

Arrest leaves questions for EVSC policy

School bus incident involving 14-year-old's arrest raises concern

Segann March

Evansville Courier & Press
USA TODAY NETWORK

EVANSVILLE, Ind. — After a 14-year-old student was arrested by Evansville Police officers using force, many in the community have raised questions about what the policies are involving students, bus transportation and police.

The Evansville Vanderburgh School Corp. has declined to comment about those policies or the bus incident last week resulting in an EVSC student's arrest.

EVSC spokesman Jason Woebkenberg said the school district could not legally comment on the incident since it is under review by police. When asked about the corporation's policy regarding incidents on the bus, Woebkenberg declined comment.

Woebkenberg told C&P to review policies 5500 Student Conduct and 8600 Transportation. Both policies only gave an overview of transportation procedures and student conduct but gave no specific policies or examples that would answer the question.

Questions about the students involved in the original incident also weren't answered by EVSC.

Evansville Police Sgt. Jason Cullum said EPD has completed its internal review. EVSC declined to say where the student went to school or whether he received disciplinary action in connection with Thursday's incident.

Cullum said it is the bus driver's job is to keep all students safe. He said the bus driver, similar to a teacher, has every right to call the police when situations like this arise on school property.

"If you're a block or two away from school... you could go back around the block, pull back up to the front and have office staff come out," Cullum said.

"It's different when you've gone 4 to 5 miles from the school, and you're in a residential neighborhood. While that fight is going on, you're responsible for the safety of every student on the bus whether they are involved in the fight or not."

What happened?

Evansville Police released body camera footage on Facebook Aug. 9, showing a 14-year-old student being arrested by three officers after leaving a school bus. According to police, a couple of students were fighting on the bus prior to the driver calling police.

More videos — filmed inside the bus that have surfaced on social media — show three EPD officers struggling to arrest the teenager. The videos show a female officer repeatedly striking the boy in the back.

EPD has received calls related to school bus fights or incidents in the past, although Cullum said it is not common.

Police are standing by the actions of the arresting officers as necessary and said the technique used on the teenager — an empty-hand hit to the suprascapular nerve cluster — is taught to officers as a means of subduing a person who resists arrest.

He said the teenager and other students were "lawfully detained."

"If a fight happened in a classroom... we have every legal right to detain everyone in that classroom while it's being investigated," Cullum said. "The same goes for transportation. EVSC transportation is voluntary because it is provided to you. No one is made to get on that bus. All the rules that apply during the educational day apply while on the bus."

Cullum said all officers are trained in defensive tactics no matter the age of the person.

"There's not a separate training or curriculum when you're taught to deal with whatever presents itself," he said "In this specific case, the first officer who made physical contact with him was smaller than he was. We don't teach age... we teach the environmental circumstances."



Camera still of EPD using force on a 14-year-old. PROVIDED