

School puts kindergartner on wrong bus twice

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Authors: hjones@thelancasternews.com

Byline: By Haley Jones
hjones@thelancasternews.com

Content

A kindergartner was put on the wrong school bus to go home twice during the first week of school in Lancaster County School District.

Joy Straight said neither the bus drivers nor the district transportation office could easily locate her 5-year-old son, Elliott Mahaffey, either time.

“It was his very first day. He’s never been to daycare. He’s never been anywhere but home with mama,” Straight said.

At Brooklyn Springs Elementary School orientation, Elliott should have been assigned to Bus 26, which drops off students in Springdale, near Lancaster Golf Club, but he was assigned to Bus 28.

According to his mother, after school Elliott was put on Bus 28, which drops students off near Elgin, on Tuesday, Aug. 22, and Thursday, Aug. 24.

The last stop for Bus 26, High Point Circle in Lancaster, is 5.2 miles away from Bus 28’s last stop on Clearwater Drive in Lancaster.

“It was about 2:45ish and the bus (Bus 26) just drove right by the house, and, of course, me and my neighbor were waiting out there for my kid to get off,” Straight said. “It didn’t stop, and then (my neighbor) immediately called the school. I was in such a panic, it’s still foggy.”

Straight said she called her husband, and her neighbor, Gail Moseley, called the district transportation office to find out where Elliott was, and why the bus did not stop.

Straight said after several phone calls, the district was able to identify where her child was on Aug. 22, and she met him at the district office while he waited with supervision on Bus 28.

Repeat issue

However, the same thing happened again two days later, even though Straight said she spoke to district officials and confirmed his bus route after the first incident.

“His bus comes in (to my street) at 2:15 on the dot,” Straight said. “He (the bus driver) stops, and I run out there (Thursday afternoon) and he yells to get my kid off the bus, but I looked at him (the bus driver) and said, ‘he’s not there, is he?’ The bus driver said no.”

“It was (nearly) an hour later that I called the school and asked them, I said, ‘can somebody please tell me where my child is at,’ ” Straight said after the school still had not located him.

Straight said after speaking with the district’s transportation office, she did not get an answer as to how this happened twice. Straight said she hung up in frustration with the district bus office after the Aug. 24 call.

Since the second mishap, Straight said Brooklyn Springs Principal Brittany McManus called her directly and apologized numerous times.

“She’s been right on the bud since that day,” Straight said.

Straight, who is a member of a Moms of Lancaster Facebook group, shared this experience online. She said at least six other mothers shared similar experiences they have had with their children riding the wrong bus.

District response

Superintendent Dr. Jonathan Phipps said the district cannot comment on specific cases. However, speaking generally about bus routes during the new school year, Phipps said mistakes happen, and it’s the district’s responsibility to make corrections and apologize when necessary.

“My understanding is that this child was never in danger, which is very important,” Phipps said. “I will say that for kindergartners, they’re basically hand-held and walked to the bus to make sure they get on the right bus in the afternoon.”

Phipps said that if there is an error, like in this situation, it is likely due to a clerical error on bus rosters, rather than school staff taking the child to the wrong bus and misinterpreting information provided via roster.

“Unfortunately, in the situation you described, it’s apparent that a mistake was made,” Phipps said. “All we can do is say, ‘we’re sorry that that happened.’ That’s not the norm.

“I don’t remember that we’ve had major issues over the past seven years with that,” said Phipps, who has been the district’s superintendent for seven years.

“As a principal of middle school, a high school and an assistant principal at an elementary school, we always were extremely careful,” he said.

Phipps said there is a human factor when mistakes are made, and all the district can do is apologize and correct the error.

“It bothers me that the mistake was made twice,” Phipps said, adding that “clerical errors do happen in any organization.

“I will say that as for keeping our kids safe and making sure that we get them home safe, that’s always our No. 1 priority,” he said.

Facebook post

The Lancaster County Safety and Transportation Office published a post Aug. 26, recognizing there were a few hiccups during the first week.

“Kudos to our bus drivers who have been on the front lines ensuring the safety of our students,” the post said.

The post also said that school buses are by far the safest form of transportation for students, and thanked parents for sharing their concerns and frustrations after the first week.

“We continue to tweak our routes and make the needed corrections,” the post said. “There is a lot of planning and hard work that goes on behind the scenes. Please know that we are working as quickly as possible to get students safely assigned to a bus.”

The district said bus drivers are short-staffed in the district, and encouraged anyone considering an application to do so.