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News » Metro

Saturday, October 6, 2007 6:18 AM CDT

Mom finds child after bus mishap

By ANDREW WIND, Courier Staff Writer

WATERLOO --- A Kingsley Elementary parent says a stranger brought her kindergartner home last month after he was dropped off at a school bus stop six blocks away.

"That just angered me, because I just had a stranger bring my kid home," said Tanya McDaniel, who contacted The Courier this week with concerns about school bus procedures.

"I don't blame the parent for being upset," said Karl Hartman, contract manager for First Student bus company, noting the issue has been addressed with the driver.

"It's the type of incident we take great pains to avoid," he added. "We want the kids to go where they're supposed to go."

"I just want to make sure something is done and make sure parents are aware this could happen to their kids. I didn't think this would happen to my kid," said McDaniel.

Hartman said drivers are given copies of their routes, bus stops and student listings stating who gets off at each one. But one of the pitfalls is the address changes that the bus company doesn't find out about until school starts.

"Our first weeks of school are very chaotic, trying to make all those changes," said Hartman. He noted, though, that McDaniel was not among those with an address change.

The incident happened Sept. 7, the sixth day of school, and was the second time McDaniel's 5-year-old son missed his bus stop. Three days earlier, the boy's first full day of school, she said he didn't get off the bus, but was taken back home by the driver.

"I kind of wanted him to ride the bus so he would meet some of the neighborhood kids," said McDaniel, who now drops off and picks up her son at school.

In the first incident, she noticed her son didn't get off the bus and called First Student. He was located on the bus and brought home, which Hartman said is the normal procedure when a student misses his stop.

At that point, McDaniel spoke with the driver about providing some help or having her son sit in the seat behind him.

"I think he just needed a little bit more assurance that he was getting off at the right stop," she said of her son. "He's shy; he's extremely shy."

That week, her husband expressed their concerns to the teacher during parent conferences. The next day, Tanya McDaniel planned to pick her son up at school, but the teacher accidentally put him on the bus.

She raced home, arriving before the bus but didn't see her son get off. She called First Student and was told he was not on the bus.

She said she was ready to call 911 when a woman in a truck pulled up.

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"He told the stranger that the bus driver told him to get off, because that was his stop," said McDaniel.

But "the drivers just don't do that," said Hartman. "To be honest, I don't know how the child got off at that particular stop.

"My hunch is the driver just missed it," he added. "The drivers need to be attentive and need to know their kids."

Waterloo Community Schools spokeswoman Sharon Miller said a number of measures have been taken to improve student safety and ensure they are dropped off at the right place. She said schools have gotten "a lot better" at providing student information to the bus garage, drivers are required to visually check each bus seat at the end of their route, and young students wear tags indicating their name and bus number.

"The bus drivers, like I said, are very good at learning their students," Miller noted. "Where we have some gap in that is right at the beginning of the school year." She added that officials would welcome suggestions in addressing the situation.

While the incident didn't spur a review of procedures, Hartman said some changes have been made this year. For example, parents are now filling out paperwork if they send a child to day care "so we have the right information to send the students to the right place."

Contact Andrew Wind at (319) 291-1507 or andrew.wind@wfcourier.com.

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purpleleo wrote on Oct 6, 2007 2:51 PM:

" Poor little guy. I would have been waiting for him at the stop after the first time it happened. At least until he was comfortable with going to school and riding the bus. Hope he's doing better now that mom is doing the transporting..... "

cheriedanae wrote on Oct 6, 2007 5:32 PM:

" If you read closely his mom was planning to pick him up on that day. The teacher put him on the bus. The mom raced home in time for the bus and he did not get off. She called and he was not on the bus. He was dropped off before his stop. Thank God to the person who brought this child home safely. What if a child molester would have found him. I think it is terrible a child was missing. If this would have been my child I would take action. "

mcdaniel wrote on Oct 6, 2007 5:35 PM:

" I was waiting at the bus stop ALL week and on friday i was picking it up from school and he was accidently was put on the bus. And I raced home to meet him there and he was not the stop nor was he at home. And I went outside to look for him and was calling 911 when the stranger came to drop him off. "

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