

Bus dispute forcing many to miss classes

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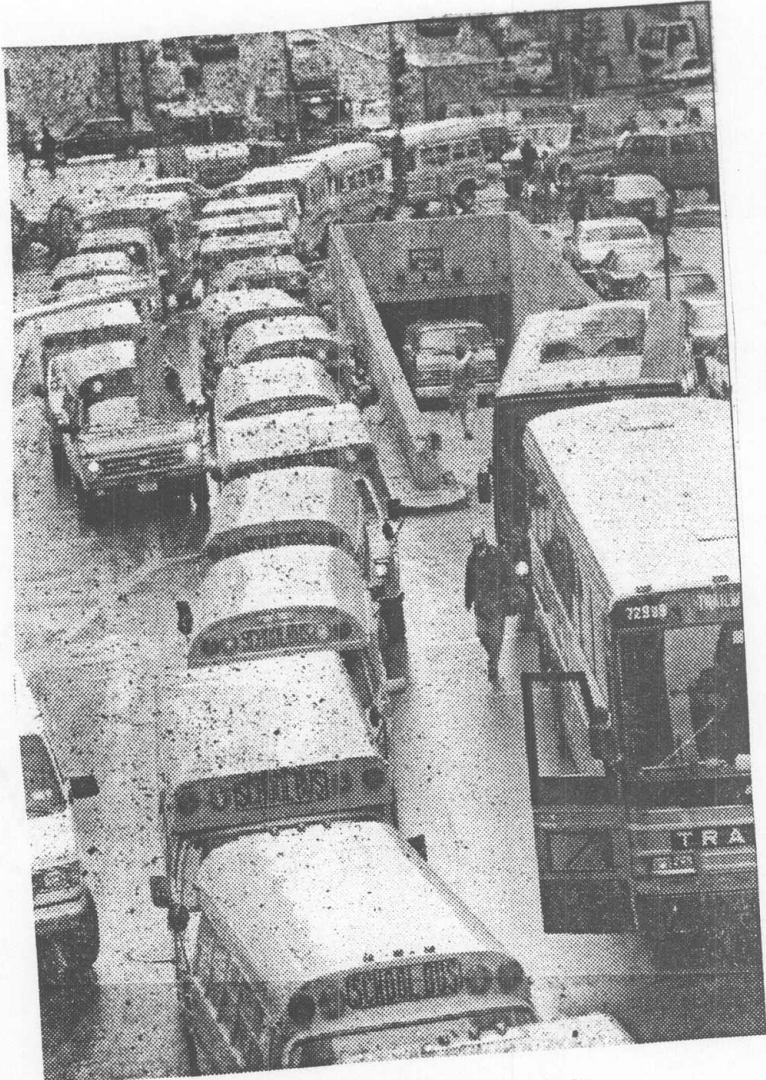
The stalemate over city contracts with bus companies that bring preschool children to special education classes has left parents and schools facing a host of problems.

The contract between the city Department of Transportation (DOT) and private bus companies expired last week. Since Friday, companies have been unable to transport children aged 3 to 5 to and from their programs.

Richard Steer, a Manhattan attorney representing the Pre-School Transportation Alliance, a group formed by the private bus companies, said the firms have no contract, and therefore no legal right to transport the children.

Steer said part of the problem is caused by a state requirement that the city engage in competitive bidding before entering into any contract. Legislation pending in Albany would lift that requirement in this instance, Steer said, and allow the bus companies to resume negotiations with the city.

City DOT officials could not be reached for comment. Frank Sabrino, a spokesman for the city Board of Education, said his agency would like to see the situation resolved, but that the contracts are the responsibility of DOT.



Above, Islander Joan Sterlacci and her son, John, try to cope with the turmoil caused in their lives by a school bus dispute.

At right, hundreds of school bus drivers circle the World Trade Center in Manhattan to present a petition to Gov. Mario Cuomo.