

From: Alma Jean Hawkins <ajhawkins@wcpss.net>

Date: January 31, 2013, 5:49:13 PM EST

To:

Cc: Briana Pelton <bpelton@wcpss.net>, Muriel T Summers <msummers@wcpss.net>, Ann Skinner <askinner@wcpss.net>, Christy Estes <cestes@wcpss.net>

Subject: Re: Fw: Urgent concern about bus transportation on 1/29/13

Good afternoon Ms. Cochran,

I do apologize that you had such an experience. At this time, staff members who should be available to respond to parent calls are currently driving routes. It is not the intent of this district not to be able to respond. As soon as I was made aware that Sam had not arrived home I did attempt multiple times to contact the driver. I also called the school. For safety and legal reasons, bus drivers may not answer their cell phones while driving and this means that it may take several attempts before a driver responds. Once she responded and it was confirmed that Sam was on the bus. I did call you back and confirm he was safe. A call was also made to provide a time of arrival.

Thank you,

Jean Hawkins
Operations Manager
Broughton Transportation
Phone: 919.856.7821

-----Briana Pelton/CombsES/WCPSS wrote: -----

To: Alma Jean Hawkins/Transportation/WCPSS@Staff

From: Briana Pelton/CombsES/WCPSS

Date: 01/30/2013 08:40AM

Subject: Fw: Urgent concern about bus transportation on 1/29/13

Ms. Hawkins,

Good morning. Please see the e-mail below that we received from the parent. Thanks very much for talking with me this morning. I hope you have a smooth day.

Warmly,
Briana Pelton
Assistant Principal

-----Forwarded by Briana Pelton/CombsES/WCPSS on 01/30/2013 08:20AM -----

To: Muriel T Summers/CombsES/WCPSS@Staff

From: Susan Miller-Cochran

Date: 01/29/2013 11:49PM

Cc: Ann Skinner/CombsES/WCPSS@Staff, Briana Pelton/CombsES/WCPSS@Staff

Subject: Urgent concern about bus transportation on 1/29/13

Our son, Sam Cochran, did not arrive home on the #4 (purple) bus this evening until 5:35 pm. This was two hours past the time he normally arrives home.

According to the bus driver, Sam fell asleep on the bus and missed his stop. She did not realize he was still on the bus until she arrived at Swift Creek Elementary to pick up her second group of students. She completed her Swift Creek route and then brought Sam home.

The problem is that we had no idea where Sam was. At no point did anyone take the initiative to contact us, and when I frantically tried to call AB Combs, Wake County transportation services, and then the missing child hotline, nobody answered. The missing child hotline went straight through to voicemail and said that parents should call back the next business day. I have never known such panic as I did when I got that message. The only person responding to my pleas for help was Miss Skinner,

who kept texting me as she tried to find out what had happened to Sam's bus. I'm incredibly grateful for her attempts to help, even well after school hours. I just needed to know that somebody cared that my son was missing.

At 4:15, I finally started calling the dispatch numbers for other districts to see if someone could help. The dispatcher for Enloe took my name and number and said I would receive a call back when they knew something. I received no return call. I finally resorted to driving Sam's bus route around 4:35 to try to find him. I found a bus finished with its route in a parking lot and, in desperation, knocked on the door and asked the driver for help. The driver called the direct line to her team leader and told me that a child had fallen asleep on a bus. Perhaps this was Sam. He would be brought home after the driver was done with her route. I still didn't know for certain that it actually was Sam or when he would be brought home. And still nobody had contacted me. I was placing my hope in the word of a kind bus driver who didn't drive a Combs route but wanted to help.

When I called Wake County transportation again around 4:45 to verify what I had heard (dialing 4-5 times before actually getting through to a human instead of a voicemail message), I was told that they weren't having any luck calling the driver. She wasn't answering her phone and hadn't returned any calls. They said they would call me back when they heard from her. A woman in the background angrily said, "I already told her he was asleep on the bus!" Apparently the driver had called her team leader to report this, but it took over an hour for that information to get to the Broughton transportation dispatcher, who wasn't answering the phone, and who hadn't tried to contact us. And apparently someone was irritated that I kept bothering the office to find my missing son.

At 5:15, a dispatcher called me to let me know she wasn't leaving the office until they found Sam. She still hadn't heard from the driver. She stayed on the phone with me, while I cried, until the driver called the office and said she was 10 minutes away. Sam arrived home at 5:35. His father had been sitting on the curb waiting for the bus for two hours. Sam was scared, and he hadn't been able to use a restroom, so he was sitting in soiled pants.

I'm angry, weary, and very concerned that the communication practices in WCPSS, at least regarding bus transportation, are completely inadequate.

Someone should have notified us when Sam was discovered on the bus. The implication from Wake County transportation and the bus driver seemed to be that this situation was Sam's fault. Yes, he fell asleep. But I fail to understand why we were not called, especially when the child in question is a kindergartner with special needs. And certainly Wake County transportation should have been able to figure out where his bus was. It took 1 1/2 hours to receive a response from the driver of the bus. During that time, nobody could give me an answer other than, "The bus must be out on its route since the driver isn't answering the phone."

Kids fall asleep on buses and miss their stops. I understand this. But the stress created in this circumstance was absolutely avoidable. I would have gladly picked up Sam at another stop if someone had communicated with us. At the very least, we would have known where he was, that he was safe, and when he would be home. This situation should never have happened. The failure of communication today was unacceptable, and it must be resolved so that other families are not put in the position we were tonight.

Susan

Dr. Susan Miller-Cochran
Associate Professor, English
Director, First-Year Writing Program
North Carolina State University