

School officials say boy who shot himself never reported bullying

By Pat Reavy
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TAYLORSVILLE — As students at Bennion Junior High mourn following the public suicide of a classmate, police and school officials continued Friday to investigate what led to the tragedy.

David Q. Phan, 14, shot himself on the overpass leading to the school, 6055 S. 2700 West, about 3 p.m. Thursday. The shooting was witnessed by other students.

The student had been dismissed from school that day and went home with his mother. He was searched for weapons before he left, said Granite School District spokesman Ben Horsely without elaborating as to why the boy was searched.

The handgun David used came from his home, Unified Police Lt. Justin Hoyal confirmed. The gun had been locked up in a safe at the home. Hoyal said David knew where the weapon and was somehow able to access it.

Crisis counselors were at both the junior high school and nearby Calvin Smith Elementary School on Friday. Several students said David had been a victim of bullying. But the Granite School District released a statement on its Facebook page Thursday evening saying that while they were investigating bullying allegations, no such incidents had been reported to the school — even by the boy himself.

"This student had been contacted regularly by a school counselor (over the past 18 months) to monitor his well being specific to concerns with bullying. Despite being questioned on an ongoing basis, this student did not report any instances of bullying. Additionally, the administration has not received any reports of bullying of this student from the student himself or other students. This is not to say that bullying was not an issue (as that continues to be investigated), but that bullying issues cannot be addressed unless they are reported," the district reported.

Thursday night, a candlelight vigil was held on the overpass where David committed suicide.

"He was nice to everyone, even if sometimes people weren't nice to him," said Bennion ninth-grader Brandon Newby.

Ninth-graders Makayla Schmidt and Ponia Clark said they came to the vigil not only in remembrance of the boy they had come to know in their classes, but also to support a friend who witnessed the tragedy. The gathering at the school gave students a chance to mourn together, Ponia said.

"I knew (him) really well, and I think other people needed comfort as well as me," she said, her voice trembling as she looked around at the group. "I needed to find a place where I could cry."

Makayla said bullying is sometimes hard to see, especially when it is done through cruel words.

“I heard it, people (talking about him),” she said. “I don't think people realize how much words can hurt.”

School officials have encouraged students to report any incidents of bullying they hear about for any student. The district also offers an anonymous text service for bullying to be reported.