

NJ EDUCATION REPORT

Six-Year-Old Strangled To Death on Franklin Township School Bus

By [Laura Waters](#) at July 21, 2023

“Why doesn’t the New Jersey Department of Education require live video feed of bus trips to special education supervisors and bus company managers?”

That’s special education attorney Jamie Epstein’s response to a story that broke today: six-year-old Fajr Williams of Franklin Township Public Schools was on a school bus Monday morning on her way to a summer program when she died from suffocation. The bus monitor, Amanda Divila, was charged yesterday by the Somerset County prosecutor with second-degree manslaughter and second-degree endangering the welfare of a child.

What happened to Fajr? She had [Emanuel syndrome](#), a rare chromosomal disease, which rendered her non-verbal and confined to a wheelchair. Most people with Emanuel syndrome have severe cognitive disabilities. As usual, when the bus, owned by Montauk Transportation, arrived at her house Monday morning, Davila strapped Fajr into her seat with a four-point harness towards the back of the bus. When the bus hit a rough patch of road, Fajr started to struggle and slumped down in her seat, with the strap intended to keep her upright landing around her throat and blocking her airways.

Where was Davila while Fajr was being strangled? According to the [Prosecutor’s Office](#) and the [New York Times](#), she was in a seat at the front of the bus “utilizing a cellular telephone while wearing earbud headphone devices in both ears.” (According to Franklin Public Schools officials, this is a “violation of policies and procedures.”) At 9 am that morning, Fajr’s mother, Najmah Nash, received a call that her daughter was being transported to an intensive care unit, where she was pronounced dead by suffocation.

Although Fajr could not speak, she was able to “make baby coos and happy sounds,” Ms. Nash said. She was “full of life and joy.” Ms. Nash was “devastated” to learn that while Fajr was strangling, her bus monitor was on her phone with the earbuds in. “It was very hurtful,” she said.

Ms. Nash also said that school boards should thoroughly vet bus companies before hiring them because “there’s only so much parents can do.”

No doubt she’d agree with Epstein’s sentiments.