

Anyone who's ever had a teenager driving knows the feeling of finally hearing the car pull into the driveway late at night, and then being able to relax and go to sleep.

I've been through two teenagers driving, but the feeling still comes back every day as our nearly 100 buses roll past my office with our kids on board. I can see our bus compound right outside my front window, and it's always a nice feeling when I see the last bus pull in late in the afternoon and my phone hasn't rung to tell me of any problems.

Once in a while, though, the phone does ring. That happened last week, when one of our buses was in a crash with an SUV at the intersection of Route 4 and Symmes Road. Thankfully, the injuries that three students suffered were all very minor. The police have advised us they cited the driver of the SUV for failure to yield.

We have a page in our crisis manual for bus crashes, and our staff went to work. Two administrators headed to the scene, and others began calling the parents of every student on the bus.

The bus, one of our newest ones, was heavily damaged and will likely have to go back to the manufacturer, International, to be repaired.

Our bus driver, Angie Kimble, has been driving for us for 18 years and has never been in a crash before. Her first thoughts were for the students and she immediately began making sure they were ok. She told our transportation director that it gave her a special feeling when a half dozen of the high-schoolers on board rushed to the front of the bus to make sure she was ok.

Angie is one of our many wonderful bus drivers. Our transportation operation is a big one. Every day we transport about 8,000 students to and from our 10 schools as well as 20 private and parochial schools. Every mile we drive costs more than \$4, and we drive about a million miles a year. It's a big part of our budget.

Our highest priority is safety. No employee in our school district is checked and rechecked as much as a bus driver. Twice each year we review the driving record for the last 10 years for all of our drivers. Every driver is required to have a physical every year. We do random drug testing on one half of the drivers every year. All drivers attend monthly safety meetings. All drivers have a Commercial Drivers License, with school bus and passenger endorsements. Every six years the drivers are re-certified, which involves four hours of behind-the-wheel time with a trainer and nine hours of classroom work. We also redo their state and federal background checks at that time.

It's a lot of work and involves significant expense. But it's truly worth it.

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