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Administrative Letter A080

Dealing With the Death of a Student

Administrative Letter #80 Dealing With the Death of a Student - 10/05/2009

October 05, 2009

Subject: Dealing With the Death of a Student

From time to time we confront the issue of dealing appropriately with the death of a student. These are always emotional times and are often met with a degree of confusion and indecision as to how we should reach out administratively. While there is no one-size fits all procedure that can be recommended due to the differing circumstances that surround these events, we should have some procedural guidelines to reference. The purpose of this letter is to propose, for your consideration, some uniform guidelines when reacting 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. Of course we welcome this opportunity and want to do all we can to help in the grieving and healing process.

We must exercise some caution in the way we recognize the deceased student and his/her family. Research indicates that when we do too much in recognition of the deceased we immortalize them, glamorizing their 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 often motivated to take their own lives when we immortalize or glamorize death.

Please find some suggestions to help in dealing with these issues surrounding the death of a student:

RECOMMENDED

Contact the family and express sorrow for their loss.

A card from the school (possibly signed by students) and flowers at the funeral would be appropriate.

An administrative visit to the viewing and funeral is encouraged.

Administration should oversee the safe return of the student's personal effects that may be in a school locker or classroom.

Students should be encouraged to extend their support to the family.

The district emergency response counseling team should be contacted immediately and be on campus to help students deal with the grief caused by the loss.

NOT RECOMMENDED

Anything that draws attention to the death with the potential to glamorize it.

Monuments on school property.

A special memorial page in the yearbook.

Special recognition assembly.

A prolog on the wall or in the trophy case.

A school-wide moment of silence.