

TESTIMONY of NEW YORK APPLESEED
THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL
COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION
Jointly with the Committee on Oversight and Investigations
Oversight of School Bus Transportation Services
November 21, 2022

My name is Nyah Berg and I am the executive director of New York Appleseed, a nonprofit organization that advocates for integrated schools and communities in New York City and State. I am testifying today to share with the council, what we believe to be, several of the most pertinent findings from a comprehensive research briefing we published on [yellow bus service](#) in April 2022.¹

When we first started our research, we did so to better support diversity planning initiatives in community school districts that often had to address questions of access for students who reside in transportation deserts or need extra assistance to attend an inclusive school setting. What began as a briefing intended to help in diversity planning quickly grew to encompass a more significant effort to bring clarity, and transparency and request greater accountability for a critical resource for many NYC students, particularly students of color and students with disabilities.

When working to untangle the incredibly complex history of yellow bus service in NYC three points rose to the surface: (1) the responsibility of getting children to school safely and on time is suffering from a fragmented system, only exacerbated by COVID-19, (2) the lack of accessible public data on student ridership is stunting accountability and most importantly, (3) students and families, particularly those from historically marginalized groups are going unheard in asking for quality transit on which they rely on.

To briefly elaborate on the above points, I highlight the following findings from the report:

- School bus delays and breakdowns seem to happen year after year with minimal calls for improvement. For example, there were 344,818 reported breakdowns and delays from 2015-2019, of which 72% involved buses carrying children in special education programs. These problems were only exacerbated by the consequences of the pandemic, and in the 2021-2022 school year, scores of students were left without buses for days, sometimes weeks, well into October. Additionally, while this follows our report, I think it is key to note the beginning of this school year was unsurprisingly more of the same, with reports citing bus delays and or buses not arriving altogether.²

¹ Please note: all evidence outlined in this testimony can be found in the following report, *Yellow Bus Service Research Briefing*, New York Appleseed, (Apr. 2022), available at <https://bit.ly/YellowBusBrief>.

² See Michael Elsen-Rooney, *New year, same school bus problems for some NYC families*, N.Y. Daily News (Sep. 8, 2022), available at:

- Despite providing transportation to all eligible NYC students in public, charter, and non-public schools, the DOE website contains almost no data or statistics on yellow bus ridership—past or present. The sole source of public data concerning ridership in NYC comes from an Independent Budget Office(IBO) report that is twenty-two years old and reflects K-8, not K-12 data. We had to contact the IBO directly for up-to-date information.
- The updated information we obtained from the IBO illustrated that in every borough except for Staten Island, Black, and Hispanic students make up the majority of students using yellow bus services in their borough. Buses for special education students also overwhelmingly serviced Black and Hispanic students. While these numbers may be of no surprise—considering NYC is a school system that is majority of students of color—it shows that the failure to supply dependable transportation is a burden shouldered, once again, by students and families from historically marginalized communities.
- Chancellor’s Regulation A-801, despite its importance in regulating quality transit services, has not been updated in over 20 years, despite past indications from the DOE it would do so in the 2019-2020 school year. As far as we know, this remains to be the case.
- The lack of updates in Regulation A-801 has seemingly led to discrepancies in what is presented on DOE websites, vs. what is outlined in the regulation. For example, Regulation A-801 provides that students in Grades K-2 are eligible for half-fare transportation if they reside less than 0.5 miles from their school, whereas the chart on the DOE’s website provides that they are not eligible for transportation at all.

Yellow bus service is a resource and a necessity for many of our most marginalized student groups to get to school, and yet at the heart of our nearly 40-page report is a story of harmful ambivalence to fix problems that families raise year after year. We offer the following next steps to navigate the complexities of yellow bus service more equitably in the future:

1. The New York City Department of Education can provide easily accessible public data on yellow bus ridership.
2. City leadership must require research on ways to better centralize responsibility for equitable dissemination and implementation of yellow bus service in New York City.
3. Facilitate comprehensive community engagement on the needs of students and families, particularly those from historically marginalized groups.

Thank you for listening and we welcome any follow-up councilmembers may have regarding our report.

