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December 1, 2007 - 6:49AM

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Mesa bus driver holds kids hostage, parents say

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[Nicole Beyer](#), Tribune

A Mesa school bus driver taking children to Fremont Junior High School halted her vehicle at a bus stop Friday morning and refused to proceed or let students off — even as parents pounded on the doors.

[VIDEO: Watch Tribune reporter Nicole Beyer talking to parents and students at the scene](#)

Maricopa County sheriff's detective Aaron Douglas said the driver was upset because she thought several students were acting unruly.

The incident involved about 25 to 30 students, and at least one parent called the episode a hostage situation.

“Parents were pounding on the doors screaming, and she would not let them off,” said Stephani Browning, who had one child on the bus and a close family friend. “That’s where my son gets on and off the bus every day. Why wouldn’t she let them go?”

Douglas said several students aboard the bus used their cell phones to call their parents, and some students used the emergency exit to get off after the driver refused to proceed to the school or open the doors.

He said tension on the bus started Thursday, when the driver stopped the vehicle several times on the way home from school and told her passengers they were being unruly. Douglas did not elaborate on the behavior of the students.

He said the driver told the students on Thursday that they should get off the bus if they did not want to be there. He said the driver halted the bus again Friday morning without leaving the bus stop at 96th Street and Broadway Road on county land near east Mesa.

Douglas said the driver told students again on Friday that they should not ride the bus if they would rather be with a parent.

Students on the route said concerns about the bus driver started long before Thursday, and some parents had filed complaints with the district that went ignored. Students said nearly everyone aboard the bus eventually stood up to get off Friday morning, but the driver would not open the doors.

Mesa Unified School District spokeswoman Kathy Bareiss said district policy prohibits bus drivers from dropping students off before they reach their destination. She said the bus driver, who was not identified, has been placed on paid leave pending an investigation into the incident.

Bareiss said the bus was equipped with a surveillance camera, but no tape was available of the incident. She did not know if the camera was broken or if it was turned off for other reasons.

Browning's son, Chaz Huber, said the driver closed the doors after the students got on the bus and started yelling at them. Chaz and other students said the driver touched the camera or did something with the camera before she started scolding them Friday morning.

Chaz said the driver, who has been on the route about one or two months, halted the bus about 10 times on Thursday and yelled at the students each time. Parents said their children came home late on Thursday.

Browning said the bus driver called the sheriff’s office Friday morning to report “unruly” students. She said the driver did not open the doors until deputies arrived.

Some parents acknowledged that junior high school students can get unruly on a bus and create difficult driving conditions.

“There’s always a few bad apples in the bunch,” said Suzanne Cook, who had a child aboard.

Browning agreed, but she said that would not excuse the driver’s behavior.

“That’s no excuse for holding them hostage like this,” she said.

—
Tribune writer Jenn Korducki contributed to this report.

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hunterxaz wrote:

I know how lame kids can be, I used to be a mean guy on the bus. I stopped riding it in 6th grade and walked / rode my bike to school.

Everyone has bad days and they don't need crappy kids to compound it. They're not paid well enough for that. Kids should respect the fact that they're getting a safe ride to school.

Meanies.

11/30/2007 1:22 PM MST on EastValleyTribune.com

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thechubbypsychic wrote:

What has happened over the course of 10-15 years, is that we giving power and control from adults to children. Parents are wanting to be their childrens best friend. Frankly, it's going to get worse as we see our basic freedom and rights being slowly chipped away with each generation. I'm at peace because I teach in a prison...so much safer and easier. God Bless all people who work with children these days.

11/30/2007 1:37 PM MST on EastValleyTribune.com

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american1986 wrote:

Actually let me give everyone a little heads up. This article has multiple things wrong with it. My cousin was one of the kids on that bus. The bus never moved from its location. The bus driver let the kids on the bus at the pick up. then shut the doors and began to yell at them because she said they were "Talking too loud" yesterday on the bus. She then preceeded to call the sheriff's department and told them that the kids were being "loud and unruly" she told the children at that point "if you dont like it on the bus get off" but would not let them off. The children called their parents because they were afraid. TRUST ME I got a call from my cousin and you cannot fak fear like that. The parents went down and she would not let them take their children off the bus. The sherriffs department finally came out and the kids were released. We are not talking about some kids being a little scared and then everything was fine. We are talking about a HOSTAGE SITUATION!!!

11/30/2007 1:42 PM MST on EastValleyTribune.com

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westbrook36 wrote:

this is all told by people from the school who dont want a bad reputation i was on the bus and she was yelling at us 4 yesterday and wouldnt let us off so wat do we do make are own way

11/30/2007 2:08 PM MST on EastValleyTribune.com

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hunterxaz wrote:

PS, "make are own way" what are you talking about hahah.

11/30/2007 2:44 PM MST on EastValleyTribune.com

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american1986 wrote:

Well she is obviously only 14 yrs old since she was on the bus. Make are own way is probably talking about how the bus driver would not let the children off the bus for their parents so some had to go out the emergency exit in the back of the bus.

11/30/2007 3:01 PM MST on EastValleyTribune.com

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kaibosh wrote:

hunterxaz wrote:

I know how lame kids can be, I used to be a mean guy on the bus.

Obviously you haven't changed much to badger a school age child on a public message board.

11/30/2007 3:09 PM MST on EastValleyTribune.com

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reality wrote:

It seems to be that the preponderance of weight seems to be on the side of the kids.

According to the article she allowed kids on the bus then shut the doors and started lambasting them for THE PREVIOUS day's behavior.

Saturday, December 1, 2007 | 1:59 pm



HELD IN BUS: Though smiling now, Stephani Browning is unhappy with a bus driver who held her son, Chaz Huber, 14, right, and his friend, Tyler Hamilton, 13, on the bus Friday morning because the driver believed its riders were being unr

Jennifer Grimes, Tribune



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