

## **Alleged sexual harassment on school bus: These boys are not being boys**

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Reports of sexualized, anti-social behavior by young children on a Pocono Mountain school bus are disturbing indeed. The district is right to install a video camera on the bus. That, at least, may deter some of the boys accused of verbally threatening grade-school girls with sex acts, or, if the threats continue, will help the district identify the wrongdoers.

But just as disturbing as what allegedly happened to the girls is that four grade-school-age boys stand accused of harassing and bullying their fellow students in ways that are more common among pre-teens and teens — and certainly not acceptable at any age. If even the least of this behavior occurred, then the boys are victims, too.

School officials confirmed last week that they have investigated several complaints from parents of girls on the bus. These include a complaint from one mother who said the boys called her 9-year-old daughter "a whore." Other parents said their children reported that boys taunted their daughters with information about sex they had read on the Internet or gleaned from their parents' video collection. The boys allegedly threatened to hold the girls down and have sex with them. One claim involved a boy who allegedly dropped his pants and underwear and said he would take the girls home and "hump" them.

This would be scary language and behavior between adults, but it's horrifying from children in grade school. If any of it is true — and the parents' accounts were similar — how and where did these boys of about the same age learn such language and behavior? What's happened to their childhood? If the boys are, in fact, saying and doing these kinds of things now, what might they be up to in eight or 10 years?

School officials say they have investigated each complaint, interviewing the girls and the accused boys, and have taken disciplinary measures. Confidentiality prevents their providing details. On the bus they changed seat assignments as well as installing the video camera and monitor.

For now, it appears, the district has done what it can to try to head off, or accurately assess, any future violations on the bus. But we live in a modern society where people of any age can get access to hard-core porn at the touch of a button. If these boys have watched such material, someone should answer for it, and it's not school officials.

Parents bear the ultimate responsibility for monitoring their children's activities and protecting them from materials that are not appropriate.

Sadly, Pocono Mountain school officials now must keep a close eye on boys who are accused of behavior that could land an older child in delinquency proceedings.