



# NOT IN SERVICE

Why Public Transit Must  
Aim to Serve Students



FUND FOR  
EDUCATIONAL  
EXCELLENCE



## WHO WE ARE

The Fund for Educational Excellence is steadfast in its commitment to equity for all students regardless of race, socioeconomic status, gender, gender-identity, sexual orientation, religion, or immigration status. Our equity approach focuses specifically on racial and socioeconomic equity.

It is impossible to consider the current context of City Schools without taking into account our City's history of racial injustice. For the majority of children in Baltimore City, the ramifications of these injustices are ongoing. By proactively considering and measuring the impact of policy, practice, program, and resources provided to students of color and those living on the lowest socioeconomic margins; by intentionally engaging those most impacted by our schools in the problem-solving process; by co-creating new opportunities for students and families, the Fund seeks to play a role in reversing the negative effects caused by systemic racism.

# OBJECTIVES FOR *NOT IN SERVICE*

Find out...

- How City Schools students travel to and from school
- Why students travel the way they do
- How that experience affects them



# BACKGROUND

0

zoned high schools in Baltimore City Public Schools.

1.5

miles from school = minimum distance to be transit-eligible.\*

3

modes of core public transit managed by MTA: local bus, light rail, subway.

18%

of annual ridership on core service in the Baltimore region = City Schools students.\*\*

29K

City Schools students rely on MTA to get to school.\*\*\*

\* Baltimore City Public Schools Board of Commissioners Administrative .Regulation, May 14, 2019

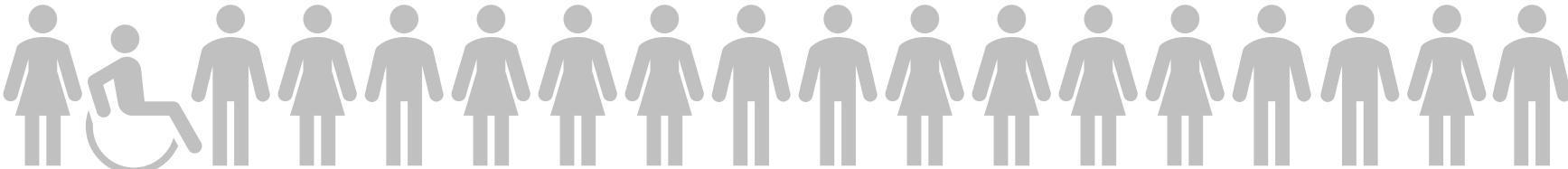
\*\* Estimate based on analysis of data from *Getting to High School in Baltimore: Student Commuting and Public Transportation*, Baltimore Education Research Consortium, January 2017; Baltimore City Public Schools SY19-20 attendance rates from the Maryland State Department of Education; and annual ridership numbers for core service from the MTA's presentation to the Fifth Annual Maryland Business Opportunities Summit, 2018.

\*\*\* "A delicate dance": In City Council hearing, MTA, Baltimore school officials discuss bus plans for students," *The Baltimore Sun*, September 9, 2020.

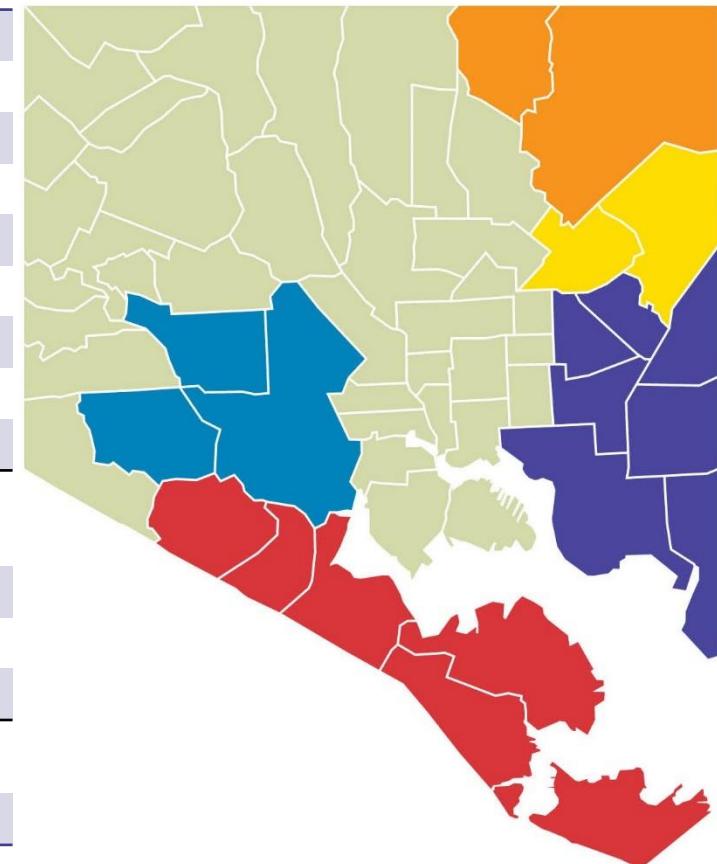


# HOW WE DID IT

30-minute interviews with 274 high school students



Race/Ethnicity	City Schools HS students	Students in our sample
Black/AfAm	83%	83%
Latinx	9%	6%
White	6%	2%
AAPI	1%	3%
Multiracial	--	3%
Other	--	1%
Household income		Students in our sample
< \$55K	Less than living wage for household of one adult and one child in Baltimore City	72%
> \$55K		18%
Car ownership		Students in our sample
Family does not have a car		23%
Family does have a car		73%



# THEMES AND FINDINGS

Student safety while traveling to and from school

How students get to and from school

High school choice decision-making

Employment and extracurriculars

Lost learning time

Commute time

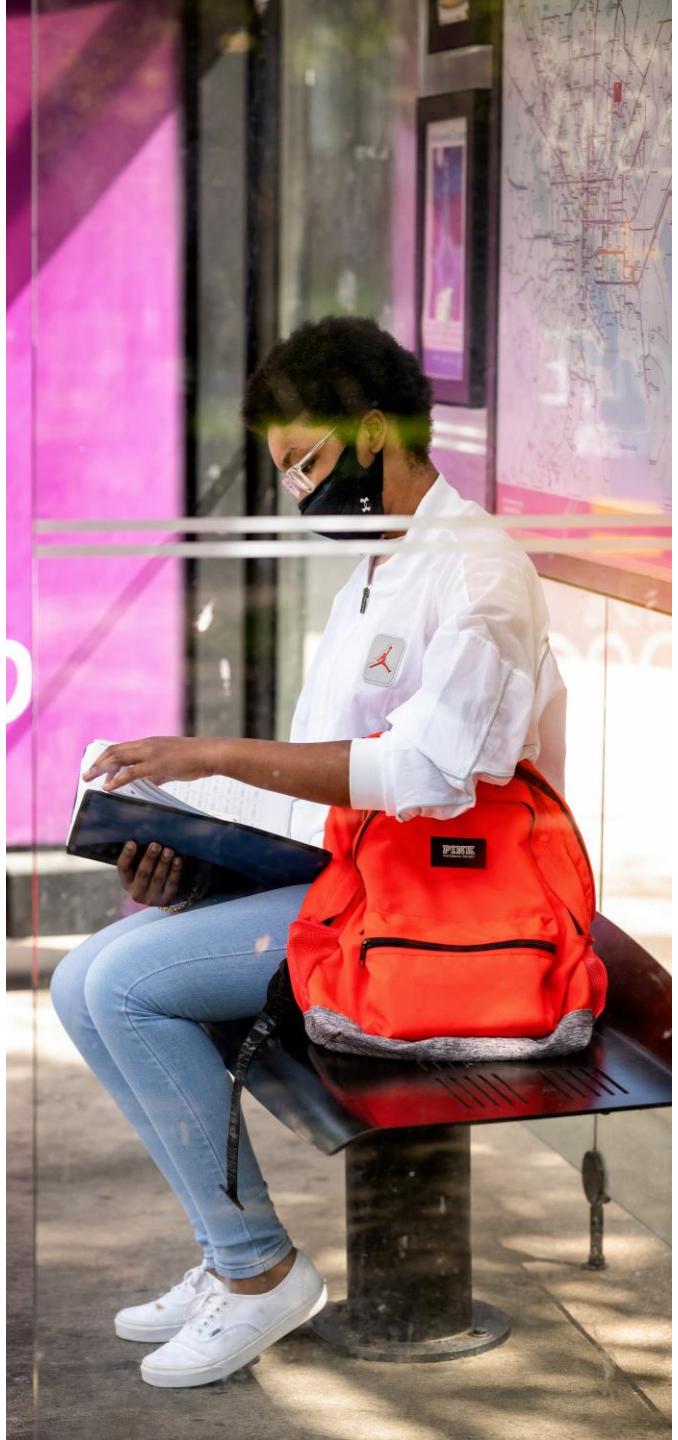
Observing and interacting with transit operators

Transit reliability

Negative experiences with adults on transit

Measures students take to ensure their safety while traveling to and from school





# STUDENT SAFETY

- Although many students feel safe overall on the trip to and from school, a number of students are uncomfortable or uneasy during at least part of the trip.
- Students feel unsafe when they have to travel early in the morning or after dark; navigate car traffic and unsafe driving; or are surrounded by a crowd of unfamiliar people on transit or at transfer points.
- Arguments and physical fights between adults on public transit happen frequently. Students often feel uncomfortable and irritated when an altercation erupts near them on public transit.
- Students report that it is not uncommon to see people who are high—or in the process of getting high—on public transit or at bus stops or train stations.
- A number of female students are sexually harassed by older men on their trip to or from school, making them feel uncomfortable and, at times, frightened.
- Many students feel a need to be cautious and vigilant while commuting to or from school and to be very aware of their surroundings.
- Some students intentionally avoid specific areas while walking to or from bus stops or train stations, and a few students say that they avoid certain bus routes or bus stops.

*The average City Schools student goes to a school in a neighborhood where **87** violent crimes are reported during the academic year and lives in a neighborhood where **95** violent crimes are reported.\**

Source: "Danger on the Way to School: Exposure to Violent Crime, Public Transportation, and Absenteeism," *Sociological Science* 6 (2019)



# SAFETY: STUDENT STORIES

## Amiya, 9<sup>th</sup> grade Baltimore City College High School

“I’m usually feeling a little unsafe in a way, because there are a lot of grown men...at the corners. We don’t see that they are actually doing anything, but there are...left around beers....they just standing all in one place, just chilling, like it’s a party or something....I’ll be there with my sister, but we still will be... feeling unsafe....And sometimes we walk to the other closest bus stop, because [the corners] will be overcrowded with men.”

To keep herself safe, Amiya tries to travel with her sister or a friend.

Because she doesn’t trust that she would be safe on the bus after dark, she does not participate in after-school activities.

## Deasia, 12<sup>th</sup> grade Vivien T. Thomas Medical Arts Academy

On a scale of 1 to 10 for safety, Deasia says her overall commute is a five. She takes her safety seriously, because she has been the victim of a robbery.

“Me and my god-sister were sitting on the bus stop and these guys walked over towards us. When I had looked up, he had pulled [a] gun out on me...and he told me [to] unlock my phone and stuff. Then they wanted us to unlock our phones and reset them. And while they were doing it, they just had the gun pointed at me...because of the way I looked, they thought I was a boy. So they...point everything towards me.”

# RELIABILITY

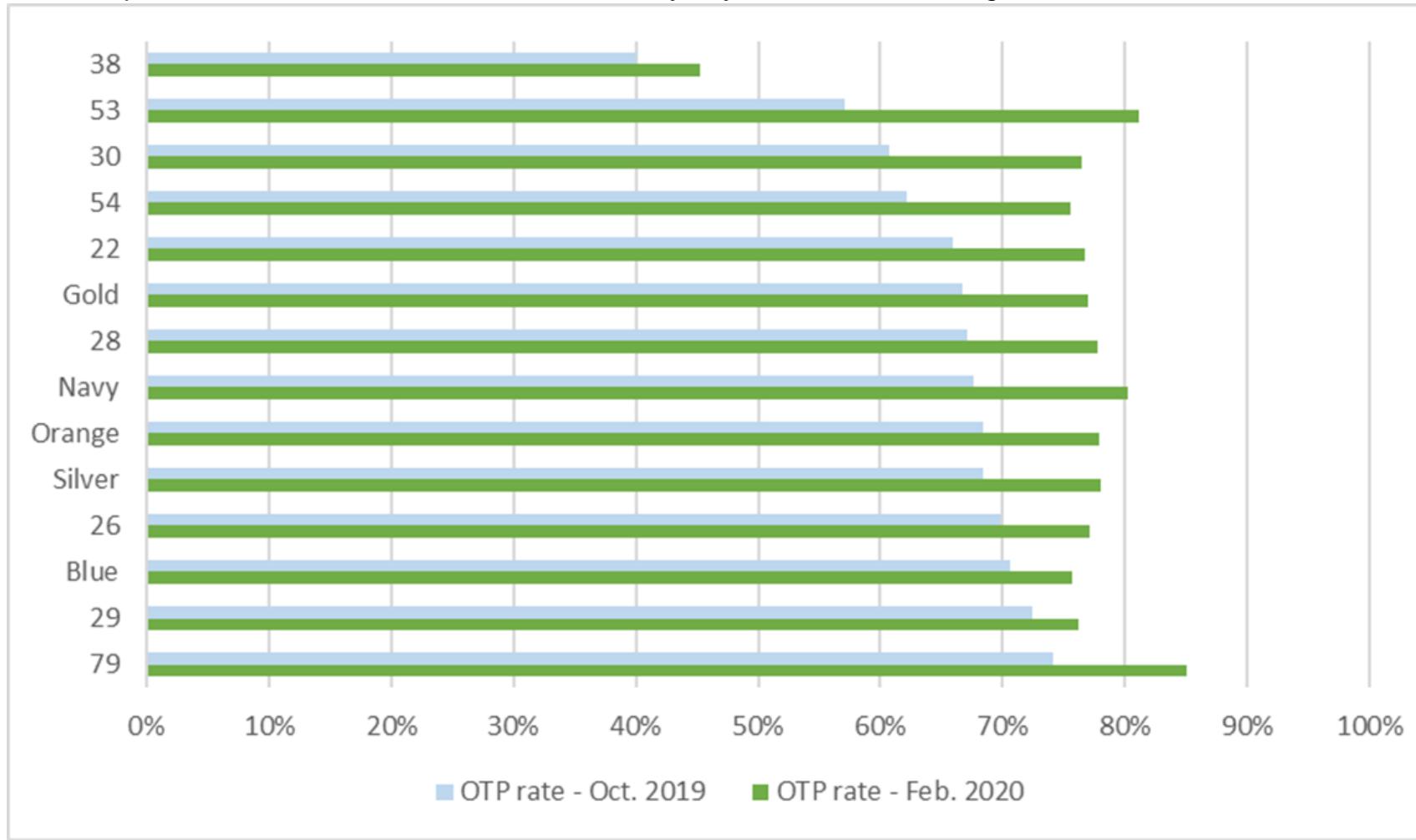
- Most students rely on MTA buses to get to and from school most of the time.
- Most students find MTA buses to be unreliable. Late buses or buses that do not come at all make students angry and anxious about the consequences they will face at school or at work.
- Students face more delays on days when the weather is bad. They also cite traffic congestion as a factor in the delays they experience.
- Some students feel that buses are more reliable than not, especially the supplemental buses that run on certain routes.
- Fewer students take the light rail and subway. They find the light rail unreliable, while the subway gets better marks for reliability.
- Many students get a ride regularly, if not frequently. Students sometimes call on a family member for a ride or get a Lyft if their bus does not come on time or if a sports practice or match ends after dark.

*High school student commutes are likely to be more complicated than the average trip of a public transportation user. Notably, we estimate that **two out of three (68%) high school students will need at least one transfer to get to school**; this differs substantially from estimates of the entire system (47%).\**

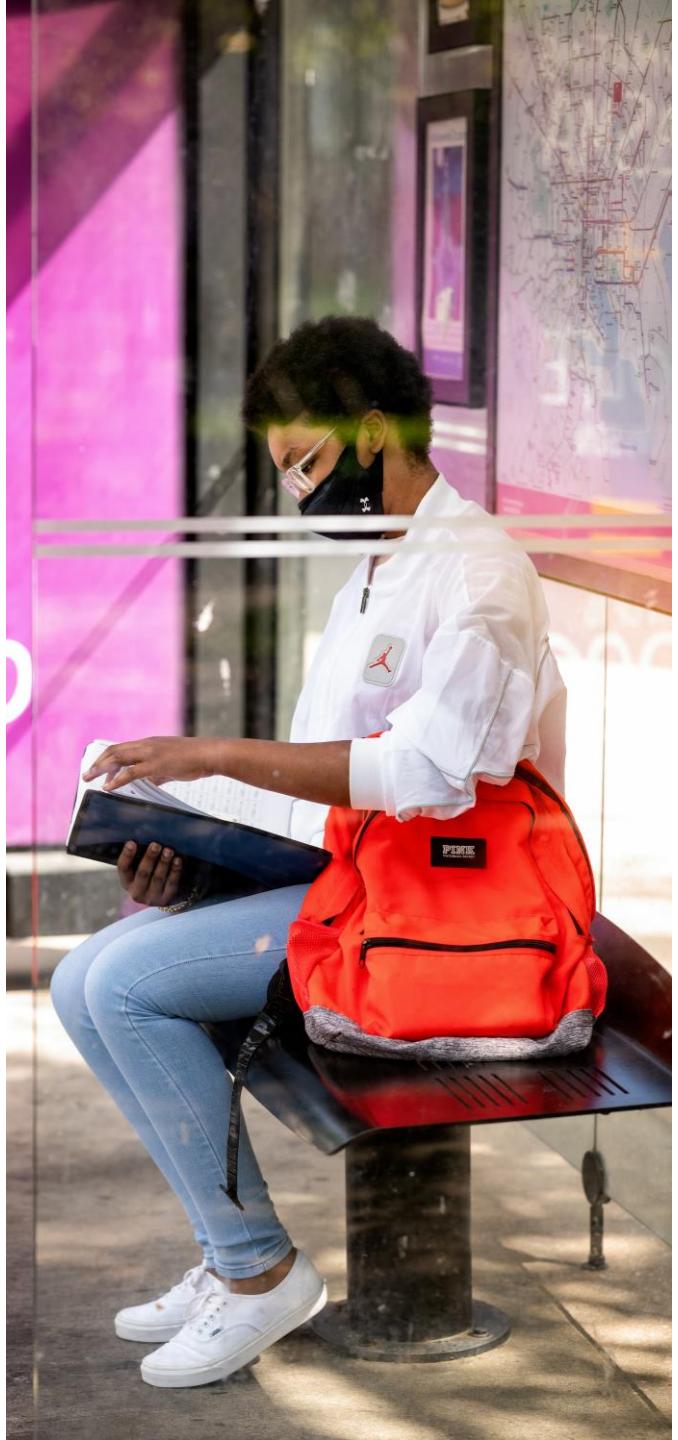
Source: *Getting to High School in Baltimore: Student Commuting and Public Transportation*,  
Baltimore Education Research Consortium, January 2017

# MTA BUS ON-TIME PERFORMANCE

*On-time performance for select MTA bus routes used by City Schools students to get to and from school*



Source: MDOT MTA Performance Improvement: On Time Performance by Route, October 21-25, 2019, and February 3-7, 2020.

A photograph of a young person with dark hair, wearing a white zip-up hoodie with a small red logo on the chest, blue jeans, and white sneakers. They are sitting on a black metal bus stop bench, wearing a black face mask and safety glasses. They are looking down at an open book. A red backpack is on the bench next to them. In the background, there is a pink wall with a map of a city street layout. 

# LOST LEARNING TIME

- Many students are late to school at least once, and sometimes multiple times, a week. Public transportation is the primary reason they cite for being late to school.
- Students say that missing even 10 minutes of their first period has a negative impact on their grades.
- While high school students are often absent from school, student absences are not usually caused by transportation issues. Students cite their own health issues and needing to care for another family member as the primary reasons they miss school altogether.
- Students report that long commutes take time away from their homework and, in some cases, limit their ability to take a job to earn money for themselves.

*City Schools 20,653 high school students were collectively tardy to their first period classes 335,470 times during the 2018-19 school year with 79% of high school students arriving late for first period at least once.*

Source: Data supplied by Baltimore City Public Schools Office of Achievement and Accountability, May 28, 2021.



# TRANSIT RELIABILITY AND LOST LEARNING TIME: STUDENT STORIES

**Ayotunde, 12<sup>th</sup> grade  
Baltimore City Polytechnic Institute**

“Typically, we’ll look at the bus app, it’ll say like, ‘[T]he bus is coming in the next five minutes,’ and the bus would never show up. That happens 100% of the time.

This level of unreliability often leads to Ayotunde being late to school.

“I’m late a lot, like quite a lot. So [the] last quarter before the pandemic, I had 23 late [days], and that’s like more than half [of the quarter]. Despite how late I am, even if the bus is messing up, I would wait until I could get on the bus.”

“It definitely impacts my first period, because...a lot goes on in five minutes. It’s only 10 minutes, [but] I was actually missing a lot to the point that my grades started dropping very low in my first period. But my other grades, it was OK.”

—Baltimore City College student

“If you’re late a certain amount of times, they drop your grade by one letter, and, to avoid that, I just don’t show up late. And that means don’t show up at all. Even though that’s probably not the best way to handle that.”

—Baltimore Design School student

# RECOMMENDATIONS

## Improved Service

- **Student recommendation:** The MTA should run more buses more frequently.
- **Student recommendation:** The MTA should improve the TransitApp.
- The MTA should take City Schools student riders into account when developing regular bus service, not just supplemental service.
- The next governor and administration, including the Maryland Department of Transportation and the MTA, should re-start Red Line development and implementation.

## Access for Students

- **Student recommendation:** Bus operators should allow City Schools students to board buses, even if they have lost their OneCard or left it at home.
- City Schools, the City of Baltimore, and the MTA should partner to provide City Schools students unlimited free access to MTA to get to school, after-school programming, internships, and jobs.
- The MTA should transition student passes from the OneCard to a CharmPass, where possible.

# RECOMMENDATIONS (continued)

## Safety

- **Student Recommendation:** The MTA, the City of Baltimore, and City Schools should add more shelters and better lighting to bus stops.
- The City of Baltimore and the MTA should jointly develop an initiative to combat sexual harassment on transit and at or around transit stations and bus stops.

## Communication & Accountability

- City Schools and the MTA should strengthen the existing memorandum of understanding (MOU) to define and outline expectations for each agency.
- MTA should allot seats on its MTA Citizens Advisory Committee to City Schools students in proportion to their share of ridership in the Baltimore region.
- MTA should make more data available to the public through the dashboard on its website.
- City Schools should develop awareness among school-based and central office staff of what students are going through to get to school.
- City Schools and the MTA should launch a Know Your Ride campaign aimed at helping students and parents consider commute as part of the school choice process and providing schools with materials about the tripper routes that serve each school.