

News

HORSETHIEF CANYON: School mourns student's death

BY MICHAEL J. WILLIAMS / STAFF WRITER

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COURTESY OF LAKE ELSINORE UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT , PHOTO COURTESY OF LAKE ELSINORE UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

Students and faculty at a Lake Elsinore Unified School District campus were grieving Thursday, Jan. 14, one day after the death of a seventh-grade girl who collapsed during an outdoor exercise.

The girl, whom authorities have yet to identify, was walking on a playing field at Luiseño School in Horsethief Canyon when the incident happened, said district spokesman Mark Dennis.

Despite efforts of the staff -- which included using an automated external defibrillator on the girl -- she later died at an area hospital. The cause of death has not been released.

School resumed Thursday with district executives, grievance counselors, psychologists, substitute teachers and extra support staff on site to provide assistance as needed. A spontaneous memorial of stuffed animals and flowers began accumulating at Luiseño's entrance.

"It's touched everyone, and yet there's a feeling that is showing that when something like this happens, people's instincts to care for one another spring forward," said Dennis. "We've seen a lot of that today -- people just caring in any way they can for students and each other. Knowing what to do seems to have happened as soon as this began."

Approximately 100 students from three fifth-grade classes and the girl's seventh-grade physical education class -- as well as teachers and other employees -- were on the field when the incident occurred around 1:30 p.m., shortly before the end of the school day.

Those who went to the student's aid found her not breathing. The staff responded with CPR and applied the defibrillator to the girl. Emergency medical responders took over the resuscitation efforts when they arrived, using their vehicles to shield students on campus from the activity.

Dennis said the girl's family thanked school personnel for the efforts to save their daughter.

"The extraordinary strength we've seen from the family is unique and rare," Dennis said. "Their ability to come here and sit with the principal and set aside their own loss and grief to say, 'We want your staff to know how much we feel grateful for all they did and we do not want them to feel burdened with guilt or self doubt.' That was an incredible message."

The family requested their daughter's privacy be protected. No information was available on memorial and funeral services.

Dennis said he was not aware of any similar incident having occurred on a district campus in past years.

The availability of the defibrillator on campus stemmed from a recent effort by the PTA to raise money to put the devices at all of the district's 20-plus campuses, Dennis said. AEDs automatically diagnose a life-threatening heart condition and respond if necessary to restore the heart's rhythm.

De Luz area resident Bob Roy launched a campaign to get the devices in all Southwest Riverside County schools following the death of his son in May 2005. Travis Roy, 14, was an eighth-grader when he collapsed at Thompson Middle School in Murrieta. He died a month later.

As part of his campaign, Bob Roy gave an AED to the Lake Elsinore district and he says now all the public schools in the region have them.

"My heart goes out to her family (of the Luiseño student)," he said. "I know what it's like to lose a child."

Contact the writer: 951-368-9690 or michaelwilliams@pe.com