



Survival Factors Factual Report Attachment:

**Rochester Community School District
Interviews**

Rochester, Indiana

HWY19MH003

(17 pages)

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of: *

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BUS STOP CRASH

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* Accident No.: HWY19MH003

ROCHESTER, INDIANA

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Interview of: JANA VANCE, Superintendent
Rochester Community Schools

Via Telephone

APPEARANCES:

SHERYL HARLEY, Accident Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

ROBERT "SKEETER" DAUGHERTY, School Resource Officer
Rochester community Schools

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I N T E R V I E W

(10:55 a.m.)

MS. HARLEY: Today is Tuesday, March the 5th, 2019. It's 10:55 a.m. My name is Sheryl Harley. I'm an investigator with the National Transportation Safety Board. I will be calling the superintendent of the Rochester Community Schools, Ms. Jana Vance. Her number is [REDACTED].

PAT: Rochester Schools, Pat speaking.

MS. HARLEY: Yes. May I speak to Ms. Jana Vance, please? My name is Sheryl Harley. I'm with the NTSB.

PAT: Yes. One moment, please, let me get you back to her.

MS. HARLEY: Thank you.

PAT: You're welcome.

MS. VANCE: This is Jana Vance.

INTERVIEW OF JANA VANCE

BY MS. HARLEY:

Q. Ms. Vance, how are you doing? My name is Sheryl Harley. Thank you very much for agreeing to speak with me, I appreciate it.

A. Absolutely. We're honored to help. I actually have you on speakerphone with our school resource officer as well who has been an integral part of -- we were out at the scene and then what we've done with our transportation, so --

Q. Well, I certainly do appreciate it. First off, I just wanted to -- do you have any problem if I record this? If you do, that's

1 no problem. I just like to record it just so I don't miss
2 anything.

3 A. Not at all. You're welcome to do that.

4 Q. Okay. And, Ms. Vance -- I'm sorry, and your -- the name of
5 your school resource officer?

6 A. His official name is Robert Daugherty, D-A-U-G-H-E-R-T-Y, but
7 he is well known in our community as Skeeter.

8 Q. Okay, Skeeter. Thank you very much for taking part in this.

9 So let me kind of explain what's going. So what actually
10 happened in Rochester isn't actually new. We've been kind of sort
11 of seeing it around the country, but to be perfectly honest we
12 don't have any idea of how prevalent it is.

13 So one of the things that we are, in fact, doing is we're
14 looking at when these incidents occur, and then we're calling the
15 school districts to find out how they handle it, if they're seeing
16 these events getting more frequent, and then trying to find out
17 what the school district is doing to combat the issue.

18 So one of the things that I wanted to do is kind of reach out
19 to your school district. We certainly were reaching out to
20 Tippecanoe Valley, but one of the things I was interested in is,
21 first off, how big is your school district?

22 A. Our school district, we are very close in size to Tippecanoe
23 Valley. We have about 1800 students, a very rural district, and
24 we span several miles of territory when we're talking
25 transportation routes. Some of our routes take as much as 90

1 minutes to run in the morning and afternoon.

2 Q. Really? Wow.

3 A. Yep, 75 minutes, maybe 90. Yeah, I would say 75 minutes to
4 some of the outermost parts of our routes.

5 Q. Okay. How many routes do you actually have?

6 A. We run 16 buses. We have 16 buses, so -- yeah, we have 16
7 buses that are out on regular routes, then we also have two routes
8 that are for special needs students and we run those separately
9 based on specific needs and educational -- their IEPs.

10 Q. Got it. Understood. Okay. So first of all -- so one the
11 things that we were kind of looking is, how does a school district
12 go about planning a school bus route?

13 A. For most districts, and I guess I can speak for Rochester
14 specifically, we have software that we start -- or we start the
15 process in that manner. It links to our school management site.
16 You enter the student, you find out where those heavily
17 congregated areas are of students that need picked up. So you
18 find and identify those through the school bus system or the
19 transportation system, but then after that we try to drill it down
20 to some common sense as well.

21 Q. Okay.

22 A. We just don't allow the system to dictate to us.

23 Q. I understand. So who would be responsible -- for example,
24 let's say that you want to establish a route. Is there some type
25 of hazard assessment or someone goes out and takes a look at the

1 route? Or do you have your drivers that kind of give you input
2 about -- as far as the safety of a route is concerned?

3 A. Yes, to all of that.

4 Q. Okay, awesome. Okay.

5 A. We rely heavily on communication with our drivers. They see
6 it, they're in the trenches, they -- you know, you kind of get
7 into a routine as a driver, but you're also trusting and engaging
8 with others on the roads that are also in their morning or evening
9 routines to work or back home from work or whatever. So just
10 constant open communication as to what we need to do to help them
11 feel comfortable with their routes and keep our students and
12 drivers safe.

13 Q. Great. Do you do a periodic reassessment of a route once
14 it's been established?

15 A. Absolutely.

16 Q. Is that based on need or do you have a certain time period?

17 A. I would say both, strategically both. If a parent or a
18 driver brings a concern to us we will immediately reevaluate that
19 as a team. If -- you know, if you have new students enroll in the
20 district, that could possibly change the dynamics of a route. So
21 you're constantly monitoring that to make sure your buses aren't
22 overloaded, those kinds of things.

23 Obviously, when this incident happened at Tippecanoe Valley
24 it caused all of us to pause and we immediately, even that
25 afternoon, had our entire team in asking them to look at this with

1 different eyes and ears, and that prompted immediate changes
2 across some of our routes. Within about 24 to 48 hours we then
3 made additional adjustments based on what we learned as a
4 district. So I would like to think that that's ongoing and it's
5 never stagnant. You're constantly, constantly in that mode of
6 trying to better it.

7 Q. Got it. So I guess do you see these -- now, I'm going to
8 call it a near miss, and I'll explain a little bit. A near miss
9 is just simply defined by the National Highway Transportation
10 Safety Administration as any time a vehicle illegally passes a
11 school bus with the lights and the stop arm deployed. So do you
12 see a lot of these?

13 A. I know you can't see him rolling his eyes, but you can
14 probably hear his laughter in the background. This is what sends
15 him over the edge. But go ahead, I interrupted.

16 Q. Yeah, no problem. So I guess what I want -- what I'm trying
17 to find out is, are you seeing a lot of this and are you seeing --
18 is it increasing?

19 MR. DAUGHERTY: We are averaging three to five a month.
20 Since we have added cameras to our buses, we have been able to get
21 in contact with those people, but our average is three to five a
22 month. Has it slowed down? No. Has it increased? No. Staying
23 about the same.

24 MS. HARLEY: Staying about the same, three to five a month.

25 So I guess here's a bizarre question because I'm not quite

1 sure that you can answer this. Do we get some sense from the
2 drivers as to what's going on? Are they that distracted or
3 they're just not bothering to stop for the bus?

4 MR. DAUGHERTY: I think distraction has a lot to do with it,
5 from talking with some of the drivers who had this happen to them.
6 They said their head wasn't even up, they weren't even focused on
7 the road. Just a lot more distraction than just, actually just
8 running the stop arm.

9 MS. HARLEY: Got it.

10 MS. VANCE: If I may add -- during some of our community
11 meetings and engagements after that and how it rallies a
12 community, if I could add two other things that have come out
13 glaringly in those meetings. The first being in Indiana -- and I
14 don't know how it is across the nation, but the laws have changed
15 in young drivers getting their license.

16 In fact, I'm going through this with my 15-year-old son right
17 now who has got his learner's permit. He can do everything
18 online, and we try diligently to make sure he reads everything,
19 but he's a teenager and he's grown up kind of on a small farm
20 setting and so he thinks he already knows everything. But there's
21 nothing really specific in training in regards to bus stop arms.
22 And, in fact, one of the ladies that got pulled over didn't even
23 realize that that arm meant stop, and she was sincere when she
24 said it. So I think that we are doing our young drivers an
25 injustice in not offering -- not requiring the training that's

1 done in the past.

2 My father is an over-the-road truck driver, and he said, you
3 know, he has seen a change in what farm equipment looks like on
4 the road, what trash trucks look like on the road, what highway
5 maintenance trucks look like on the road, and that we are being
6 outshined, out-sparkled as compared to others. And, in fact, some
7 of them have lights in similar positions and places.

8 MR. DAUGHERTY: They're not able to make them out until
9 they're right on top of them.

10 MS. HARLEY: Got it.

11 MS. VANCE: So those are two things that have come out in
12 community safety meetings that we've had and community questioning
13 what we're doing. And that's just local. That may not be -- but
14 we're hearing that over and over again within our own community in
15 these kinds of discussions.

16 BY MS. HARLEY:

17 Q. And, you know, and one of the things that we're looking at is
18 -- as you may be aware, in addition to the crash in Indiana, we
19 were looking at several crashes in Wyoming, in Georgia, and in
20 Mississippi, and it seemed that the drivers see the lights, they
21 just don't know what those lights are attached to. They seem to
22 be genuinely confused that it's a school bus. So that --

23 A. Yeah.

24 Q. -- that point actually means a lot to us.

25 A. We've heard that repeatedly. One of our biggest supporters

1 in getting cameras for Rochester schools actually owns an over-
2 the-road trucking business, and he was the first to say that he
3 and his drivers are constantly confused by the lights and what
4 they're seeing until it's nearly too late. And so he was the one
5 who immediately ran to help support Rochester schools and Valley
6 schools and everything in trying to bring changes to fruition.

7 Q. Got it. So with the -- your new cameras, I'm assuming you
8 got them on all your buses. Have you seen kind of a stepped-up
9 enforcement now that there's actually some kind of video that
10 shows this?

11 A. So, for clarification, we're in the process of getting them
12 on all of our buses. That takes, you know, time to get them to
13 the mechanic shop to get those changed over and everything else.

14 Q. Yeah.

15 A. But I'll let Skeeter speak to it. We felt a lot of support
16 from our community, from our law enforcement. I'll let him kind
17 of take over that part of the conversation.

18 MS. HARLEY: Okay.

19 MR. DAUGHERTY: Prior to the cameras being on the bus, I
20 mean, you know, you're just going off the license plate number and
21 whatever information the bus driver could get. The prosecutor's
22 office was just sending letters and trying to remind them that
23 stop means stop and things like that.

24 Since we have video now, our local authorities have had no
25 problem going to the residence, taking the video with them, and

1 showing it to those people. And they're immediately going, yeah,
2 that's me; no questions asked. So they've been wrote tickets. So
3 far the only tickets that has been wrote are the -- one has been a
4 misdemeanor, one has been an infraction ticket.

5 MS. HARLEY: Um-hum.

6 MR. DAUGHERTY: The prosecutor is breaking those down until
7 we get the new law in place here in July. He looks at a bunch of
8 different things, factors that come into the running of the arm.
9 If they just blew through it at a certain speed that definitely
10 constitutes a misdemeanor or a reckless ticket; whereas, one had
11 drove through and then as soon as she passed the stop arm she
12 stopped.

13 MS. HARLEY: Oh, I see.

14 MR. DAUGHERTY: Local enforcement has picked up on it, of
15 course. I just give them the video.

16 MS. HARLEY: Got it. Okay.

17 BY MS. HARLEY:

18 Q. So I guess one of the that things I -- how many of your
19 routes are on state roads that have what we call highway speeds,
20 speeds of 50 and above?

21 A. I don't -- Skeeter and I -- well, four of them are, four of
22 our routes that is the majority of the routes. I would say most
23 of our routes at some point cross over a state highway or a dual
24 lane -- or a four-lane highway. But four of our routes, the
25 majority of their time is spent in those areas.

1 Q. Okay. So does your school do near-side boarding, or are the
2 kids also crossing the roadways?

3 A. So immediately after the accident we revamped all of the
4 routes. I've seen 90 percent of our pickups now are same-side
5 pickup and drop-off. There are a couple that we're still trying
6 to tackle. They're on lesser traveled roads. It doesn't mean
7 that we shouldn't be making those adjustments to it, just trying
8 to figure that out. But 90 to 95 percent of our routes now, every
9 stop is same-side.

10 Q. I see. Okay. All right. So I guess one of the things that
11 I ask people, and it's kind of a bizarre question, is so going
12 forward, if there was something that you wanted to tell me that
13 would help you as a school district keep your kids safer in these
14 situations, what would you suggest we do?

15 A. I have two, and then I'll let Skeeter give his two cents
16 worth. We need to change the appearance of our -- the outward
17 appearance of our buses. And just speaking both as a parent and
18 as a superintendent, we have got to better train our youth as
19 they're engaging in getting their license.

20 Now Skeeter may have other ideas, I'm not sure.

21 MR. DAUGHERTY: No, I'm on that same line. I know that our
22 buses we're out -- like you said earlier, we're outshining
23 ourselves. How we tone that down, how we make it look different
24 is probably number one priority we need to look at.

25 The second is, yeah, our younger drivers, no education in bus

1 stops and bus arms and things like that, need to be up to the
2 forefront also.

3 MS. HARLEY: Okay. Let me just go over my notes and make
4 sure I didn't miss anything. Okay.

5 MS. VANCE: You've got our number now, so don't ever hesitate
6 to reach out and we'll do all we can to help answer and support
7 you in your endeavors.

8 MS. HARLEY: I appreciate it. And one of the things that we
9 do is that we will kind of reach back to you and make sure that we
10 have correctly stated everything that you've told us. One of the
11 things that we're really interested in is getting the school
12 districts to kind of help us figure out what to do with this.

13 Again, first thing we need to do is figure out how often this
14 occurs, and that has been -- that has been a big problem because I
15 think it occurs a lot more than people realize. I just think,
16 unfortunately, even on the part of the federal government, we have
17 not done a great job at keeping track. And I think,
18 unfortunately, this is why suddenly we're seeing it because we've
19 kind of -- we've missed -- we missed it somehow.

20 And again, I certainly appreciate you giving me -- talking to
21 me. If you think of anything else or if you think there's someone
22 else in your school district or a driver who has got any kind of
23 suggestion, please feel free to give them my phone number -- it
24 apparently doesn't work here in the middle of Florida where I'm at
25 -- or my email. And I certainly appreciate you talking to me.

1 MS. VANCE: Absolutely. Well, hopefully, the weather is
2 better there for you than it is here for us in Northern Indiana
3 today.

4 MS. HARLEY: Yes, ma'am. Thank you again. All right. Have
5 a good day.

6 MS. VANCE: All right.

7 MS. HARLEY: Thank you, Skeeter, appreciate it.

8 MS. VANCE: Bye-bye.

9 MS. HARLEY: Bye-bye.

10 Interview terminated at 11:13 a.m.

11 (Whereupon, at 11:13 a.m., the interview was concluded.)
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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the
NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

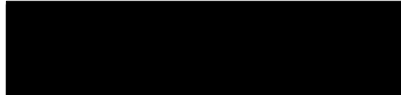
IN THE MATTER OF: BUS STOP CRASH
 ROCHESTER, INDIANA
 Interview of Jana Vance

ACCIDENT NO.: HWY9MH003

LOCATION: Via Telephone

DATE: March 5, 2019

was held according to the record, and that this is the original,
complete, true and accurate transcript which has been transcribed
to the best of my skill and ability.


Charlene Brown
Transcriber