

3615-7215 Memorials and Grief Support in Schools

The Wake County Board of Education is committed to supporting school communities during times of loss with sensitivity, equity, and respect. The Board recognizes that the death of a student or staff member has a profound impact on the school community. It is the policy of the Board to ensure that memorial activities honor those affected and are guided by established principles, while maintaining schools as welcoming, supportive spaces focused on learning and well-being.

This policy provides a guiding framework for decision-making regarding memorials that balances the needs of grieving individuals with the Board's educational responsibilities. This policy aims to ensure consistency and equity from case to case, recognizing that decisions made immediately after traumatic events may set difficult precedents if not carefully managed.

I. Guiding Principles

- A. Respect and Sensitivity:** Activities shall reflect sensitivity to the wishes of the grieving family and the developmental, cultural, and religious needs of the community.
- B. Equity:** All losses must be recognized with equal respect and dignity. Differentiating responses based on an individual's prominence may suggest that some losses are more significant than others.
- C. Learning Environment:** Memorials should not create lasting reminders that intensify the grieving process or detract from the educational mission.
- D. Safety:** Policies shall prioritize the emotional safety of students, particularly regarding the prevention of suicide contagion.

II. Governance and Approval

- A. Approval Authority:** All memorial activities in the school setting must be approved by the school principal or the Superintendent.
- B. Family Consent:** Before any communications or activities are undertaken, the school must designate a consistent point of contact to obtain the family's permission to share information and to ensure their wishes are respected.

III. Immediate Response

A. Communication

1. School marquees will *not* be used to post messages about the deceased.
2. Personal information should not be posted on school social media pages. Announcements should be handled privately and respectfully, avoiding school-wide assemblies for the initial announcement.

B. Funerals and Services

1. Memorial services shall be held off school grounds to allow the community to gather respectfully without disrupting the learning environment.
2. Funerals will not be held in District facilities.
3. Students wishing to attend services may do so with parent permission and will be excused from class.

4. Students and staff will not livestream funerals or ceremonies on school campuses.

IV. Memorial Activities and Guidelines

A. Spontaneous Memorials

1. Impromptu memorial displays (i.e. informal, student-initiated tributes such as flowers, notes, t-shirts with the classmate's photograph, etc.) may be allowed but must be managed with clear boundaries.
2. School staff should communicate clearly about expectations and limitations, and plan for removal of the memorial and any items.
3. The display will remain for up to 5 days. This timeline must be communicated to the school community in advance to avoid misunderstandings.
4. The School Crisis Team will review items to ensure they are appropriate. After the display period, families will be offered the items as keepsakes.

B. Permanent Memorials

1. To avoid constant reminders of loss that hinder healing, permanent memorials (e.g., plaques, statues, trees) are prohibited on school grounds.
2. The District does not permit memorials that require altering school property, naming schools or facilities after individuals, or mounting items to walls/trophy cases.

C. Commencement Acknowledgement

1. Graduation focuses on scholastic achievement.
2. The school can provide a flower arrangement that collectively honors all members of the school community who are not able to be present at graduation. The school can include a statement in the graduation program indicating the flower arrangement is to honor deceased staff and students.
3. The school can place a vase on the stage, in a noticeable position, and the vase will include a white rose and ribbon. The vase will be given to the family after the event. The school can include a statement in the graduation program indicating the vase is to honor the student.
4. An honorary diploma recognizing the former student can be delivered to parents after the ceremony upon request by the parents. **Parents will not be allowed to participate in the ceremony by walking across the stage to accept the diploma on behalf of the student.**
5. To avoid lingering reminders of loss, schools shall avoid leaving an empty chair or holding a moment of silence during the ceremony.

D. Suicide Response

1. Memorials following a suicide may unintentionally or inadvertently glamorize death or communicate that suicide is an appropriate or desired response to stress. If a death is a confirmed or suspected suicide, schools must follow recommendations from the District Crisis Response Team to reduce the risk of contagion.

2. Permanent memorials (e.g., plaques, yearbook pages) are strongly discouraged following a student's death by suicide. Instead, **memorials that are temporary, nonrenewable, or in the form of a living memorial** are recommended (e.g. donations to suicide prevention programs).
3. The cause of death is only shared if the family permits. Staff should encourage students to seek support from Student Services staff if they have questions or concerns about what they have heard.

E. Fundraising and Gifts

1. Public funds shall not be used to purchase or maintain memorials.
2. Schools **should not organize** crowdfunding efforts due to concerns about transparency and pressure on the community.
3. **Staff participation in external campaigns is a personal matter to be conducted outside of school hours and without institutional endorsement.**
4. Families or community members wishing to honor or remember the deceased student or staff member may wish to consider the following options:
 - a. Scholarships established in the name of the deceased.
 - b. Donation to a charity or program that is dedicated to helping students.
 - c. Donation to the family or a charity of its choice.
 - d. Sympathy card and flowers at the funeral.