

Suicides of two Kingsburg High students shake community

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Two Kingsburg High students died by suicide last week, the latest in a cluster of tragic events that have shaken the Kingsburg community this spring.

The deaths of the students, a senior and a freshman, follow the death of 16-year-old Kingsburg student Megan Snyder, who died in March after a vehicle collision with a tractor-trailer.

Randy Morris, superintendent of Kingsburg Joint Union High School District, said his staff is focused on trying to support students and families. "Kids have been very supportive of each other. It's been a rough year for our kiddos."

One of the students died early last week and the second died over the holiday weekend. The deaths of the two boys appear unrelated, Morris said.

About 150 students gathered on campus Sunday night to grieve, Morris said. Counselors are on campus and staff met Tuesday morning to discuss how to support the students.

Among the boys' friends and family, an outpouring of posts on social media paints pictures of shock and heartache.

Many students and loved ones shared memories and photos of the boys. One post displays a photo collage of one of the boys, images of him as a youngster, of growing older and playing football, and then as an almost grown man with a flower in his lapel.

Some sent their final goodbyes over Twitter and Facebook.

"Your life touched so many people. I just hope that your departure touches even more. You were a phenomenal man," wrote one young woman on Twitter.

In an obituary for the young man who was ready to graduate next month, he's described as a "loving brother" who "touched the lives of so many with his infectious smile and occasional witty jokes."

His funeral was held Tuesday, the same day many students returned to school and learned about the death of the freshman who died over the weekend.

It's important to understand that a string of suicides in the same community in the same week or month is extremely rare, said Leann Gouveia, executive director of education and grief organization [Fresno Survivors of Suicide Loss](#). Each year, she said, about four Fresno County youth under age 18 kill themselves, a rate that has remained relatively steady over the past five years.

"That's 20 kids (over five years). That's astronomical no matter how you slice it," she said.

But many more attempt suicide each year. The national rate of youth who attempt but don't die by suicide is about 25 times higher than the number who die, according to the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention.

"That's the scary part. Completed suicide (is) absolutely horrible, but if you look at the number of attempts we have a problem that people aren't even aware of," Gouveia said.

In the aftermath of the boys' deaths, Gouveia said families and school staff need to keep open lines of communication with all Kingsburg High students.

“The worst thing that can happen is if it’s not talked about,” she said.

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