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Groping victim says it happens 'all the time'

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by **Jacqueline Mah**
Staff Writer

Mar. 9, 2005

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The 12-year-old girl who says five boys pushed her to the back of her middle school bus last spring and took turns groping her chest said what happened to her is not all that unusual.

Situations involving boys inappropriately touching or groping girls at school or on buses occur "all the time," the girl said during a recent interview.

Parents and school officials just don't know about them.

"Most of the students don't go and tell," she said.

The Gazette is not publishing the girl's name to protect her privacy; her mother gave permission for the interview.

The eighth grader said she knows at least six other girls at her school -- Roberto Clemente Middle School in Germantown -- who have had similar things happen to them.

One of them is a good friend who was groped by two boys on

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her school bus last month. The incident was written about in a Feb. 23 Gazette article.

Most county schools have police officers assigned to them for the purpose of overseeing any departmental issues that may arise. Officer Wendy Strashensky is assigned to Clemente.

Strashensky said while she is only aware of the bus incident last spring and the other bus groping last month, she agreed that it might be possible that incidents occur with more frequency.

"You've got to remember, there are a lot of victims who don't report stuff," Strashensky said. "It's hard to say how much stuff goes on if the victims are not reporting stuff."

The Clemente girl said the kind of inappropriate touching that occurs at school and on the bus is not viewed by the offending boys for what it is -- criminal behavior.

"People don't think it's a big deal. They think of it as a game," she said. "They think it's funny and stuff."

Parents interviewed by The Gazette said they think more needs to be done to educate boys about what is and is not appropriate.

"I can control what goes on in my house and what they see and what they listen to, but once they step out that front door there's not much I can do," said the mother of a Sally Ride student who was given a sexually explicit letter by a Clemente student.

County school spokesman Brian Edwards said he did not know whether school curriculums addressed the issue of inappropriate sexual behavior.

"Respect and appropriate behavior is paramount to education, period," Edwards said. "Whether it's done in the health class or not, I don't have the answer to that question."

The mother of the Clemente girl groped last spring said she worries about her daughter constantly.

"I need to understand. What does it take for the bus drivers and the school to do what they need to do?" she said. "Our kids are in their hands the majority of the day, and if I sit at my desk and feel that my daughter is not safe, what am I supposed to do?"

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