

AP 551 - MEMORIALS IN SCHOOLS

Background

The Cowichan Valley School District recognizes that the death of a student or staff member deeply impacts students, staff and families and that memorial decisions made immediately in the aftermath of a crisis caused by a death may be made without full consideration of the potential implications for students, staff, families and the community. The purpose of this AP will provide a process for memorial decision making, as well as memorial activities. It also recognizes that memorials may require careful, and deliberate, consideration in determining approved memorial activities. This AP will be reviewed on an annual basis by District and building administration to ensure it continues to further the stated purpose.

In recognition that schools are designed primarily to support learning, school sites should not serve as the main venue for the memorializing of students, staff, or families. Memorial activities expressed at school need to be coordinated and approved through the Critical Incident Response team, as well as the school principal. Together, they will assist families and students in selecting memorial activities that are appropriate for the school and assist students and staff in healthy bereavement.

Context

Each case is considered individually by our Critical Incident Response Team in partnership with the school principal and impacted family and school community. It is also with the understanding that temporary memorials can be of support to many, and must be planned and managed in respectful ways that help support those individuals most directly impacted while also gently helping a school return to normalcy.

Often, there is a very real need to support a temporary shrine or memorial. In these cases, the Critical Incident Response team will work collaboratively with the principal to involve family members and students, especially at the secondary level, to discuss decisions regarding memorials.

A guiding principle of the Critical Incident Response Team and school principal is to ensure the material and nature of a memorial is temporary and not permanent in nature, and that an appropriate location is identified. Memorials that are long term or permanent are not appropriate as they may be trauma activating because of the simple fact that they provide an ongoing visual reminder of what happened. The Critical Incident Response Team will work with the school team to ensure that a plan for creating a temporary memorial and removing the memorial is communicated with staff, students and family members prior to its installation.

Procedures

In the event of a traumatic incident or sudden death of a member of our school community, the Critical Incident Response Team and school principal will meet to discuss immediate supports required for the family, school community and those directly impacted.

1. Memorial activities that take place at school must be approved and coordinated through the school principal and the Critical Incident Response Team and in consultation with the Superintendent. The principal and the school's counsellor will assist families and students in selecting memorial activities that are appropriate for the school community and will assist students in healthy bereavement.
2. In recognition that schools are designed primarily to support learning, school sites should not serve as the main venue for the memorializing of students, staff, or families.
3. Temporary school memorials, as approved by the school principal and Critical Incident Response Team, may be displayed until the day of the funeral, or within one week following the death, after which time they will be given to the family or charity as determined by the family and designated district officials. (Allowable temporary memorials include flower arrangements, banners, pictures, notes, and locker and student desk displays.)
4. The School District reserves the right to accept or decline permanent memorials. Permanent legacy memorials for deceased students, family and staff should be limited to endowments, scholarships, or items with educational significance. Scholarship and endowment memorials may be established as a one-time award, with a description of the purpose of the endowment or scholarship. In general, the school district will avoid legacy memorials such as benches, placing a plaque in the hallway/gym or planting a tree, as these are standards that schools may not be able to apply consistently to all possible future deaths.
5. Fundraising for memorial items during the school day is prohibited. District student activity accounts cannot be used to support, finance, or fundraise for memorialization. Proceeds from district co-curricular events or contests cannot be donated to agencies for memorialization. Funding for memorialization may not come from schools.
6. Should a current student or member of the school staff pass away anytime during the current school period, the yearbook staff will treat the death in a tasteful, respectful manner. The portrait of that individual will appear as it would under normal circumstances, with the appropriate section's portraits. Pages covering sports, academics, or activities that have already been published may also feature the individual. The yearbook should not be dedicated to the deceased person.
7. School district facilities will not be used for memorial services or funerals. Exceptions may be made for rental of school facilities by private parties with the approval of the Superintendent. In addition, the Superintendent, in consultation with the District Critical Incident Response Team, has the discretion to approve school-wide memorial activities in certain rare and extenuating circumstances. Due to the varying needs of students and staff, students and staff would not be required to participate in a school-wide memorial.
8. A commemorative event may be established and held in the name of the deceased student, staff or family member. Activities cannot be held during the school day, and should be sponsored by a class, club, or activity in which the deceased student or staff

member participated. Advertisement of events must occur outside the school day. It is recommended that Commemorative items or events be sponsored by community-based agencies and promoted outside the school day.

9. School staff will monitor anniversary dates and may provide small group or individual counselling and/or other supportive activities to friends of the deceased in order to assist with grief recovery. School-wide recognition of anniversary dates will not occur
10. Existing memorials are generally the sole responsibility of the entity providing the memorial; District staff and/or finances may only be used to maintain current memorials as part of regular maintenance processes and/or to ensure safe conditions. The District reserves the right to remove a memorial if it is not or cannot be maintained or is contrary to the overall educational needs of students.

“The work of honouring the memory of an individual, particularly one who has died suddenly and unexpectedly, is exceptionally delicate.”

Based upon the knowledge of traumatic exposure as well as the complexity of school systems and school populations, and in recognition that schools are designed primarily to support learning, school sites should not serve as the main venue for the memorializing of students, staff, or families.

Adopted: May 2, 2023