

Child safe after LTUSD bus driver 'loses' him

By Kathryn Reed

It was probably the longest hour of Libi and Jason Fenley's life. Their son was missing. He didn't get off the school bus at day care. And no one knew where he was.

Corben is a 6-year-old first-grader at Sierra House Elementary School in South Lake Tahoe. His teacher and principal confirmed he got on the bus at about 3:20pm last Friday.

Jason Corben got a call at approximately 4:10pm from the day care center saying the bus did not drop Corben off.

"We freaked out because we knew neither of us had him," Libi Fenley told *Lake Tahoe News*. "I called the bus garage. They said he was not there."

South Lake Tahoe Police Department received a call from the Fenleys at 4:34pm Dec. 11. In about five minutes officers were at the bus garage.

The bus driver, who is reportedly a veteran at her job – even a trainer, searched the bus three times. No Corben.

"The bus driver said he got off at the wrong stop," Fenley said. She said this before film from the cameras was reviewed.

All LTUSD school buses have two cameras, some have three. They are there for safety and security.

There was quick talk among the Fenleys, officers and Lake Tahoe Unified School District transportation officials that a search should begin in the neighborhood where Corben may have gotten off. This was going on despite there being no proof he got off somewhere else.

Then suddenly there was banging on the bus garage door. It was Corben.

He had actually been on that bus that was supposedly searched by the driver. He had fallen asleep. It's not the first time. And he's not the first kid to do so.

"He was fine, he was scared. He woke up in the dark in a scary place," Fenley said of her son.

But she's not happy how the district handled things. When Corben got on the bus Monday the driver didn't offer an apology. Fenley was flabbergasted Christy Blach, director of transportation, seemed to care more about her employee than Fenley's son. She was miffed Superintendent Jim Tarwater had not responded to her email.

Blach was short with *Lake Tahoe News* on Dec. 15. "He was at the bus garage for maybe 10 minutes," she said.

That might be true, but no one knew it. Corben was found at 5:04pm that Friday.

Tarwater didn't know about the incident until *Lake Tahoe News* called on Tuesday. He said that is not normal protocol.

"I would say they slipped up, didn't they?" he said of not being told. "I can see why she would be upset," Tarwater said of the distraught mother.

Fenley said, "If the driver is not going to be accountable, what procedures are going to be put in place other than flashlights will be used for looking for items (and people) on the bus?"

With neither the superintendent nor the board being told about the incident by staff, change couldn't happen as fast as Fenley would have liked.