On day nine of the New York City school bus strike, more yellow buses rolled out thanks to replacement bus drivers who took the wheel or acted as matrons on special-education buses.

Since the strike began Jan. 16, the city has certified 49 new bus drivers and more than 200 matrons, according to NYC Department of Education spokeswoman Marge Feinberg.

Leaders of the Amalgamated Transit Union Local 1181 met Monday with school bus company representatives at Mayor Bloomberg's official residence in an effort to end the strike but were unsuccessful. Bloomoberg did not attend. The citywide strike arose over contracts that were recently put out for re-bid for the first time in several decades. Absent were previous employee protection provisions for workers with seniority.

Feinberg told STN the number of newly certified matrons, or bus aides, is higher than that of drivers because of so-called hybrid companies that employ drivers who do not belong to the Local 1181 while the matrons are members.

"A non-1181 driver can get certified as a matron, so that the bus has essentially two drivers on board but one is certified and serving as a matron. This helps get more buses rolling," she said.

At this report, about 2,810 bus routes out of some 7,700 total routes were running — 85 more routes than yesterday. All pre-kindergarten runs were restored, along with more than 12 percent of general-education runs and 37 percent of special-education runs.

"Once a route starts running again, the Office of Pupil Transportation calls the families affected to let them know that their bus route is running again," Feinberg said.

Transportation staff also continues to update the route finder on the DOE website so families can check there as well.

The restored routes were welcome news to parents like Jeannine Cieri, who recently shared the travails of getting her autistic son to school during the strike. Cieri said it takes three subways, five elevators and about 10 blocks to get him to school in his wheelchair. On Jan. 24, she discovered one of the elevators was out of service, so she had to push his chair down three flights of stairs to get to the right train.

Cieri said she was so frustrated she called the offices to log complaints with Governor Andrew Cuomo, Commissioner of Education John King, Mayor Bloomberg and Chancellor Dennis Walcott. She became frustrated when she said no one would accept responsibility for the bus strike nor the need for a taxi/limousine voucher system to help children to get to school.

Cieri pointed out that most parents cannot afford to pay for daily taxi fare ($35-plus each way in her case) and wait for DOE reimbursement. So, she called Access-A-Ride and found out they will add a new student to their pick-up list "if possible" and charge $2.25 in exact change.

"If my son were to lose any portion of his return fare, he would not be able to board the bus," she continued. "On a special education bus, there is also a bus matron to make sure everything goes smoothly. This is not possible on Access-A-Ride and my son has autism — I am not sure how he would fare. I cannot take the chance with his emotional well-being."

As more buses hit the road on Staten Island, replacement drivers were booed and called "scabs" by striking bus drivers and matrons, who told CBS New York the replacements aren't qualified to handle students with special needs. The city requires a driver and matron on all special education buses.

Feinberg said the drivers and matrons who are being certified have completed the standard safety protocols and procedures as all other drivers and matrons, including:

- A Social Security card, and if not a U.S. citizen, a Green Card or Resident Card;
- A New York State commercial driver's license (CDL) with CDL "S" (school bus) endorsement and "P" (passenger) endorsement;
- A letter from the bus company, on company letterhead, requesting certification;
- Three letters of reference that attest to his or her character and work record;
- A final qualification letter (result of DMV fingerprint process);

- 13 county criminal history check letter dated within 60 days;
- Physical performance test dated within 60 days;
- Medical exam and tuberculosis skin test dated within 90 days (if it is positive, the results of a chest X-ray are required);
- Clean drug test results dated within 60 days;
- Abstract of official vehicle operating record from NYSDMV–19A Active-School Qualified, and if not, the driver should provide an add-on to roster letter from the DMV (DS-870);
- Pre-service training certificate (completion of five-hour course provided through an OPT-certified training location);
- Spring/fall refresher certificate (two-hour required refresher course provided through an OPT-certified training location and required each year for drivers); and
- Complete OPT application signed by bus company representative, as the driver will be certified under this company.