

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

ADVISORY NEIGHBORHOOD COMMISSION 3A



Resolution Regarding OSSE Transportation Services for Students with Special Needs

School transportation is a service on the signed Individualized Education Program (IEP) documents agreed to by the school district and parents or guardians of a student with special needs, under the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

The DC Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) is responsible for providing transportation for special needs students across the District.

OSSE has been the subject of multiple reports by parents, guardians, and others about failures to provide timely and safe transportation for District students with special needs.

In recent months, late and no-show buses have caused students with special needs, including students residing in our ANC, to miss class time, leaving families frustrated, concerned, and uncertain what to expect from one day to the next.

When the required transportation is not available, parents and guardians have to make arrangements on extremely short notice to help their children get to school.

Parents and caregivers who have to arrange alternate transportation often are paying out of pocket and then waiting a minimum of 30 days for reimbursement, while no "maximum" wait time is defined.

The lack of the expected and promised transportation at the end of the day means that teachers and staff are obliged to work overtime to care for the students during the time the students are waiting for a ride, and then to make sure the students get safe transportation home.

One result with even longer term implications is that special need students affected by the lack of transportation are not able to get the "free and appropriate public education" (FAPE) and services required by their IEP, because they cannot get to their schools.

Official responses to families and guardians about this problem have noted shortages of drivers and other staff necessary to support and maintain the required transportation services.

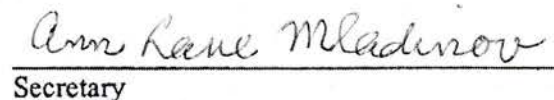
OSSE has not yet found an acceptable resolution to this urgent and important issue facing communities across the District.

The Commission urges that the Council, Mayor and OSSE give priority attention to solving this problem so special needs students have the transportation the District is required to provide and the burdens that ineffective school transportation is creating for families, guardians, caregivers, school personnel, and young people can be alleviated.

We are attaching a list of potential steps that affected residents have proposed as recommendations for addressing this issue.

The Commission approved this resolution by a vote of 4-0 at a duly noticed public meeting on March 21, 2023, at which a quorum was present. (Three of the five Commissioners constitute a quorum.) By this vote, the Commission also designates the Chair or his designee to represent the Commission on this matter.


Chair


Secretary

ATTACHMENT TO ANC 3A RESOLUTION REGARDING OSSE SCHOOL TRANSPORTATION FOR STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

The following suggestions for action have been developed by family members, guardians, and others affected by problems with OSSE School Transportation for students with special needs:

1. Provide gas and rideshare gift certificates to impacted families.
2. Work with families who need to be reimbursed to fill out the paperwork and get the money to them as soon as possible.
3. Hold harmless in performance evaluations the teachers, staff and schools who are losing instructional hours with their students because of bus delays or no-shows.
4. Investigate the causes of the difficulties with OSSE school transportation for special needs students and identify mechanisms for ensuring the failures do not recur and those responsible can be held accountable.
5. Develop an effective plan to address the loss of special education and related services to students caused by bus delays or no-shows.
6. Provide parents and guardians with a timetable for implementing policies to avert late buses and prevent or substitute for canceled or suspended routes.
7. Implement a software application similar to those used in surrounding counties where parents and students can track the school transportation vehicles so they can tell when the buses or vans are coming or if they are coming at all.
8. When a bus/ride is going to be earlier or later than the scheduled window, make sure the drivers can communicate the information directly to families, guardians, caregivers and students via phone and/or text, whichever is their preferred method of being reached.
9. Allow drivers to communicate directly with the schools they are serving to let the school personnel know about delays and schedule changes.
10. Require that the plans for school transportation services during an Extended School Year (ESY) will be made public earlier in the year than is currently done, so families, guardians, caregivers, and students can do more effective planning to accommodate the schedule.
11. Create calendars that clearly communicate when OSSE will and won't be providing transportation services and share the calendars before the beginning of the new school year so the information goes directly to parents, guardians, and students signed up to receive transportation services, and the affected parties can make alternative arrangements for transportation ahead of time for days when there will be school but no OSSE transportation services.
12. Ensure that bus drivers are properly vetted before hiring and make that process transparent to families, guardians, students, and schools (DCPS or otherwise).
13. Maintain an effective incentive program to attract and hire more bus drivers to address and prevent and staffing shortages.