Schoolbus Driver Safety – Emergency Planning Fatality File

11-Year-Old Boy Saves Classmates By Taking Control Of Careening School Bus

He wasn't supposed to get out of his seat and he's certainly not old enough to drive a car, let alone a bus. But rules sometimes don't apply in an emergency and on Monday, a young Cleveland student was too busy saving lives to think about the rules.

An 11-year-old was on board his school bus when the driver got off for a moment to get some gas and run to the washroom. But something happened in his absence and the big vehicle somehow slipped out of park and began rolling faster and faster down a steep hill towards certain disaster.

Some of the 26 other kids inside leapt out onto the street, while others sat frozen in fear and screaming in panic. And that's when the youngster jumped into the driver's seat and tried everything to get it to stop. He pulled on the emergency brake, but it didn't slow the bus down. So the quick thinking student did the only thing his instincts told him to do – crash the vehicle in the safest way possible.

He steered the carrier over a curb and into a large pillar where its front end sat smashed in but left those onboard safe. Police are crediting the kid with saving a lot of lives by his actions. The bus was heading down a slope in an industrial area, picking up speed as it went. It was stopped just before hitting a sharp turn that likely would have caused it to flip over, leading to potentially catastrophic injuries for its remaining passengers.

Instead, 15 youngsters suffered only minor harm and were treated and released from hospital.

Officials were quick to praise the unnamed boy. “This kid did some quick thinking,” admires Larry Gray, a local fire department spokesman. But they weren’t quite so happy about the actions of the bus driver. Under the state’s rules, the man behind the wheel is not allowed to leave his vehicle under any circumstances if there’s even one student on board – not even to stop for gas.

Strickland recalls going to the washroom and pounding on the door, screaming for the man to come out. But he didn’t make it in time. He began running after the bus as it rolled down the side street and ironically suffered the most from the frightening scenario. He was taken to hospital with chest pains. An investigation into his actions is now underway.

Experts are at a loss to explain why the bus started to roll. An inspection found no mechanical problems and a witness says he’s positive none of the kids tampered with it or caused it to suddenly start up.

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