



# Advocates for Children of New York

## Protecting every child's right to learn

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## Arranging Transportation Services

Obtaining transportation services can be a major problem for students, especially for students with disabilities who must travel a distance to school. Furthermore, whenever the Department of Education (DOE) needs to change a student's bus route, it will take a minimum of 5-7 days to process. Be proactive by making phone calls and following up with appropriate DOE staff until transportation services are in place. As always, consider submitting requests by fax or email so you have proof of delivery.

### ***What should I know about transportation services?***

The DOE provides transportation services based on grade, distance, and, if applicable, a student's Individualized Education Program (IEP). Students in grades K–6 generally receive transportation on yellow school busses under contract to the DOE. The Office of Pupil Transportation (OPT) determines bus routes in conjunction with students' schools. Students in grades 7–12 should receive Metrocards and are expected to use public transportation. Regardless of grade, students with disabilities are entitled to bussing if it is specified on their IEPs.\*

### ***Who is eligible for transportation services?***

**Students in grades K–2** are eligible for free transportation services if they live ½ mile or more from their school.

**Students in grades 3–6** are eligible for free transportation services if they live one mile or more from their school. Additionally, students are eligible for half-fare Metrocards for use on MTA busses if they live between ½ mile and 1 mile from their school.

In order to qualify for yellow bus service, students must live in the same district as their school (for most programs) or in the same borough (for city-wide programs). Exceptions are available for students in temporary housing, including shared housing arrangements and shelters.\*\* For complete information on OPT's requirements, visit their website at <http://www.optnyc.org/ServicesAndEligibility/getransportation.htm>.

**Students in grades 7–12** are eligible for full-fare Metrocards (with three trips a day) if they live 1½ miles or more from their school. Students in grades 7–12 are eligible for half-fare services if they live between ½ mile and 1½ miles from their school. Generally, students in grades 7–12 are not eligible for yellow bus service unless it is medically required.

### **NOTE:**

For students in grades 7–8, OPT may grant exceptions to allow the use of existing yellow school bus routes if public transit services are inadequate or unavailable. These students still must meet distance criteria in order to qualify for bus services.

**\* Students with disabilities** do not automatically receive yellow school bus transportation. Usually, they must meet the same eligibility requirements as general education students. Students are entitled to specialized transportation if they have a chronic medical or orthopedic disability, a severe emotional disability that requires support on the bus, or an intellectual disability to the extent that continued management and support on the bus is necessary.

**\*\* Students in grades K-6 who live in homeless and domestic violence shelters** are entitled to busing. Other students in temporary housing, including those sharing housing with someone else (sometimes referred to as 'doubled-up'), are entitled to free transportation, either busing or full-fare Metrocards, regardless of the standard age and distance requirements. Parents are also entitled to Metrocards if they need to bring children in preK – 6<sup>th</sup> grade to school on public transit. For more information, including forms and procedures, contact the NY State Technical Assistance Center for Homeless Students at <http://www.nysteachs.org/> or 800-388-2014.

## **How do students get transportation services?**

Schools should automatically set up transportation services upon a student's enrollment in school, at the beginning of a new school year, and when the student's eligibility changes based on his or her grade, distance from school or program. Parents should receive a letter in the mail from the bus company with the bus number, route number, bus stop and approximate pick-up time. If the parent does not receive a letter, contact the school or OPT before school starts and follow up to ensure that bussing begins. If a child moves during the school year, inform the school of the child's new address immediately; the school will change the child's address in the system and submit a request to OPT for a new bus route.

**Note:** OPT may issue a variance, which authorizes transportation for a student who is not otherwise eligible. Variance categories include medical conditions, hazardous conditions, emergency conditions, and shelter placements. Each variance requires unique documentation and must be renewed annually. For more information, visit <http://www.optnyc.org/ServicesAndEligibility/exceptions.htm>.

## **Where do I go for help with transportation issues?**

**STEP 1: Call the school immediately to ask about the transportation status.** The school may not have entered the correct address into the system or requested bus services from OPT. Ask the school to enter the address and to contact OPT immediately. The contact for transportation issues at public schools is usually the Pupil Accounting Secretary. As a general rule, it takes 5–7 days to route a student once OPT receives his or her information from the school.

**STEP 2: Contact OPT at (718) 392-8855 or [pupiltransportationteam@schools.nyc.gov](mailto:pupiltransportationteam@schools.nyc.gov).** Describe what is going on with your child's transportation and ask to file a complaint. Write down the complaint number that OPT gives you.

**STEP 3: Follow up with OPT.** Call back every day there is a problem and keep a log of the complaint numbers and issues. If your complaint is not resolved, ask to speak with a supervisor at OPT. If your child has an IEP, you have the right to file an impartial hearing over busing issues.

### **ADVOCACY TIP:**

Have the student's New York City ID number (a 9-digit number assigned to every NYC public school student) handy when you call OPT.

**Still have more questions? Please call the Jill Chaifetz Education Helpline:**

Monday through Thursday • 10 am to 4 pm • 1-866-427-6033 (toll free)

[www.advocatesforchildren.org](http://www.advocatesforchildren.org)

*This Tip Sheet does not constitute legal advice. It attempts to summarize existing policies or laws without stating the opinion of Advocates for Children. If you have a legal problem, please contact an attorney or advocate.*