



THE STATE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT / THE UNIVERSITY OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK / ALBANY, NY 12234

EXECUTIVE DEPUTY COMMISSIONER  
(518) 473-8381  
E-mail: Sharon.Cates-Williams@nysed.gov

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Theresa Podagrosi  
Audit Manager  
Office of the State Comptroller  
110 State Street  
Albany, NY 12236

Dear Ms. Podagrosi:

The following represents the New York State Education Department's (NYSED) comments to the Office of the State Comptroller (OSC) regarding the follow up observations of the New York State Education Department's Oversight of Pupil Transportation Services (2022-F-5). NYSED's Office of Pupil Transportation continued to experience staff turnover and sustained vacancies during the time between the initial audit report and subsequent follow up observations. As stated previously, the Unit had begun to rebuild prior to the initial audit, and continues its search to fill vacant positions now, complicated further by the COVID-19 pandemic and a national employee shortage.

Nevertheless, we are grateful for the follow up observations and discussions with our colleagues at OSC. Please find responses to OSC's recommendations based on the findings associated with this engagement below:

Recommendation 1:

**“Work with School Districts and busing contractors across the State to ensure they are made aware of Department training record requirements.”**

NYSED continues to explore ways to expand our reach in this area. The Department's Office of Pupil Transportation staff already utilize multiple approaches to provide information to school transportation and school business officials as well as private transportation contractors. This includes remote and in-person presentations at multiple conferences and seminars each year, maintaining an up-to-date website, frequent communications with several umbrella groups for pupil transportation (both public and private sector) as well as participation in state-level advisory groups. Additionally, the Department continues to conduct scheduled and “surprise” on-site compliance reviews and inspections via its vendor PTSI.

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Recommendation 2:

**“Develop and implement a risk-based method to identify School Districts and busing contractors that warrant review to fully utilize all available site record reviews allotted in the PTSI contract.”**

We agree with this observation. We have new systems in development that will enable us to collect and analyze school transportation information more effectively. New systems currently in development will track compliance and identify operational and contractual risks, prompting on-site inspections to be conducted by the agency’s vendor.

Recommendation 3:

**“Work with DOE and other jurisdictions across the State to ensure that all reportable accidents are reported to the Department and PTSI.”**

We agree with this recommendation.

Recommendation 4:

**“In conjunction with the Department of Motor Vehicles, develop and implement policies and procedures to standardize monitoring of drug and alcohol compliance for drivers, monitors, and attendants.”**

NYSED agrees that this recommendation would have positive outcomes. While oversight of drug and alcohol testing falls under the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) and NYS Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV), NYSED continues to partner with its fellow regulatory colleagues to craft and endorse enhanced standards and consistency wherever possible. Transportation is considered a local function, however, and there are limits to the degree of standardization that can be achieved.

Yours truly,

  
Sharon Cates-Williams

c: Christina Coughlin  
Paul Overbaugh  
James Kampf  
Jeanne Day