of students in temporary housing. Several research articles show that both chronic absenteeism and [student mobility](#) are associated with worse educational outcomes for students experiencing homelessness (for school mobility, see [here](#) and [here](#) and [here](#); for chronic absenteeism see [here](#) and [here](#)).

To help address this, the federal [McKinney-Vento Act](#) requires that school districts provide transportation to students experiencing homelessness who continue enrollment in their same school, and [Chancellor's Regulation A-780](#) implements this obligation by making busing or a comparable, alternative mode of transportation available to all students in shelter in grades K-6, and making student and parent public transit passes (e.g., MetroCards) available for students in temporary housing not receiving busing. Districts, including NYC, face challenges implementing these responsibilities. While many of the challenges are connected to transportation itself (e.g., availability of buses, drivers, routes), [the initial challenge is ensuring these students are identified](#) in the appropriate systems so that the responsible parties know the students exist, where they reside and that busing or other forms of transportation need to be provided. The following are just some examples of cases where the technical systems failed to support students in need:

- Many children born in 2011-2017 in DHS shelters could not be promptly routed for busing because there was a data match error between the NYCPS and DHS data systems (i.e., children missing Student ID (OSIS) numbers in the Daily Feed)
- In school year 2021-22 alone, 26% of students residing in shelters operated by DHS transferred to different schools ([4,436 out of 17,032](#) students in DHS shelters transferred schools). Some of these transfers from their previous school to the local school near their shelter were a direct result of delays in busing being set up and/or delays in establishing new route. Additionally, there are known delays in processing busing requests for students in non-DHS shelters and other temporary housing arrangements.
- Advocates for Children has heard from many parents and shelter providers about delays in busing lasting weeks and in some cases months, where there hadn't been any communication with the parent about the nature of the delay, how to troubleshoot the issue, or alternate transportation in the interim. These delays usually were caused by: a lack of clarity about the responsibilities of NYCPS and shelter providers to address and escalate these issues; how and when to resolve data match issues; how and when to initiate an exceptions request process on the part of the NYCPS and shelter provider staff; and delays in NYCPS processing exceptions requests.

Refining the technical and data systems, policies and training in these areas is a necessary and common sense approach to improving transportation for students in temporary housing. The committee has outlined several challenges and recommendations below.

**Challenge 5: Student name and date of birth are recorded in DHS shelter system (CARES) and NYCPS systems differently. NYCPS student entries may also be entered in multiples. Both scenarios lead to the creation of multiple Student IDs. Students who are not matched in the two systems do not receive busing since the NYCPS does not know that a student is in a DHS shelter until the records are matched. NYCPS is charged with the task of reconciling.**

Recommendation 5A: Ensure that NYCPS STH staff are trained and tasked to review the DHS daily feed against NYCPS enrollment data to determine cases of unmatched students; the review should include a clear matching algorithm (e.g., any school-age children who do not have an OSIS (Student ID) or are not currently enrolled in a NYC public school). Ensure that NYCPS STH staff review the data daily and link all unmatched data within 24 hours of being identified. Unmatched records typically occur when the name and/or date of birth are entered differently in DHS and NYCPS systems, and this requires a manual review to identify and reconcile. A concerted effort should be made to link all unmatched data by the last day of school – before 10-month employee NYCPS staff departure – to aid in Summer Rising and First Day of School routing.

If a shelter site has no assigned shelter-based STH staff for the summer months, it is the responsibility of the Regional Manager or designee to identify and link all unmatched data until shelter-based STH staff return and take back this task.

Where it is determined that a school-age child is not enrolled in a NYC public school, direct appropriate NYCPS shelter staff to promptly follow up with the family and caseworker (as confirmed by the shelter’s Intake Specialist) to help them enroll their children in a NYC public school unless they are enrolled in a private school or a school outside of NYC. Note that NYCPS staff do not need to help children enroll in a NYC public school if they are already enrolled in a private school or a public school outside of NYC. NYCPS only needs to support school-age children who are not enrolled in school anywhere. The DHS daily feed NYCPS receives does not indicate which school-aged children are enrolled in private school, enrolled in a public school outside of NYC, or not enrolled in school anywhere; students appear as not being enrolled in a NYC public school.

Additionally, NYCPS and DHS are to make sure that school-aged children are enrolled in school. If a parent indicates that their child is enrolled in a private school or outside of NYC, NYCPS or DHS typically asks for some type of confirmation or will call the school to confirm.

Recommendation 5B: Train NYCPS school staff and appropriate DHS staff, including DHS Program Administrators and Prevention Assistance and Temporary Housing (PATH) staff, in naming conventions of students from other countries to raise awareness and cultural responsiveness necessary to improve the accuracy of name entry. Develop a process that includes parents and guardians in the data collection phase, so that their input is fully accounted for before submission in the agency system(s). While parents and guardians are currently included in the process, we should work to train all agencies to ask for the optional provision of identifying data that parents may have received from other agencies (i.e., DHS shelter provider asking a parent if they know and can provide a StudentID). For example, date of births are recorded (documented) differently in different countries, so knowing the cultural differences will help avoid data match problems – e.g., birth date on February 8, 2023 may be written as 8/2/23 as opposed to 2/8/23 depending on the country of origin.

Recommendation 5C: Explore the feasibility of data sharing agreements between agencies to delineate what data is being shared and identify possible ways to streamline data entry. NYCPS should leverage and partner with the Children Family Data Collaborative (CFDC) to identify the types of data other agencies have, what existing data is needed, and what data does not exist that we need to collect from families. An agency outcome of this recommendation includes creating one system of entry that both DHS and NYCPS leverage to intake students. This system would allow for capture of basic information (i.e, name, DOB) about students and their families that will then load into each agency's systems. This will create a common entry to baseline the student and allow each agency to continue entry of agency-specific data within their own systems. Both NYCPS and DHS would integrate entries from families into existing agency systems to collect new information, monitor for changes, and to identify potential errors.

Recommendation 5D: Ensure that NYCPS staff have an internal process of reviewing students with similar names, dates of birth and other enrollment information to identify cases of duplicates in the NYCPS system. The NYCPS has an existing mechanism for merging duplicate records to one Student ID. Once merged to a single Student ID, a final check must occur to ensure that the student continues to be matched to their corresponding DHS record.

Recommendation 5E: When NYCPS staff reconcile unmatched student records in NYCPS and DHS systems, a linkage occurs. The linkage allows NYCPS to know that a student is in a shelter and needs to be routed for busing. However, the linkage NYCPS makes does not prompt either agency to update the students' name or date of birth. Follow up with the family must occur to confirm the correct name and date of birth and then one or both systems must be updated to ensure a total match (as opposed to just a linkage).

**Challenge 6: Students in Domestic Violence (DV) and Housing Preservation and Development (HPD) shelters, as well as Humanitarian and Emergency Response and Relief Centers (HERRCs) are not part of the DHS shelter system. Therefore, they are not entered into the DHS system, would not be matched to a NYCPS record, and would not be routed for busing through the usual mechanism. Students in these shelters receive busing through an exceptions form process. Thus far, the process to obtain and complete an exceptions form, and to confirm that a student has been routed has been unclear, and there is also no dedicated NYCPS or shelter staff who manages the process.**

Recommendation 6A: Across the approximate 57 DV shelters and HERRCs, NYCPS should hire or reassign excess staff to at least 6 positions to support students and families at roughly 10 shelters each, similar to the support Shelter-Based Community Coordinators are providing. These staff will be trained in the process for requesting busing for students (including how to request busing for students with and without IEP-mandated transportation in DV shelters while maintaining confidentiality of DV shelter site location), they will see the exceptions process through for each child in need, turnkey training to shelter and NYCPS school-based staff to ensure awareness of policies and procedures. Note that HPD shelters currently have Family Assistants that support the exceptions process, and should be activated to knowledge-share and model best practices.

Recommendation 6B: NYCPS should build STH team capacity and ensure that STH Regional Managers should have regular check-ins with shelter staff to ensure that students are receiving busing as appropriate. Where students are not receiving busing, shelter staff should share the



exceptions form. Further, STH Regional Managers, shelter-based community coordinators or designees should regularly (e.g., weekly) pull data to identify students in DHS shelters eligible for busing who are not being bused and provide guidance to families to offer assistance in resolving busing delays.

Recommendation 6C: The Office of Pupil Transportation (OPT) and Automate the Schools (ATS) teams should build out more comprehensive mapping and data entry functionality to support busing of special education students in DV shelters and ensure that an appropriate mailing address is recorded.

OPT has a list of the DV shelters by name (e.g., Freedom House) and P.O. Box, and has assigned pick-up locations for each of them. When an Exceptions Request is submitted for a student in a DV shelter, the form includes the name of the shelter which makes the pick up location clear, even in cases where multiple DV shelters use the same P.O. Box. However, there is a concerning issue with arranging for special education busing for students in DV shelters that share a P.O. Box across multiple locations. Currently, OPT routes special education busing based on the address information in ATS; note that the difference here is that Exceptions Requests are not used for students with mandated transportation on their IEPs. Therefore, if a school only enters the P.O. Box in ATS and not the name of the shelter, and the P.O. Box is shared among several locations (e.g., Sanctuary for Family's Rosa Parks House and Freda Kahlo House both use P.O. Box 1406), it will be unclear where to route the student resulting in students being picked up at the wrong location. As a temporary solution, OPT and the Human Resources Administration (HRA) created a handful of "fake" P.O. Box numbers and instructed schools to enter them into ATS when such cases arose. While this solves the busing issue, it prevents parents from getting mail from the school because they have a "fake" address on file. A solution to this problem would be to create a protocol and training for schools, DV shelters, and STH staff about how schools must enter both the correct PO Box and DV shelter name into ATS and how OPT should arrange busing for these students based on the PO Box and shelter name (similar to what is done with the Exceptions Request). STH, OPT and ATS should also discuss the feasibility of creating a transportation address in ATS that would be used solely for busing; this address would default to a family's permanent address unless a school processed a change, and schools should be able to enter start and end dates at the family's request.

**Challenge 7: Improve the turnaround time for updating a bus route for students who move from one shelter to another. Currently, there is no automatic notification process and there is therefore a gap in providing busing to the student.**

Recommendation 7A: NYCPS should develop a daily matching process between the prior day's and current day's feeds from DHS. Where there is a delta in the shelter location, the bus route should be updated automatically based on the student's new shelter location.

Recommendation 7B: DV, HPD and HERRC shelter staff should notify their NYCPS point (established in Recommendation 5A) that a student has moved to a different shelter, pursuant there are data-sharing agreements in place between agencies. As NYCPS points may be doing rounds, it is necessary to notify the point so that they can prioritize an adjustment to the exceptions process for a student that moved. Shelter staff should notify their NYCPS point person, and NYCPS should start to process changes with a specific start date to maximize the

time students have appropriate transportation (dependent on whether the functionality identified in Recommendation 5C is developed).

**Challenge 8: Clarify the language in the electronic [Exceptions Request Form](#) so that only those students who require an exception submit a form. The current language on the form for requesting busing for students in temporary housing for whom busing is not automatically arranged is not clear as it implies that all students in temporary housing need to request an exception to transportation eligibility.**

Recommendation 8A: The [Exceptions Request Form](#) beginning prompt should be updated to clarify that a student's right to transportation based on their housing status and other factors, as applicable, such as grade level and proximity to school, and that the student (or shelter staff supporting the family) do not need to complete the form unless they reside in a non-DHS shelter. It is important that the language regarding busing requests for students in temporary housing be as clear as possible because often, for example, it is DV shelter provider staff who submit busing requests for students in their shelters, and they are often unfamiliar with navigating the NYCPS. And, the page should be easy to understand for parents.

## **C. School Responsibilities**

Students in temporary housing are afforded the protections of the McKinney Vento Act to promote school stability and enhance their success in school. Transportation is necessary to maintain school stability and allow students to consistently attend school. Many students in temporary housing face multiple barriers in accessing transportation, including delays of weeks or even months without any transportation. These delays often result in unnecessary school transfers disrupting school stability and student success.

Pursuant to Chancellor's Regulation A-780 Section VII, the NYCPS is required to provide busing, or a comparable alternative mode of transportation other than public transportation, for all students residing in shelters in grades K-6. Additionally, the NYCPS is required to provide busing to all students in temporary housing with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) whose IEPs recommend busing. When a parent is interested in busing for their student, school staff support in submitting an exception request. School staff should consult with the school-based STH liaison and, if necessary, appropriate staff at OPT and/or NYCPS STH, to follow up when transportation has not been arranged in a timely manner. Under Section A-780 of the Chancellor's Regulation, school staff are responsible for updating the student's address in ATS and OPT must provide busing within 5 school days of the address change. School staff lack the knowledge needed to arrange busing appropriately or troubleshoot common issues related to busing, especially when involving students with more complex transportation needs such as students in temporary housing with special education needs or residing in domestic violence shelters. Frequently, families are erroneously told they are not eligible for busing or it is unclear who is responsible for updating students' addresses. As a result, bus transportation is not arranged. Consequently, many students then face difficulty in attending schools and are effectively forced to transfer schools mid-school year and/or becoming chronically absent. Families and shelter staff have shared that schools often do not explain all transportation options to families including whether they are eligible for busing or other forms of transportation leaving families without the knowledge to make the right decision for their children. Because school staff are typically the first people families in temporary housing interface with to obtain information about their transportation options, it is critical that schools are well informed and prepared to support families in temporary housing to promote school stability and student success.

To provide schools with the tools they need to promptly arrange busing for students in temporary housing and resolve transportation-related issues, the committee has outlined several challenges hindering bus service and recommendations to address these challenges.

### **Challenge 9: Single policy guide outlining district and school responsibility regarding all transportation supports and options for students in temporary housing.**

Recommendation 9A: Create single policy guide that aggregates all key transportation policies, procedures, processes, and guidelines impacting provision of transportation service to students in temporary housing and delineating responsibility across schools, district, OPT, NYCPS-shelter based staff, and non-NYCPS shelter staff. Once completely drafted, NYCPS must seek input from stakeholders outside of the NYCPS who interface frequently with barriers to transportation for STH to review the guide and provide feedback on the guide prior to publication.

Guide must be available to all NYCPS staff, non-NYCPS shelter staff, and families so that all involved parties can access the steps necessary to implement transportation, similar to the NYCPS's Standard Operating Procedures Manual (SOPM) for Special Education. Guide should be updated regularly with any changes to policies and procedures regarding transportation.

In addition to being available online, physical copies should be made available at schools and shelters. See Communications Recommendations for more information and how information should be shared across platforms, including language access.

Guide must include specific roles and responsibilities for school-based staff, NYCPS's students in temporary housing division, OPT, NYCPS shelter staff, and as non-NYCPS shelter staff including:

- School-Based Transportation Coordinator: See below for specific responsibilities related to forms of transportation
- School-Based Students in Temporary Housing (STH) Liaison: Responsible for ensuring families are fully informed of all transportation services available to families in temporary housing and that they are assisted in accessing transportation including: requesting additional metrocards when necessary for STH students, supporting transportation coordinator in troubleshooting issues with transportation for STHs by escalating issues to OPT/STH, and making sure that the school has metrocards available for STH families as needed.
- NYCPS Shelter-Based Community Coordinators
- NYCPS School-Based Community Coordinators
- NYCPS Family Assistants
- NYCPS Bridge-the-Gap Social Workers
- Non-NYCPS shelter-based staff (especially at shelters with no NYCPS staff)
- Success Mentors

Guide must include escalation paths to assist school-based staff and shelter staff with steps that must be taken to troubleshoot various difficulties that may arise when arranging transportation. Flow charts detailing various escalation paths for common transportation issues (ie. what to do when transportation is not arranged within 7-10 days). Section on which issues should be resolved by OPT and which should be resolved by NYCPS's STH division.

Guide must include specific sections dedicated to supporting students in temporary housing who:

- Receive special education busing in grades 3K-12 (ie., how to update residency information and request transportation, how to arrange accommodations)
- Attend 3K and PreK programs at NYCPS schools, charter school, non-NYCPS programs
- Transition into permanent housing
- Attend summer programming
- Attend afterschool programming

**Recommendation 9B:** Make contact information for the school-based STH liaison and school-based transportation coordinators available publicly on each school website (including charter schools, preschool programs, district (1-32) schools, district 75 schools, district 79 schools). In addition, contact information should also be made available on the "Find a School" page for each school.

Add school-based transportation coordinator and school-based STH liaison name and contact information to the McKinney Vento posters required to be available to the school community on a yearly basis.

If there is a section for STH transportation in the school's consolidated plan, the school-based transportation coordinator and school-based STH liaison's will inform the school community at least twice a year (August, January) that they are the primary contacts for STH transportation.

Recommendation 9C: Required bi-yearly workshops conducted by OPT in August and January of each school year for school-based transportation coordinators at all schools including district schools, charter schools, non-NYCPS preschool programs, and committee on special education (CSE) offices. School-based transportation coordinators should be required to conduct turnkey professional development opportunities for the school community on transportation changes presented during bi-yearly OPT workshops.

### **Challenge 10: Arranging and implementing busing for students in temporary housing.**

Recommendation 10A: Clear policy guidance on eligibility for busing. NYCPS must include in Guide (Recommendation 8A) eligibility requirements for busing for students in temporary housing.

- Eligibility:
  - All students in shelter grades K-6
  - All students with IEPs grades 7-8 who do not have busing recommended by their IEP
  - All students in temporary housing who have busing on their IEPs
  - All other students in temporary housing can receive busing if route available
  - Students who transition into permanent housing for remainder of school year and for one additional year if the student is in the terminal grade in the school building
- Expanding Eligibility: NYCPS should *strongly consider* expanding the busing mandate within next 2 school years so that all students in temporary housing can benefit from consistent education:
  - Students in shelter grades 3K-PreK
  - Students in shelter who attend summer programming and/or afterschool programming
- In addition to including this policy in 8A, NYCPS must create one pager on who is eligible for busing. One pager should also link to overall guide 8A. See communications recommendations for distribution, language access.

Recommendation 10B: Transparent roles and responsibilities for district, school, and shelter-based staff involved in arranging timely busing service and supporting families/students/schools. As mentioned in Recommendation 8A, roles and responsibilities of school-based staff, NYCPS-shelter based staff, NYCPS STH, OPT and non-NYCPS shelter staff must be clearly defined.

Guide from Recommendation 8A must include guidance for school leadership on what factors to consider when selecting who will serve as the school's transportation coordinator, including the availability of staff to support during times of high transportation requests (ie. August and

September). Guidance should also be provided to ensure there is year-around support for transportation requests (i.e. summer support). Similar section must include guidance for school leadership on what factors to consider when selecting who will serve as the school's STH Liaison.

#### School-Based Transportation Coordinator:

- explaining transportation options to families in temporary housing upon enrollment or upon receipt of change in housing status
- notifying families in temporary housing of their eligibility for busing upon enrollment or upon receipt of change in housing status
- Coordinating with the person responsible for updating student information (i.e. pupil personnel or accounting secretary) to update a student's address within 1 day of receiving notification of new address
- Complete request for busing, including completing exception request forms for students who are not automatically routed (ie. exceptions form for non-DHS shelter students, confirming match with DHS system)
- notifying the family and shelter-based staff of the status of the busing request for busing within 5 school days of the request
  - Notification should occur through at least two forms of communication (ie. phone call, email, text message)
  - NYCPS should consider creating automated notification 5 school days from request through robocalls, etc.
  - All notification must be in family's preferred language
- providing the family information regarding their transportation options (including prepaid rideshare, metrocards) while busing is pending and/or delayed beyond 7-10 school days of the request for busing
- requesting other forms of transportation when busing is pending and/or delayed beyond 7-10 school days. See below for more.
- assisting families with obtaining changes to the bus route when they move to other housing.
- acting as the escalation point for families with questions or delays regarding busing, metrocards, limosys and reimbursement.
- Troubleshooting: NYCPS will create checklist of questions that transportation coordinators must use when family comes to school with issues with transportation
  - Including questions such as: are you in temporary housing, does the child have an IEP, does the IEP mandate busing, do you need to change your address, etc.

#### School-Based Students in Temporary Housing Liaison:

- Advising school community of eligibility requirements for transportation for students in temporary housing
- Ensuring all families identified as in temporary housing are connected with transportation coordinator to arrange transportation
- Supporting transportation coordinator with addressing barriers to arranging busing including directly connecting with OPT and/or NYCPS STH when busing is not arranged within 10 school days

#### Other School-Based Roles/Shelter-Based Roles

- District STH Office Role
- District Transportation Liaison Role

- OPT Roles

Recommendation 10C: Process map for arranging and implementing busing and escalating issues. Step-by-Step directions for how to arrange busing for various student groups in temporary housing and how to resolve issues with busing must be included in 8A. This should include which district offices are responsible for resolving challenges with transportation. Additionally, NYCPS must create step-by-step one pager for arranging busing for students in temporary housing. Specific one-pages should be created for the following groups:

- Students in DHS shelter grades K-6 and students with IEPs grades 7-8 without busing
- Students in 3K and Pre-K in temporary housing
- Students IEP mandated busing grades 3K-12
- Students in DV shelters
- Students in HPD shelters
- Students K-6 in temporary housing (not shelter) that would like to request bus route if available
- Students who transitioned into permanent housing

**Challenge 11: Procuring and providing metrocards for students in temporary housing.**

Recommendation 11A: Clear policy guidance on eligibility for metrocards to include:

- All students grades PreK-12 are eligible for MetroCards
- All students waiting for busing are eligible for MetroCards
- Parents who accompany their children to and from school are eligible for MetroCards

Recommendation 11B: Transparent roles and responsibilities for district, school, and shelter-based staff in the metrocard provision process and supporting families/students.

School-Based Transportation Coordinator: Responsible for explaining to families their eligibility for MetroCards and for providing student and parent MetroCards to all STH families, ordering additional MetroCards for STH families throughout the school year. Metrocards should be provided to eligible families on the *same day as requested*. If the school is waiting families should receive Metrocards from the STH office within 2 school days and schools should provide families additional cards within 5-7 school days of order.

STH School-Based Liaison: Support School-Based Transportation Coordinator in eligibility questions for MetroCards, confirming status of STH family, and escalating issues with obtaining additional MetroCards for STH families throughout the school year.

Recommendation 11C: Process map for procuring and providing metrocards and escalating issues. Guidance created through 8A will contain a directive on how transportation coordinators can procure additional MetroCards during the school year. STH School Liaison/Transportation Coordinator should reach out to STH Regional Manager as the first step in resolving issues with MetroCards.

**Challenge 12: Arranging and implementing other transportation services such as prepaid rideshare and processing reimbursements as well as considerations for families who require transportation but cannot access prepaid rideshare and/or reimbursement.**

Recommendation 12A: Clear policy guidance on eligibility for other transportation options such as prepaid rideshare and reimbursements.

- Current Eligibility:
  - Students in temporary housing for which a route does not exist in grades K-6 or 7-8 with IEP without busing
  - Students in temporary housing with IEP-mandated busing and/or bus accommodations (bus paraprofessional, nursing) that is not being implemented
- NYCPS should *strongly consider expanding eligibility* to the following groups of STH:
  - Students in 3K and PreK who require busing but a route does not exist/not available
  - Students who need transportation other than metrocards to get home from afterschool programming
  - Students who need transportation other than metrocards to get to/from 3K and PreK and no bus route is available
  - Students in temporary housing who are waiting for busing to be implemented beyond the 7-10 school days required to implement busing

Recommendation 12B: Transparent roles and responsibilities for district, school, and shelter-based staff in provision of other transportation options and supporting families/students.

School-Based Transportation Coordinator: Responsible for advising families when they are eligible for prepaid rideshare, explaining prepaid rideshare requirements and requesting prepaid rideshare.

District Transportation Liaison: Responsible for supporting the school in requesting prepaid rideshare and explaining other options are available.

Recommendation 12C: Process map for arranging and implementing other transportation options such as rideshare and reimbursements.

- Guidance in 8(1), must include step-by-step process and roles for requesting rideshare and requesting reimbursement.
- Issues with reimbursement and prepaid rideshare should be escalated to District Transportation Liaison.

Recommendation 12D: Alternative Options for Families that cannot use prepaid rideshare and/or Metrocards. NYCPS/City will explore alternative options for interim transportation when bus service is unavailable that does not rely on the ability of the child's parent to accompany the child, such as funding chaperones to accompany students using NYCPS's prepaid rideshare service or contracting with companies that use smaller vehicles with vetted drivers, such as HopSkipDrive, used by school districts such as Los Angeles.

**Challenge 13: Arranging and implementing transportation services for highly vulnerable groups and during transitional periods such as the first day of school and summer school.**

Recommendation 13A: Improving arranging and implementing of transportation services for first day of school.

- Exception form to request busing should be made available to families in June/July prior to the beginning of the school year



- OPT should begin processing requests in August prior to the beginning of the school year
- Transportation Coordinator should be available to assist with arranging transportation in August.
- STH Families should be notified during the summer that they can go to their school on select dates to arrange transportation.
- If busing is not arranged for the first day of school, the Transportation Coordinator should provide Metrocards or arrange prepaid rideshare to the family by the next school day. See above for more details.

Recommendation 13B: Improving arranging and implementing of transportation services for summer school.

- Exception form to request busing should be made available to families in April/May prior to the beginning of the summer session
- OPT should begin processing requests in May prior to the beginning of the summer session. In the case that a student enters the system after May, NYC Public Schools will make sure requests are processed in a timely manner.
- STH Families should be notified when they can begin requesting summer busing
- All families in summer program should be notified of who is responsible for transportation during summer programming
- If busing is not arranged for the first day of summer, the Transportation Coordinator should provide Metrocards or arrange prepaid rideshare to the family by the next school day. See above for more details.
- Issues with summer transportation should be escalated to District transportation liaison

## **D. Bus Routes**

The pandemic thrust school bus drivers into uncertainty. The outcome of not knowing when they would return to work, forced school bus staff to retire or enter into a new profession entirely. At the beginning of the 2022-2023 school year, the Office of Pupil Transportation reported that there was a driver shortage of approximately 500 drivers which affected 400-420 routes daily. While the bus driver shortage has improved, there is currently a shortage in replacement drivers (292 drivers) required contractually. Replacement drivers are used when the regular driver assigned the route is not available. Although there is a collaborative effort between NYC Public Schools and bus companies to alleviate the school bus driver shortage with creative approaches, the challenge continues as competitors in the transportation industry are actively seeking to recruit school bus staff that have already been trained. This not only impacts students in need of transportation but creates barriers for the NYCPS and bus companies as they work on resolving this issue.

This is a vulnerable population that NYC Public Schools is committed to supporting as best as possible. The STH busing committee goal is to provide safe, reliable and efficient transportation to our students in temporary housing as well as all students in need of transportation services. In line with that goal we have explored ways to resolve barriers like; driver shortages, updating student routing technologies, clarifying transportation policies, maintaining a laser focus on supporting our most vulnerable students as well as expanding transportation options. We believe we face these concerns with support of our elected officials and thought partners for the community, schools and families will keep us on track in achieving our goal.

New York Appleseed briefing on New York City Yellow Bus Service:

[https://www.nyappleseed.org/wp-content/uploads/NYA\\_YellowBusReport\\_April2022\\_Final-1.pdf](https://www.nyappleseed.org/wp-content/uploads/NYA_YellowBusReport_April2022_Final-1.pdf)

Bus Driver Shortage:

<https://www.timesunion.com/hudsonvalley/news/article/school-bus-driver-shortage-new-york-17808126.php>

Alternative routing systems:

- [EZRouting Video](#)
- [EZDistrict Video](#)

**Challenge 14: School bus staff were considered non-essential during the pandemic which resulted in lack of work opportunity, compensation and ultimately forced school bus staff to resign. There is also an ongoing challenge in hiring of school bus staff as competitors in the transportation industry are actively seeking to recruit school bus staff that have already been trained. Both scenarios have contributed to the shortage of bus drivers.**

Recommendation 14A: NYC Public Schools should seek legislative support and partner with MTA to create a program to develop incentive for trained NYCPS school bus staff that guarantees a job opportunity with MTA after a given timeframe of continued employment with NYCPS contracted bus companies.

Recommendation 14B: NYC Public Schools should work with the NYC School Bus Umbrella Services bus company (NYCSBUS) — a not for profit bus company created to give greater visibility into the operations of bus companies — to understand challenges in driver recruitment

and explore creative strategies for recruitment. NYC Public Schools should explore whether any successful initiatives can be replicated across the industry and consider the expansion of NYCSBUS.

Recommendation 14C: NYC Public Schools should encourage partners in city and state government to pursue state legislative change to allow for the inclusion of Employee Protection Provisions (EPPs) in school bus contracts.

Recommendation 14D: NYC Public Schools should rebid school bus contracts — scheduled to expire June 30, 2025 — to ensure these contracts reflect the needs of families and schools, include systems to measure performance, and to incent good performance of school bus staff who work on buses and who operate bus companies.

**Challenge 15: OPT routing systems used to route students in temporary housing who are eligible for stop-to-school or curb-to-school transportation need improvement.**

Recommendation 15A: While working with VIA, NYC Public Schools should continue to explore the possibility of using other routing systems.

**Challenge 16: Routing timeframe for students in temporary housing eligible for busing.**

Recommendation 16A: NYC Public Schools should minimize timeframe for routing eligible students via DHS automatic or Exceptions process and travel time for students eligible for busing residing in shelters located in close proximity to their school.

Recommendation 16B: Upon receiving notification from DHS of shelter closure(s)/openings(s), NYC Public Schools should provide immediate alternative transportation (i.e. MetroCards, rideshare after 10 days of waiting) to students while in the process of being routed.

**Challenge 17: Prepaid rideshare option is limited to students eligible for busing whose route is out of service or there is a delay in identifying a route due to the distance between the residence and child's school. Families and supporting STH school and shelter based staff are unclear on eligibility criteria and how to request rideshare. Families in temporary housing are not all able to pay out of pocket for alternate transportation and when they do, there is not a clear or readily accessible or known process for reimbursement.**

Recommendation 17A: NYC Public schools should update the information & guidance shared with families, school, and STH school-based and shelter-based staff regarding prepaid rideshare option to include eligibility criteria (including days in which a student will become eligible), how eligible families can request rideshare, and who they can contact for support.

Recommendation 17B: NYC Public Schools should expand prepaid rideshare to students in temporary housing who need transportation other than Metrocards in one of the following scenarios:

- Who are waiting for busing to start, including those waiting to be routed, those waiting for busing to begin after being routed, and those whose busing has been interrupted
- Who have IEP-mandated busing and/or bus accommodations (bus paraprofessional, nursing) that is not being implemented

- NYCPS will explore the possibility of expanding rideshare to students in 3-K and Pre-K where there is no bus route and to students participating in the afternoon portion of Summer Rising.

Recommendation 17C: NYC Public Schools should clarify the process for seeking reimbursement for transportation expenses for students in temporary housing and should ensure that parents, schools, STH team, and shelter providers are aware of that process and how to access it.

**Challenge 18: Students in temporary housing who want to participate in afterschool, Saturday Academy and interventions of SERS are most in need of these extra supports but are unable to participate in these much needed programs due to the limitations associated with transportation.**

Recommendation 18A: NYC Public schools should rebid school bus contracts to allow NYCPS to provide after school, evening, and weekend routes at a more reasonable cost so that students in temporary housing can better access afterschool programs and the recreational portion of Summer Rising (currently busing is only available for the academic portion of the Summer Rising program)

Recommendation 18B: In addition to busing supports, NYC Public Schools should expand existing policy to provide Parent/Guardian MetroCards for students participating in afterschool, Saturday and interventions of SERS regardless of if that student receives busing in the morning.

**Challenge 19: Busing for preschoolers is available only if there is an existing appropriate route available. The lack of busing poses a barrier to participation in 3-K and Pre-K for children in shelter.**

Recommendation 19A: The NYCPS should expand access to busing to all preschoolers in shelter to the same extent that it is available to students in K-6 who are in shelter.