

California girl dies from injuries in school fight

Feb. 27, 2012: A photo of Joanna Ramos, 11, with a note, is left at a memorial outside Willard Elementary school in Long Beach, Calif. Ramos, who died after a fight with another 11-year-old in an alley near their elementary school underwent emergency surgery for a blood clot on her brain before her death, her sister said Monday. (AP)

LONG BEACH, Calif. – The coroner's office ruled Monday that the death of a 10-year-old Southern California schoolgirl after a fight with another female student was a homicide.

Blunt force trauma to the head killed Joanna Ramos, who collapsed at home after a fight on Friday in Long Beach, coroner's Lt. Fred Corral says Monday.

He did not immediately have details about her injuries or the circumstances of her death.

The girl's older sister said Joanna died after surgery for a blood clot on the brain after the fight in an alley with an 11-year-old girl.

Joanna Ramos' mother rushed her to the hospital Friday evening after the girl began vomiting and complained of a headache, said Vanessa Urbina, 17, who was at the hospital with her sister.

Joanna was unconscious by the time she arrived at the emergency room, but hospital staff revived her three times before she went into surgery for the blood clot, Urbina told The Associated Press.

"They did surgery on her brain because she had a blood clot, and after surgery the doctor said she was still alive, and then a few minutes later he comes back and tells us that her heart stopped and they couldn't bring her back," Urbina said, crying as she sat on the steps of Willard Elementary School near a memorial of flowers and balloons.

In the hospital, "She was covered up, you could only see her face," Urbina said.

Joanna was pronounced dead at 9 p.m. Friday, about six hours after she and another 11-year-old girl had a pre-planned fight near the school.

No arrests have been made.

The circumstances left family, friends and authorities seeking answers.

There were seven witnesses to the fight, which lasted less than a minute, police said. It didn't involve any weapons and no one was knocked to the ground.

Detectives have interviewed family and friends of both girls, but there is no indication that Joanna was bullied, police said.

"I personally don't hear of 11-year-old fights like this, especially girls. I can't say they never happen but I think everyone was completely caught off-guard by this event," police spokeswoman Nancy Pratt said Sunday.

Joanna returned to her after-school program after the fight, where her friend saw her with blood

on her knuckles from wiping at a bloody nose, said Cristina Perez, the friend's mother.

Perez said her daughter, who is 10, heard about plans for the fight during recess earlier in the day and knew to stay away from the alley after school.

"We've just got to pay more attention to our kids too, not just dropping them off at the school. I'm always on my daughter, always," Perez, 30, said as she gathered with other concerned mothers outside the school Monday. "I tell her, 'You see a fight (and) you stay away from it.'"

Perez and other mothers outside the school said their children told them the fight was over a boy.

"They took off their backpacks, and they put their hair in a bun, and then that's when they said 'go' and that's when they started hitting each other," Joanna's friend and classmate Maggie Martinez, who watched the fight, told KNBC.

Martinez and other friends said they tried to stop the fight, but were held back by boys who were watching and wanted it to continue.

Worried parents gathered at the school after dropping off their children to look at a memorial of flowers, balloons and drawings dedicated to Joanna and to read a letter distributed by the principal about the fight. A sheriff's deputy lingered in the background and a police car circled the block, monitoring the activity.

Mother Victoria Pyles said her daughter had started classes at the school last week after the family moved to the neighborhood. Her daughter likes the school, Pyles said, but now she isn't sure whether to leave her there.

"This is her third day here and this is happening and I'm just so confused at this moment, thinking should I take my daughter out of this school," Pyles said. "If this is what is going on, I don't like it. It's very scary."

Urbina, Joanna's sister, remembered her sibling as a happy child who liked to sing, dance and watch soap operas and loved having her hair curled by her older sister. She had asked Urbina to curl her hair for her birthday on March 12, and had asked her parents to take the whole family to an amusement park to celebrate.

"She was so young for this to happen" Urbina said. "She was so happy and so many people loved her."