

Bus-ness as Usual **by Dan Jacoby**

The furor over the sudden, chaotic changes in bus routes for New York City's school children continues unabated. Now Mayor Bloomberg is lashing out at his critics, including several City Council members and the Public Advocate. While kids all over the city are getting to school late, nobody is asking a very important question:

Why are so many of these kids taking buses to school anyway?

According to the Queens Courier, five-year-old kindergartener Salma Youssef has to travel over four miles to get to school. Is there an elementary school nearer to her home in Astoria? In fact, according to the NYC Department of Education website, there are at least half a dozen, so why isn't she going to one of them? The scramble to send very young children to schools far from their own homes is one of the stupidest aspects of our pathetic excuse for a school system.

It's one thing to grant a waiver for a child to go to a school that may not be in his or her official district, if the other school is just as easy to get to. But how many thousands of New York City children are being bused to schools far away for no reason that anyone outside of this screwy system (and most reasonable people inside it) would consider remotely legitimate?

There used to be – and ought to be – elementary, middle, and high schools in every residential neighborhood in the city. Is that no longer the case? If it isn't, why not? Whose insipid idea was it to deprive children of the opportunity to learn, socialize and play with their own neighbors? And in neighborhoods where such schools do exist, why aren't kids going there?

Mayor Bloomberg defends the new busing plan by saying, "we do have more dollars to put into the classroom." But how is that an improvement when, thanks to the new plan, the kids themselves aren't getting to the classroom?

Instead of spending over \$15 million paying some outside contractor to tell us how to save a mere \$12 million (which is now estimated to be a mere \$5 million), how about keeping kids closer to home? That way, the buses won't be needed, the city will save far more money, parents can be more confident that their children will get to (and home from) school, and the kids will have a much easier time.

And then, while the kids are in schools closer to home, the money saved can be redirected to making sure their neighborhood schools are kept up and well supplied. With tardiness rates down, school quality up, and money spent on education instead of bureaucratic nonsense, everybody who should benefit does benefit.

Or is it too much to hope that the simplest solutions will ever be implemented?