**TEMPLATE SCHOOL DISTRICT**

**Sample Memorial Policy**

Student/Staff Memorials

Adopted February 1, 2020

**Purpose**

Memorials are a way for students, staff, and the community to express their grief. The public image of memorials is of a permanent monument or plaque. In schools, memorials are more often ritualized group activities. Because they are often group events, they serve to normalize feelings. Memorials can also be learning events for children and opportunities for students to take an active role in the grieving process. Depending on the age of your students, many of them will not have much experience, if any, with death and the grieving process. Therefore, part of the response will be to teach students about the grieving process and what to expect at memorial services, events, or activities. Children may learn about customs, rituals, and the different kinds of reactions and emotions they can expect to have themselves or see in others. Memorials will likely evoke questions from students, so they should be given time to ask questions. This will help them feel more prepared for the memorial, which may subsequently serve to reduce feelings of anxiety.

The Template School District recognizes that memorials established upon school district property must be proposed, reviewed, and adopted cognizant of concepts of equality, proper concern for all students, staff and community members, appropriateness of memorials, and best usage of available property. Memorials will be considered for students, alumni, and current and retired staff members. The School Board or its designee reserves the right to accept or deny any memorial gift.

**Authority**

Written requests for the establishment of memorials shall be submitted to the Superintendent. The request shall include the following:

1. The identity of the person(s) to be submitted for memorial.
2. A brief narrative justification of the reason(s) for the memorial.
3. A description of the memorial to be established given the guidelines set forth herein below.

The Superintendent may refer the request to the relevant building principal for a recommendation. The School Board, however, will make the final decision. The principal may request further information if required. In making a recommendation for a memorial, the principal must consider the following

In the event that requests are made to establish district-wide memorials (e.g. the naming of a facility, etc.), the Superintendent or designee will select a committee to address such issues.

**Do No Harm**

A memorial should “do no harm.”Memorial or gathering sites should be physically and emotionally safe. For example, if a student died in a car crash, do not allow students to gather and grieve at the accident site if it is beside a busy street or highway. Keep candles at the memorial site separate from stuffed animals, flowers, and letters and poems. Let students’ questions be the guide; do not force them to discuss or attend the memorial if they are not ready. Making students feel obligated to express themselves or grieve before they are ready may be doing more harm than good and probably suggests that the adults need to do their own grief work. Emotional numbing may be a protective factor for a child during the initial stages of grief.

**Types of Memorials**

When appropriate, encourage your students to express themselves by providing them with a number of choices in memorial activities. A variety of activities will increase the likelihood that individual students can choose their preferred mode of expression. Choosing to create a memorial—whether permanent, semipermanent, or temporary—is no small decision.

*Permanent memorials* may include a granite monument, permanent artwork, an engraved stone, or a permanent plaque. The purpose of a permanent memorial is to remind people of the person who died. Permanent memorials are discouraged as they may serve as triggers for grief and may glamorize a death. If used, permanent memorials require careful planning and discussion before any final decisions are made.

*Semipermanent, renewable, or living memorials* may include a tree planting, a memory garden, dedication of a space such as the library or gymnasium, a bench, an annual scholarship, or an annual 5K run. For semipermanent memorials, the school will want to designate how many years the memorial will remain in place.

*Temporary memorials* may include a nonrenewable scholarship; a onetime monetary donation to charity; a message on a poster or banner; a memory book; writing an individual or group letter; keeping a journal; creating a personal song, poem, or other art project; a candlelight vigil; or an impromptu memorial site (collection of balloons, flowers, stuffed animals, and photos). Most temporary memorials are short term, can be given away as a gift or donation, or they will expire or come to an end within a year. In most school-related deaths, it is most appropriate to create temporary memorials. Temporary memorials allow students, staff, and families to express their grief in a positive and constructive manner.

**Recommended Memorials**

Memorials may be established if there is no cost to the school or school district. Appropriate memorials may include:

1. Scholarships in memory of a deceased student and/or staff member.
2. Donated books, music, videos, or other materials recommended by the school principal (or designee) to the Template School Board for approval and acceptance to the school library. Donated items may include a plate with wording limited to "Donated in Memory of “student/staff name" or "In Memory of “student/staff name" and the deceased's legal name and dates of birth and death. Disposal of the donated item, due to its being outdated, obsolete, or in disrepair is at the discretion of the school principal (or designee).
3. Non-conditional monetary contributions to a particular school activity, department, educational foundation, or event. The school principal must recommend acceptance to the Template School Board for approval.
4. Equipment donated with recommendation of the Superintendent to the Template School Board. An engraved plate no larger than two (2) by six (6) inches may be affixed to the equipment and may include wording limited to "Donated in Memory of “student/staff name" or "In Memory of “student/staff name" and the deceased's legal name and dates of birth and death. Disposal of the donated item, due to its being outdated, obsolete, or in disrepair is at the discretion of the school principal (or designee).
5. A flower bouquet may be on display at graduation ceremonies in a location deemed appropriate by the school principal (or designee). An acknowledgement stating that the bouquet is "In memory of all deceased students who were a part of this graduating class" will be printed in the graduation program. At the discretion of the school principal (or designee) and the concurrence of the next of kin, a deceased student's diploma may be presented posthumously to a family member of the deceased if all degree requirements had been met prior to the student's death. Such a presentation would be in the same manner and at the same place in the program as if the student had received the diploma.
6. Following past practice with regard to yearbooks might help decision making. If a yearbook page is dedicated to a deceased staff member or student, it may not need to be a full page and must follow the safe reporting guidelines found in Appendix A. For suicide loss, focus on positive mental health and include something like “in your memory, we will work to save lives…”
7. Permanent “property” memorials are discouraged. This includes the planting of trees and gardens as well as plaques, markers, etc.

Since there are currently a number of plaques and other assorted markers on grounds and in buildings throughout the School District, the following guidelines shall apply:

1. Current memorials, markers or plaques installed prior to implementation of this policy will remain in place, without maintenance and/or care by the school or school district. Items which fall into disrepair, will be moved, replaced or eliminated if such action is deemed appropriate and necessary for the overall operation and plan of the campus. Such tangible property will be offered to the family of the deceased. Trees, shrubs, or perennials which die will be removed by the school district’s maintenance department. Oversight for these decisions will be made by the school principal (or designee) and/or the Supervisor of Buildings and Grounds.
2. Memorials, markers or engraved plaques will be removed during the summer months and offered to the family after one (1) complete school year.

**Spontaneous Temporary Memorials/Expressions Following a Death**

Because memorials are group events, it is a time for people to come together and to support one another. Often memorials serve as a gathering place on important anniversaries after an event. These are encouraged to be off school grounds and held outside of school hours. While large group memorials are discouraged, schools should enlist the support of the local police department if they do occur. School administrators and mental health staff should also be in attendance, if possible, to provide supervision; monitor student reactions and the appropriateness of the activities; and support students, staff, and community members. Monitoring memorials is especially important after a suicide loss. Every decision made regarding memorials after a student suicide will be extremely important, because it may help prevent the death of another student by contagion. Decision makers need to remember that their primary concern should be about the surviving students that are left in their care. Otherwise, saying no to a memorial can be misinterpreted as the school not caring or being insensitive.

The Template School district is sensitive to the emotional needs of our school community during times of crisis. While Template school district may provide family and friends appropriate opportunities to share their grief upon the death of a student, tragic incidents or deaths may be observed by spontaneous expressions of grief, support, or sympathy for a victim and/or their family. These expressions often have taken the form of banners, locker decorations, flowers, or gatherings. So that no human life is interpreted to be more or less important than others, the following procedures shall be followed:

1. In enforcing this policy, it is imperative that students and staff involved are treated in a sensitive manner by explaining the reasons for the policy to students, staff, parents and/or guardians.
2. A moment of silence may be offered at the district or school level.
3. Since expressions of grief are often emotional and cathartic, individual or trained professionals should be available to appropriately address need. As specified earlier in this manual, mental health professionals will be available during school hours as needed.
4. Decorations or displays should be limited to an area designated by the school principal (or designee). For example, locker decorations should be limited to the inside of a locker, if at all. Displays should not be in a common area of the school. These displays should not be in place for more than 5 days after the funeral at which time they can be removed and offered to the family of the deceased.
5. Candles and other flammable items cannot be permitted on school grounds without the permission of the Superintendent.
6. Gatherings on school property without the presence of an appropriate adult will not be allowed. Assemblies are not appropriate after the death of a student or staff member.
7. Consideration should be given to the victim’s family for “formal memorial observances” on school property; however, the Superintendent and the Template School Board shall be given the final consideration in decision making.
8. Memorial t-shirts that prominently display a deceased’s picture or name are discouraged. Support bracelets, clothing or gear that are not intrusive, but display messages of hope, may be considered. It is important to not inadvertently trigger grief or suicide contagion with these images.
9. Online memorial pages (i.e. RIP pages) should also be monitored closely by school staff for concerning messages posted by students. It is recommended that these only stay online for 30-60 days, at which time they should be taken down with a message acknowledging the supportive messages while providing psychoeducation as well as were to seek help (AFSP & SPRC, 2018).

\*Current legal interpretations indicate that a district may not be involved in planning religious content, but may not infringe upon the right of non-school personnel to express themselves.

Unacceptable Memorial Gifts and Practices

Memorials and practices that are deemed not acceptable by the school or school district are those that:

1. Alter school activities or the school schedule.
2. Require the retirement or discontinued use of school property.
3. Infringe on the separation of church and state.
4. Require the use of public funds for purchase, development, or maintenance.
5. Memorials that glamorize the method of death.
6. Present a potential health, safety risk, or violate school district rules, regulations, and procedures.

**Delegation of Responsibility**

In the event of a crisis on campus that results in multiple items being left to honor or memorialize student(s)/staff, the school district reserves the right to eliminate, donate, or move the items to a more appropriate location in order that those items would not be in violation of "Unacceptable Memorial Gifts" 1-6. These may be offered to the family.

**DO’s and DONT’S**

DO NOT:

* DO NOT encourage spontaneous memorials, such as collections of objects. If they occur, respectfully remove them within 5 days. A memorial can be an upsetting reminder of a suicide or romanticize the deceased in a way that increases risk for suicide contagion.
* DO NOT conduct memorial assemblies as emotions can be too grand to control.
* DO NOT make attendance at memorial events or creation of memorials mandatory.
* DO NOT conduct any activities that might do harm or increase traumatization.
* DO NOT close school or dismiss early to allow students and staff to attend a funeral (students and staff should be permitted to attend on an individual basis).
* DO NOT announce the death of a student over the intercom system (classroom announcements are more personal).
* DO NOT encourage funerals to be held at a school.
* DO NOT allow memorials to be placed at the entrance of a school (memorials need to be

DO:

* provide a variety or range of memorial activities for students so they can choose their own way of expressing grief.
* enforce the same memorialization policy regardless of the manner of death.
* invite students to write personal and lasting remembrances in a memory book located in the guidance office that will be given to the family. (Be sure to read and review each student’s writings/artwork for appropriateness).
* encourage students to engage in service projects, such as organizing community service.
* invite students to make donations to a scholarship fund or other fund in memory of the deceased student or participate in another form of a living memorial.
* encourage teammates/classmates to dedicate one game or school show in the deceased’s honor.
* promote memorials and activities that foster a sense of hope, recovery, and positive action.
* provide a variety of age-appropriate memorial activities that reflect the student’s developmental stage.
* allow students to leave a memorial event if they do not feel comfortable.
* provide students and staff with additional options (counseling, talking to a trusted adult) should they become overwhelmed with emotions and need additional support.
* disseminate facts and provide information to parents and staff about crisis reactions and adaptive and maladaptive coping responses.
* demonstrate awareness and sensitivity toward culturally related expressions, practices, and activities.
* closely supervise all memorial events to make sure they are appropriate, safe, and follow the maxim of “do no harm.”
* monitor individuals at memorial events and make sure they are linked with or referred to mental health professionals, if needed. (Students indicating self-harm or violent intent need to be referred immediately.)
* promote “living” memorials that benefit others (e.g., donations for a suicide prevention program).