Washington County School District
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Saint George, Utah 84770
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District Policy 2410

Student Memorial Policy

Health/Safety/Welfare Washington County School District

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1. Purpose:

From time to time the Washington County 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/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 often 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.[1]

2: Policy:

2.1. The District will not allow:

- Funerals on school property.
- Memorial services that may alter the routine of a regular school instructional day.
- Memorials that require the altering of school property.
- Memorials that require the altering of school activities or the activity schedule.
- Memorials that infringe on the separation of church and state.
- Memorials that require the use of public funds to purchase, develop, or maintain.
- Memorials that include plaques attached to any object on school property.
- Memorials that draw attention or have the potential to glamorize the death.
- Memorials that consist of a monument on school property.
- Memorials in the yearbook.
- Memorials attached to a wall or in a trophy case.

2.2. Acceptable memorials/activities may include:

- Scholarships established in the name of the student.
- Donation to a charity or program that is dedicated to helping students.
- Collection of money to be donated to the deceased's family or charity of their choice.
- A sympathy card from the school (possibly signed by students) and flowers at the funeral.

2.3. Additional Administrative Support

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

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[1] Author, Steel W, "School Memorials: Should We? How Should We?" Trauma and Loss: Research and Intervention, The National Institute for Trauma and Loss in Children, Retrieved from http://www.tlcinst.org/memorials.html