

NEW YORK

# Gonzalez: Mayor Bloomberg should stop blaming bus workers for the strike and look for creative solutions



The mayor's claims that he wants to protect competitive bidding seem hypocritical after his history of violating or ignoring such rules. He also fails to look at the reasons for rising bus costs that have nothing to do with the workers trying to protect their livelihood.

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School bus attendants and their supporters walk a picket line near a bus depot in New York on Thursday. New York City's first school bus strike in 34 years entered its second day Thursday with no resolution in sight and tens of thousands of parents scrambling to get their kids to school.

[Mayor Bloomberg](#) claims he won't give in to the job protections demanded by striking bus drivers because he wants to save the city money.

The city, he says, can't afford skyrocketing bus costs that now surpass \$1 billion annually for only 150,000 pupils — an average of nearly \$7,000 per student.

Furthermore, the mayor says he must obey the law by using competitive bidding to get the lowest price on bus contracts. He says job protections put into contracts after the last strike in 1979 were declared illegal by the courts because they stifle competition.

Of course, the companies offering lower bids will almost surely pay less to their drivers and decimate the existing workforce. That seems to be okay with Bloomberg.

Some may be stunned by the mayor's newfound love for competitive bidding rules. His administration, after all, ignored or violated such rules so often over the past decade that he's often been referred to as "No-Bid Mike."



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School buses sit inactive by the dozens during a drivers' strike on Thursday. The proliferation of charter schools, which Mayor Bloomberg backs, is one cause of rising bus costs he has overlooked. Some 20% of charter school students, who come from greater distances, take buses, as opposed to 9% of regular public school kids.

Even more amazing is the mayor's silence at the causes of skyrocketing bus costs that have nothing to do with the workers.

The biggest is special education. While only about a third of the 150,000 students bused daily are in special education, their transportation represents three-quarters of the total cost of the program — more than \$770 million. That's an average of \$12,000 annually per child, according the city's Independent Budget Office.

Many of those children ride long distances to private schools outside the city.

Bus union president Mike Cordiello says many routes are so ineptly configured by Tweed bureaucrats that his members run 186 routes daily to Westchester County, most of them with 6 children or less per bus. There are 25 buses per day to New Jersey, 16 to Rockland County, several to Connecticut.



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Mayor Bloomberg says he won't give in to bus union demands, because he wants to save the city money. Bus costs now surpass \$1 billion annually for \$150,000 students -- nearly \$7,000 per student.

On some routes, two monitors are needed per bus to carry children in wheelchairs down from walk-up apartments to the bus.

The cost of busing 100,000 general education students averages only \$2,600 each. But nearly half of those kids attend private, parochial and charter schools, which drives up overall cost.

Charter schools, in fact, are the new growth area for busing. Some 20% of charter students ride school buses, compared to just 9% of regular public school kids, according to one Independent Budget Office estimate.

Thus, Bloomberg's own policies of opening more charters that recruit kids from greater distances has inadvertently led to more greater for busing.

Instead of blaming union workers for trying to protect their livelihood, Bloomberg should look for creative ways to solve this dispute and end the strike.