

## Parent Up in Arms After Autistic Child Goes Missing at School

We don't know where your child is.

Those words would send any parent into a panic. It happened Friday at Butler Elementary School in Savannah.

This wasn't just any child, but a 9-year-old autistic boy who is supposed to have his own personal supervision.



Renee Mikell and her son Kenya.

When his mom arrived to pick him up from school Friday, no one knew where Kenya Gholson was. He was missing for almost an hour. The Savannah-Chatham County Public School System is looking for answers, and his mom isn't sure her son is safe at school anymore.

"Nobody could find him," Kenya's mom, Renee Mikell, told WTOC. "Nobody knew where he went."

Renee picks her son up every day. Friday, there was no sign of Kenya.

"They had no response, no nothing, no clue," Renee said. "Nobody took initiative to call police, call campus police. Anything."

Teachers searched, Renee panicked. Kenya has a professional who is supposed to keep an eye on him until Renee takes him home.

"She wasn't even doing her job," Renee told us.

Kenya ended up in a neighborhood four blocks away from the school. In order to get there, he had to walk down four streets. A woman saw him walking in the middle of the road and knew something wasn't right.

"He was just walking in the street, cars were honking at him," Ellouise Johnson told WTOC. "I knew something was wrong with the child."

Ellouise held Kenya's hand and called the police, who reunited mother and son. Renee couldn't thank Ellouise enough.

"I couldn't leave the baby," Ellouise said. "I just had that feeling it was something."

"I was so happy to find my baby," Renee said. "It didn't make sense."

Renee tracked down Savannah-Chatham superintendent Dr. Thomas Lockamy to get answers. He promised it would never happen again.

"We can only do better, that's all we can do," said district spokesperson Bucky Burnsed.

Burnsed says school officials believe Kenya followed other students walking home from school. According to Burnsed, school officials did call police, and Butler Elementary personnel were given a safety refresher course Friday afternoon.

"If I were her I'd be skittish too," Burnsed said. "We're going to work hard to earn her trust."

"I'm not sure they can give him the protection he needs," Renee said.

Renee thought Kenya was safe at school. She's having serious second thoughts. "It definitely didn't make me feel secure. At all."

Renee did not send Kenya to school Monday, and won't until she feels the school addresses her concerns.

Kenya suffers from a type of autism known as Willie Prader syndrome, which also causes obesity. She says he doesn't run, or move very fast, so losing him still makes no sense.

He is also very hard to understand. Ellouise says that tipped her off when she tried talking to him. All she understood was, "I want my mommy."

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