

November 27, 2023

Dear Casa Grande Union High School District Learning Community,

I am writing to share the shocking, sad news that we lost Hailey Stephens, a Casa Grande Union High School Senior. Hailey was shot in a senseless shooting Saturday night and died Sunday afternoon.

Hailey was ranked number #19 in her class while maintaining a 4.33 grade point average. She was also involved in hard-working activities like FFA and cheerleading. I have spoken to some of her current and past teachers, and they described an extraordinary young lady who was a source of sunlight in their classrooms as she was kind to everybody. Hailey also had a beautiful smile that will be etched in the memories of the hearts and minds of all her family, educators, and friends.



Today, we start the grieving process, and we work to heal from this senseless tragedy. This process will be complicated as we have many questions and what-ifs. As we go through this process, I ask this community to be mindful of the grieving and healing process and be careful not to gossip, speculate, or act out in anger.

The police are investigating this senseless loss of life. If you have information that could be useful to the investigation, please reach out to the Casa Grande Police Department. Investigating a crime is like completing a puzzle. Each piece of the puzzle will help us learn the facts of what happened and bring the shooter to justice. The Stephens family deserves justice for this unjustified loss of life.

We will have crisis teams and a police officer on Union's campus these next few days to deal with the aftermath of this horrible tragedy. If you need to talk with someone, please reach out, as talking/processing is essential to the grieving process.

Throughout my lifetime, I have found myself asking "Why" several times and the answers are not easy to find. Hailey's tragic death has generated many questions that I hope some get answered soon. Answering questions like "Why Hailey?" will be difficult. Hailey's death is a reminder that life is precious and can be taken from us at any time. Although her life was short, Hailey lived a fulfilling seventeen years and made a difference in our community. We are thankful for her impact on all of us and devastated her life was cut much too short.

Hailey is part of family tree of two Casa Grande multi-generational families. The number of people whom this senseless tragedy will impact will be enormous. The Casa Grande Community will wrap its arms around this extended family and help them cope with this tragedy. I know many of you are at a loss of words for what to say to Hailey's family and friends. Actions do speak louder than words. Let's let all of our actions moving forward indicate that we demand these senseless acts of violence to stop immediately and that we can all live together in peace and unity.

Finally, I encourage all of you tonight to reach out to your loved ones and let them know how much they mean to you. Hugs and messages of love are the very best healing medicine.

Best wishes to your family.

Jeff Lavender  
Superintendent