

**CITY OF NEW YORK**  
**THE SPECIAL COMMISSIONER OF INVESTIGATION**  
**FOR THE NEW YORK CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT**

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**VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL**

July 26, 2024

Hon. David C. Banks  
Chancellor  
New York City Public Schools  
Department of Education  
52 Chambers Street, Room 314  
New York, NY 10007

Re: Santiago Hidalgo  
SCI Case #: 2023-8141

Dear Chancellor Banks:

An investigation conducted by this office has substantiated that New York City Department of Education (“DOE”) Route Y195 Bus Driver Santiago Hidalgo (“Hidalgo”), an employee of the DOE contracted vendor Don Thomas Buses, Inc., made threatening comments to a then-eight-year-old, nonverbal student (“Student A”).<sup>1</sup>

**I. Investigation & Findings:**

On September 29, 2023, [REDACTED], [REDACTED], forwarded a complaint to the office of the Special Commissioner of Investigation for the New York City School District (“SCI”) that OPT received regarding Hidalgo. [REDACTED], [REDACTED], reported to OPT that the grandmother of Student A (“Grandmother A”) possessed video evidence of Hidalgo telling Student A to “shut up,” and that Hidalgo was going to “throw [Student A] out the window.” Grandmother A also alleged that [REDACTED] told Student A, “If you were my child, I will kill you,” and to “shut up.” [REDACTED] also allegedly hit Student A in the chest and yanked her by the arm.

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<sup>1</sup> Hidalgo is listed as ineligible in the DOE Personnel Eligibility Tracking System (“PETS”) and has a problem code assigned to his personnel file.

Then, on October 11, 2023, ██████████ informed SCI that Student A, Mother A, and Grandmother A visited P.S. 188, along with the student who took the video of Hidalgo (“Student B”) and her mother (“Mother B”). Student B reported that ██████████ abused Student A for a couple of weeks prior to the recorded incident.

Investigators interviewed ██████████ about the complaint he filed with OPT, and he explained that on September 27, 2023, in a meeting with him and ██████████, Grandmother A, Mother A, Student A, Mother B, and Student B collectively reported that on September 26, 2023, Student A was abused by her school bus driver and bus attendant. According to ██████████ they informed him that the bus driver said he would throw Student A out the window, and the bus attendant pushed and grabbed Student A by her arm and told her that if Student A was her kid, that she would kill her. He further explained that while Student B attended a different school than Student A, they rode the same bus. Student B purportedly videotaped the incident, however, ██████████ stated that he had not seen the video. After hearing these allegations, ██████████ contacted OPT, and instructed Mother A and Grandmother A to also contact OPT.

Subsequently, investigators spoke with Grandmother A, who told them that on the evening of September 26, 2023, Student B visited her home and informed her that for the previous two weeks, Student A was abused and yelled at while on the school bus. Grandmother A stated that Student B then sent her a video of an incident that occurred earlier that day on the bus.<sup>2</sup> Grandmother A told investigators that she initially brought the incident to the attention of the New York City Police Department, however, they did not prepare a police report so, on the day following the incident, she, Student B, and Mother B went to P.S. 188 and met with ██████████ and ██████████. To investigators, Grandmother A explained that Student A was nonverbal; while she can sing along to the radio, she cannot understand questions or provide answers.

In her interview with investigators, Student B, then-15-years-old, confirmed that during the afternoon bus route on September 26, 2023, she recorded videos of the bus driver and bus attendant acting inappropriately with Student A. Student B told investigators that she was not sure what the bus driver or bus attendant’s names were, however, she had witnessed them act inappropriately towards Student A. Per Student B, just two weeks into the school year, ██████████ began to yell and scream at Student A, saying “be quiet,” and “shut up.” Student B added that Student A struggled to sit still and was always trying to get out of her seat, despite wearing a seat belt. On approximately two occasions, Student B reportedly saw ██████████ grab Student A’s clothes and shove her back in her seat. On September 26, 2023, she was filming a video while on the school bus, and the bus driver – Hidalgo – got out of his seat and walked to the back, yelling at Student A in the process. Hidalgo purportedly yelled that he was going to throw her out of the window. Student B confirmed that later that evening, she visited the building where Student A got off the bus, found Grandmother A, and sent her the videos she had recorded.

Investigators interviewed ██████████, who confirmed that she was aware of the allegations against her and Bus Driver Hidalgo because, prior to her suspension on September 27, 2023,

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<sup>2</sup> Grandmother A sent this video to SCI investigators for them to review at a later date.

her employer, Don Thomas Buses, Inc., showed her the videos recorded by Student B. ██████ stated that she started as a bus attendant for Route Y195 on September 12, 2023, with Santiago Hidalgo as the bus driver. ██████ explained that Student A was on the “spectrum,” and would often be noisy and sing while on the bus. According to ██████ Student A’s behavior disrupted the other children, many of whom liked to sleep on the bus. ██████ added that a student who would sit directly next to Student A was sensitive to noise and could react poorly to it, so she tried to keep Student A quiet. Together, investigators and ██████ reviewed the videos taken by Student B, and ██████ was not heard making any inappropriate or threatening comments, nor was Student A heard expressing that she felt intimidated or abused. One male voice audibly stated, “You’re making a lot of noise,” and “be quiet” while referencing other students sleeping. Then, another voice, whom ██████ identified as Santiago, shouted, “What is your problem? What is your problem?” and “Do you want me to throw you out the window? Shut the heck up.” ██████ recalled that as Santiago was shouting, Student A was making noise and attempting to remove her seat belt. Because of the commotion with Student A and the fast pace at which Santiago spoke, ██████ said that she did not realize what Santiago said until the bus company showed her the video on September 27<sup>th</sup>. Regarding the allegations that she used an inappropriate amount of force with Student A, ██████ acknowledged that she did touch Student A – she would hold Student A’s arms down to prevent her from removing her seatbelt and getting out of her seat. However, she denied using excessive force or corporal punishment.

Bus Driver Santiago also agreed to an interview, and he confirmed that he worked for Don Thomas Buses, Inc. on Route Y195 with ██████. He asserted that he never observed ██████ physically or verbally abuse Student A. After investigators showed him the video in which he was recorded telling Student A to “shut up” and that he would “throw [her] out the window,” he admitted that while he did not know Student A’s name or remember saying those words, he recalled that there was an incident where someone jumped around on the bus and he “just lost it.” Hidalgo said he yelled but could not remember what he said specifically. He added that Student A had a problem with her “social behavior” and was constantly making a large amount of noise. He maintained, however, that he never touched Student A.

## **II. Conclusion & Recommendation:**

Based on the facts stated above, SCI substantiated that Bus Driver Santiago Hidalgo engaged in verbal abuse.<sup>3</sup> Not only did Student B provide an eye-witness account of the incident, but she also provided a video in which Santiago can be heard making threats to Student A. Further, he admitted that he “just lost it” at a student on his bus route. An individual who cannot control their own frustration and rage should never be permitted to work around young children. As Hidalgo is not a DOE employee, we recommend that he continues to remain eligible in PETS and have a problem code assigned to his personnel file so that this matter is considered should he seek future employment with the DOE, within any of its facilities, or with any of its vendors.

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<sup>3</sup> As Student B’s video did not capture ██████ behaving inappropriately with Student A, and both ██████ and Hidalgo denied that she ever touched Student A in a physically violent manner, SCI unsubstantiated the allegations against ██████

Please respond in writing within 30 days of receipt of this letter as to any action taken regarding Santiago Hidalgo or the recommendations made herein. We are sending a copy of this letter to the DOE Office of Legal Services.

Should you have any inquiries regarding the above, please contact me at (212) 510-1418 or [DSchlachet@nycsci.org](mailto:DSchlachet@nycsci.org).

Sincerely,

ANASTASIA COLEMAN  
Special Commissioner of Investigation  
for the New York City School District

By: /s/ Daniel I. Schlachet  
Daniel I. Schlachet  
First Deputy Commissioner

AC:DS:cl

cc: Elizabeth Vladeck, Esq.  
Karen Antoine, Esq.  
Katherine Rodi, Esq.  
Monica Davis-Thorne – Director