



Department of Education's School Bus Services

What questions did the audit look at?

Did the New York City Department of Education (DOE) have proper operational controls to ensure that school bus service providers delivered timely, reliable transportation and complied with laws, regulations, and contract terms?

Why does it matter for New Yorkers?

DOE's school bus system transports more than 125,000 students each day to public, charter, and nonpublic schools, including students with disabilities who may rely on specialized services. Families depend on these services and failures in the system directly affect student attendance and access to mandated services.

The audit found that DOE did not adequately oversee school bus vendors or hold them accountable for poor performance. DOE did not proactively use readily available GPS and complaint data to identify trends and address problems. Instead, DOE relied on investigations of individual complaints to assess vendor performance but did not promptly investigate them or take effective corrective action to resolve them. In addition, DOE did not ensure that GPS devices were installed and used, or that practice runs were conducted for bus routes.

The audit also found that bus routing and student tracking technology was not implemented.

These lapses caused students to miss class time, support services, and free school meals, with special education students disproportionately impacted. These issues undermine educational equity and students' academic performance and progress may suffer as a result. Moreover, delays inconvenienced families and weakened public trust in DOE's ability to manage basic transportation services.

What changes did the agency commit to make following the audit?

- ▶ DOE agreed to better analyze trends by assigning contract managers to monitor vendors, reviewing prior complaints as part of investigations, conducting GPS reviews, and comparing planned route start and end times to actual arrival times for students.
- ▶ DOE agreed to strengthen vendor accountability by incentivizing good performance and providing greater accountability for poor performance, assessing damages for noncompliance based on GPS data, taking routes away from poor performers, and collecting route information from vendors at the beginning of the school year.
- ▶ DOE agreed to improve administrative oversight by establishing guidance on methods and tools staff should use when reviewing complaints and documenting all performance discussions with vendors.

AUDIT FINDINGS



DOE did not use readily available data to monitor school bus vendor performance and identify problematic vendors and routes.



DOE did not adequately and promptly investigate no show/late service complaints or take effective action to address chronic issues.



Special education students were disproportionately impacted by unreliable bus service, including excessive delays and problem runs.



Routing technology aimed at improving bus services delayed for four years due to development issues, with no timeframe for implementation.



Audit Recommendations	Agency Response
<p>1 Assign contract managers to vendors contracts to proactively conduct routine reviews and assessments of complaint data and vendor-reported delays to identify problematic routes and vendors that are performing poorly, discuss issues with vendors, implement corrective action plans, monitor progress until performance improves, and assess liquidated damages if vendors do not improve timely.</p>	<p>AGREED</p>
<p>2 Review and use prior complaints made regarding transportation issues as part of its investigation process to identify trends in vendor's poor performance.</p>	<p>AGREED</p>
<p>3 Consistently maintain vehicle numbers that service school bus routes and use them to systematically perform a GPS review for all complaints related to no/late service.</p>	<p>AGREED</p>
<p>4 Routinely compare planned route start and end times to actual times for students to determine whether vendors comply with key contract performance standards and IEPs, and issue violations and penalties as appropriate.</p>	<p>AGREED</p>
<p>5 Consider implementing enhanced minimum performance standards for timely and reliable service and adding minimum performance standards related to ride times and complaints in its new school bus vendor contracts. This should include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Setting minimum monthly performance metrics for on-time performance, no service, and ride times based on GPS data, and complaints relative to the number of routes, scheduled trips, or completed trips; 	<p>PARTIALLY AGREED¹</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> b. Establishing a structure that incentivizes good performance and provides greater accountability for poor performance and escalation including a tiered scale of penalties based on monthly performance metrics and increased penalties for repeated violations; c. Assessing liquidated damages for noncompliance based on GPS data; and d. Taking routes away from the poorest performers or terminating their contracts. 	<p>AGREED</p>
<p>6 Collect Curb-to-School route information, including pick-up and drop-off times, from the vendor at the beginning of each school year and not solely depend on the vendor to maintain this information.</p>	<p>AGREED</p>
<p>7 Fully enforce the terms of school bus contracts and assess penalties when GPS devices are not operational when buses are in service.</p>	<p>AGREED</p>

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8	Ensure that it is recovering any monies distributed to Via Transportation for required work that was not performed.	DID NOT AGREE OR DISAGREE²
9	Establish comprehensive policies and procedures that provide guidance on (1) the methods and tools staff should use and consider when reviewing complaints, and (2) requiring supervisory review before resolving complaints.	AGREED
10	Provide vendors with reports detailing planned and actual route start and end times, discuss those reports with vendors, and document those discussions.	PARTIALLY AGREED³
11	Formally document and maintain a record of all performance discussions with vendors.	AGREED
12	Formally document amendments made to Via Transportation's new delivery dates and work plan and submit that amendment for registration.	DID NOT AGREE OR DISAGREE⁴

¹ DOE stated that it is currently working on different methods to develop and implement performance standards for timely and reliable service outside of the contract, but DOE did not agree to implement performance standards for ride times.

² DOE stated that it will take this recommendation under advisement and that it expects VIA to fully comply with the terms of the contract.

³ DOE stated that it engages in dialogue and provides vendors with updated reports/route sheets as needed.

⁴ DOE stated that it will take the recommendation under advisement.

