

## First-grader's brutal death presents challenges

### Counseling

Grief counselors are available for community

#### Meaghan M. McDermott

Rochester Democrat and Chronicle USA TODAY NETWORK

Between television, radio, internet and social media, it's hard to escape hearing the gruesome details surrounding the death late Thursday of Brockport Central School District elementary schooler Abraham Cardenas.

The 7-year-old was allegedly slain inside his Lake Road home that night by his mother Hanane Mouhib, a 36-year-old former nurse practitioner who had been hospitalized for mental health problems just weeks before Abraham's death.

Police say Mouhib stabbed and decapitated Abraham with a kitchen knife inside one room of the family home while her husband, another son and mother-in-law were in an adjacent room. Three successive 911 calls were made from the home about 8:20 p.m., one reporting a suicidal female armed with a knife. When deputies arrived, they had to subdue Mouhib with pepper spray and a stun gun before taking her into custody.

On Saturday, grief counselors were made available for community members and families at Barclay Elementary School, 40 Allen Street, where Abraham was a first-grader. Dozens of cars were parked at the school about 1 p.m. on Saturday. School officials requested media not approach the grieving families out of respect for their privacy, and school security officers were posted in the parking area. The district will continue providing grief counselors and other services for affected families when students return from their spring break on Monday and "for as long as they're needed" said District Superintendent Lesli Myers. Myers said the high-profile nature of Abraham's slaying poses a challenge for the counseling team, as unrelenting and sometimes horrifyingly detailed media coverage and social media sharing about the case has made it hard for parents to shield their young ones from the news, no matter how much they may have tried.

"Given that reality and knowing that this is what we have to deal with, we know we are going to have students coming to us with a wide range of knowledge," she said. "They will run the

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**A Sweden woman has been charged with the murder of a 7-year-old boy. It took place at this house on 5499 Lake Road in Sweden. CARLOS ORTIZ/@CFORTIZ\_DANDC/ STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER**



**Abraham Cardenas**

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gamut and everything in between from students whose parents have not been watching television to those who have been quite vocal.”

When it comes to dealing with the students and their uncertainties and grief, Myers said the most important tool for parents and other student caregivers is communication.

“It’s a delicate balance, we have to lead this but we have to figure out what the students know, and that means doing a lot of listening,” she said. “And it’s not about trying to normalize the situation, but helping students realize that loss is a normal part of life, that it unfortunately does happen, that we miss the person — in this case Abraham — and that sometimes bad things do happen.”

This crime has been especially piercing, she said.

“I want to reiterate what a wonderful young person Abraham was,” said Myers. “He was vibrant, loved to learn and was an integral part of our school community. He just lit up a room and adults just loved him so much. We are saddened and we miss him.” Abraham had attended Brockport schools since he started kindergarten in 2016, and his older brother is a current Brockport student. Abraham previously attended Stepping Stones Learning Center as a special needs student, said his former teacher Bridgette Remillard.

“His eyes and smile could light up a room. He was so smart and loved to draw,” she said.

Stepping Stones Learning Center closed in June of 2017. The center served students from birth to 21 years-old with and without special needs, according to the website.

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**Mouhib**

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