



Kansas State Firefighters Association

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SMOKE THE BUS

By KEISHA SMITH

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Times photo/Keisha Smith

Washington Elementary School spent Tuesday afternoon cultivating young heroes to face danger.

The school hosted the Smoke the Bus program which teaches students how to exit a bus in the

event there is fire or another emergency that may fill the bus with smoke.

"I want to teach the kids proper evacuation of the bus and teach them some safety," USD 480 Bus Driver Trainer Bill Mein said.

"I hope we never have to use it in the school district."

More than 30 8- and 9-year-old students participated in the program.

Liberal Fire Department Deputy Chief Kelly Kirk and Mein administered the exercise to two third-grade classes at Washington.

The students were instructed to hold hands as they walked off the bus and shout "next" as they joined the line. The bus was filled with artificial smoke and the children could not see the person in front of them.

"We want these kids to know how low the visibility is and we want them to be to the point where they won't panic if they're in a smoke-filled situation because that would be the important thing," Kirk said.

Select children were individually designated to perform safety functions while exiting the bus, including taking the fire extinguisher, locating the first aid kit and finding a "planted" student, who was not able to join the other students in the line.

Washington Elementary student Amira Rin was in charge of counting the kids who came off of the bus, during Tuesday's exercise.

"It's important not to leave anybody behind if a bus is on fire or anything happens on a bus," 9-year-old Rin said. She added that she felt responsible.

Rin and her classmates completed the exercise in 1:05. The goal was to complete it in less than three minutes.

"In a fire, it's not the flames that usually kill people," Kirk said. "They're usually overcome by smoke and can't escape from the flames."

Bus safety is extremely important to USD 480. State mandates require that buses are inspected by the Kansas Highway Patrol, have emergency supplies, and are equipped with two-way

communication systems.

During USD 480's last school board meeting, members came to a consensus to begin the process of purchasing a new school bus. Federal requirements state that school buses cannot exceed the age of 20.

Two weeks ago, a tractor trailer and a school bus in Shields collided. The accident killed one 9-year old boy and seriously injured three students.

Last week, a Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University bus rolled down an embankment on Interstate 85 in South Carolina. The bus was carrying 20 cross-country athletes and coaches. All of the passengers survived and climbed out the side door.

In late August of this year, 15 students in Illinois were injured on a school bus after the driver lost control on a road and crashed into an embankment.

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