

The History of How School Buses Became Yellow

Rural educator Frank Cyr had the vision and pull to force the nation to standardize the color of the ubiquitous vehicle

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consolidation. The Rockefeller-backed General Education Board provided Cyr \$5000 (\$92,000 in 2019) to study local school-bus needs and bring together the various parties who could effectuate needed changes.

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During those seven days of deliberation in the Grace Dodge Room at Columbia Teachers College, Cyr said he hung strips of different paint colors from the wall, in “50 shades ranging from lemon yellow to deep orange-red.” The conference attendees, which included representatives of the bus manufacturing industry, selected a small group to make the final color selection, and the orangish-yellow color they chose has been the industry standard ever since. Initially christened National School Bus Chrome (a reference to the lead-chromate yellow in the original paint), the United States General Services Administration (GSA) now calls the color National School Bus Glossy Yellow, or Color 13432 in the Federal Standard 595a color collection that GSA uses for government procurement. The

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Remarkably, “That color that we are calling school bus yellow hits both peaks equally.” So although they may not have fully comprehended the science behind it, the color Cyr and his colleagues chose at the 1939 conference makes it hard for other drivers to miss a school bus, even in their peripheral vision. “And it’s darned big,” Schwab adds.