

Transportation Still a Challenge Post-Sandy Even as More New York City Schools Reopen

Written by Michelle Fisher

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Two and a half weeks after Hurricane Sandy battered the East Coast and other areas, New York City has reopened nearly all of its public schools and worked hard to keep parents updated. Today President Obama took an aerial tour of the city, viewing devastated sections of Queens and Staten Island, where most schools have reopened but some without power.

All K–8 relocated schools had busing reinstated Tuesday, according to [the New York City Department of Education](#)

. The DOE website has been updated daily with information on school closures and transportation for students attending relocated schools. Seventeen closed schools were slated to reopen Friday. Another dozen schools that were temporarily relocated are scheduled to reopen after the Thanksgiving holiday on Nov. 30.

Until then, relocated students will continue catching the bus at 7 a.m. at their closed school building to be taken to their temporary location, with return service provided at the end of the school day. Students with Metrocard passes have been using transit to get to and from their relocation sites while those without cards may obtain them at their new relocation school. Students with IEP-mandated transportation may be picked up at their homes and taken to their temporary location. Families who choose to drop off or pick up their child from temporary locations are [eligible for reimbursement](#) .

Earlier this week, many students were finally able to return to their schools of origin, and attendance has surged to more than 90 percent, [NY1](#) reported. P.S. 253 was just one of 56 forced to move temporarily to different buildings because of storm damage. Officials are pleased to see attendance figures back on the rise. On Tuesday, 92 percent of students showed up compared to only 12 percent who went to the temporary location in Flatbush.

Part of the problem with the temporary locations the city arranged was the lack of reliable transportation, as many parents lacked access to cars or the subways, and a citywide school bus shortage limited the number serving the pickup sites.

According to the New York Association of Pupil Transportation, school sites with the largest bus shortages are in New York City and on Long Island. The latter had several hundreds of buses completely lost to the storm or deemed temporarily inoperable.

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[NYAPT Executive Director Peter Mannella said](#) the association is networking with school districts to determine what resources they need, and schools are working together to reinstate transportation services. More than two million students in New York rely on the yellow bus to get to and from school every day.

Because of bus and fuel shortages, alternate forms of transportation have been approved at the state level for the transport of K–8 students. On Nov. 7, Gov. Cuomo signed [an executive order](#) to temporarily suspend and modify the statutory revisions related to the transportation of school children statewide. The executive order states that "school bus requirements shall not apply to motor vehicles operated on an emergency basis for the transportation of New York City pupils, children of pupils, teachers and other persons acting in a supervisory capacity to or from school or school activities."

In addition, school bus drivers who do not meet standard state qualifications may now operate these vehicles. The order further states that provisions applicable only to school buses shall not apply to motor vehicles operated on an emergency basis for transportation in these cases.

New York state, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware and Maryland are also waiving tolls and other barriers for commercial motor vehicles assisting in the relief and recovery efforts in those states, per the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration. FMCSA is coordinating and expediting the quick delivery of fuel to the areas devastated by Hurricane Sandy and the subsequent snowstorm.

The agency has set up a 24-hour hotline to address questions related to Hurricane Sandy: 1-800-832-5660.

Similarly, the New York City DOE has instructed parents who have questions about their child's transportation to call the Office of Pupil Transportation at (718) 392-8855 or check the [Hurricane Sandy FAQs](#)