

Students

Student Memorials

From time to time, Scottsbluff Public School District must confront the issue of dealing appropriately with the death of a student. The purpose of this policy is to set forth uniform guidelines when responding to the death of a student. When a student dies it is generally a school-wide (if not a community-wide) tragedy. Schools are immediately identified as having some responsibility to make sure the student's life is recognized and honored. The District welcomes this opportunity and desires to help in the grieving and healing processes. The District is obligated, however, to exercise caution in the method used to recognize the deceased student and his or her family. Research indicates two potential problems.

First, physical memorials have the potential to communicate immortalization, essentially glamorizing the death in the minds of some students. Young people who suffer from depression or other psychological problems and are at risk for suicidal behavior are sometimes motivated to take their own lives when they are exposed to a memorial immortalizing the death of a student.

Secondly, memorials can be an ongoing visual reminder of what happened, leading to students worrying if it will happen again or wondering if they could be next. From this perspective, memorials in the school or on school property pose a significant risk simply because a school is a "closed" environment. It becomes almost impossible for students to avoid the physical reminders of a death when a memorial is located on school premises. Memorials need to be an opportunity of choice, as we all grieve differently. For some, it is healthier not to be reminded.

Consequently, the following guidelines should guide schools' decision-making during such circumstances.

The District will not allow:

1. Memorial/funeral services that may alter the routine of a regular school instructional day;
2. Memorials that require the altering of school activities or the activity schedule;
3. Memorials that require the altering of school property;
4. Memorials that infringe on the separation of church and state;
5. Memorials that require the use of public funds to purchase, develop, or maintain;
6. Memorials that include plaques attached to any object on school property;
7. Memorials that draw attention or have the potential to glamorize the death;
8. Memorials that consist of a monument on school property;
9. Memorials in the yearbook;
10. Memorials during graduation ceremony, such as an empty seat to honor the individual; and/or,
11. Memorials attached to a wall or in a trophy case.

Acceptable memorials/activities may include:

1. Scholarships established in the name of the student;
2. Donation to a charity or program that is dedicated to helping students;
3. Collection of money to be donated to the deceased's family or charity of their choice;

4. The inclusion of a recently deceased student in a yearbook with the notation “In Memory of...” during the year of his or her death (in a manner otherwise no different than any other student) shall not be considered a memorial;
5. Honorary diplomas for deceased students that are currently seniors may be distributed privately to parents/guardians; and/or,
6. The graduation ceremony may include a moment of silence to honor all who could not be in attendance.

Additionally, memorials/donations are encouraged to be given to the Scottsbluff Public Schools Foundation in accordance with the Foundation guidelines and procedures.

Additional administrative support may include:

1. A sympathy card from the school (possibly signed by students and staff) and flowers **not purchased with district funds** could be sent to the family or site of the ceremony;
2. The District Emergency Response Counseling Team should be contacted immediately and be on campus to help students cope with the grief caused by the loss;
3. Students and staff should be encouraged to extend their support to the family in safe, courteous, and appropriate manners. Staff and students are encouraged to respect the family’s privacy and should refrain from posting on social media platforms;
4. Administrators and staff attendance at the viewing and funeral are encouraged;
5. Administration should oversee the safe return of the student’s personal effects that may be in a school locker or classroom; and,
6. School records, inclusion in any distribution lists (electronic, telephone, mailings), attendance lists, and rosters should be sensitively purged.

The Board of Education recognizes the guidelines listed above are not an all-encompassing list and respectfully reserve the right to exercise its best judgment for those instances not covered by the guidelines appearing above.

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