

MEDICINE HAT PUBLIC BOARD OF EDUCATION OPERATES AS MEDICINE HAT PUBLIC SCHOOL DIVISION, AND FOR THE PURPOSE OF THIS DOCUMENT WILL BE REFERRED TO AS “MHPSD” AND/OR “DIVISION”

SECTION 300 – General Administration

ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEDURE: MEMORIALS IN SCHOOLS

<i>PROCEDURE CODE:</i>	<i>300 AP 004</i>
Policy Reference: 300 – Emergency and Crisis Management	Exhibits:

OVERVIEW

Medicine Hat Public School Division recognizes that the loss of a loved one is deeply impactful; the death of a student or staff member profoundly affects students, staff, families, and the community. This administrative procedure outlines the appropriate and respectful ways in which memorials may be handled within schools. It reflects current best practices as outlined by the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) and prioritizes the emotional well-being of all members of the school community.

The Division believes that remembrance of a student or staff whose life ended during their years with the Medicine Hat Public School Division should be consistent and equitable, regardless of the circumstances of the death, to avoid perceived inequities or unintended glorification of particular events or individuals. It is also paramount that all actions are guided by trauma-informed practices that recognize that grief and trauma affect individuals differently; we know that what may be comforting for some, may be distressing for others. Additionally, all actions must be considerate of the grief processes of the family and friends of the individual who had died, and aligned with their wishes whenever possible. Further, the Division recognizes that the complexities of grief in the immediate aftermath of a death do not always allow for the full consideration of the potential long-term implications of memorials on students, staff, families, and the community. Therefore, the intent of this procedure is to provide guidance to administrators and Division personnel involved in decision-making regarding memorials and related activities.

DEFINITIONS

Memorials – Any objects or activities that serve to remember a deceased person or event that resulted in a death.

PROCEDURES

1. The primary purpose and focus of school sites are to support the learning of students; in recognition of the Division's goal of optimal learning, school sites should not serve as the main venue for memorializing students or staff. As such, school division facilities should not be used for formal memorial or funeral services. School administration must be notified of any informal non-school sponsored memorial events or gatherings, for example, candlelight vigils, that are taking place on division grounds outside of school hours; such events are not permitted during the school day as they may be disruptive to learning. While staff may attend such events, they cannot be expected to attend as representatives of the school or Division.
2. A memorial must "do no harm". The potential impact of a memorial upon students and staff must be considered. Individuals experience the grieving process in different ways; therefore, memorials must be respectful of this and the needs of all students and staff within the school. As well, the possibility of re-traumatization must be taken into account when considering the appropriateness of a memorial. Students and staff should not feel obligated to express themselves or grieve before they are ready, as doing so can create more harm than good. Careful consideration must be taken regarding the location/placement of a memorial to avoid causing emotional harm to students and staff. Additionally, school wide recognition of memorial placements or anniversary dates will not occur for the reasons listed above.
3. In the majority of school-related deaths, temporary memorials are deemed most appropriate. Temporary memorials provide students, staff, and families an opportunity to express their grief in positive and helpful ways. Temporary memorials must be approved by school administration and may be displayed on the school site until the day of the funeral, or up to, but no more than, one week following the death, after which time memorial items will be given to the family by school administration or designate. Temporary memorials must be placed in locations approved and monitored by school administration. School administration, in consultation with the Superintendent, maintains the discretion to remove any memorial items deemed inappropriate or in violation of division policies. Allowable temporary memorials may include:
 - Flower arrangements
 - Messages of support (notes, cards or banners for the family)
 - Pictures
 - Locker displays
 - Other items approved by the school administrator in accordance with health and safety protocols.
4. Permanent memorials are physical or lasting tributes intended to honor or remember an individual over time. While often created with good intentions, permanent memorials in schools can unintentionally contribute to prolonged grief, inequity, or emotional distress,



particularly in cases involving suicide or traumatic deaths. To protect the emotional well-being of staff and students, the following will not be permitted:

- a. Physical memorials (plaques, benches, dedicated rooms or spaces, memorial walls or bulletin boards that remain indefinitely)
 - b. Alterations to the school environment (tree plantings, murals/artwork, engraved bricks or tiles)
 - c. Naming or dedication of spaces, facilities and/or events
 - d. Memorials that require upkeep, maintenance, and/or assumed responsibility for the care of the memorial.
5. To maintain consistency, respect privacy, and protect the integrity of our school communities during times of loss, the division discourages the creation or promotion of public fundraising campaigns (e.g., GoFundMe or similar platforms) or memorial pages by schools, school staff or school-based groups in response to the death of a student or staff member. Public expressions of support or remembrance must be coordinated through the school administration in consultation with the family and follow division protocols. This helps ensure our responses are respectful, appropriate, and consistent across the school community.
 6. Memorial items (such as T-shirts, buttons, or other commemorative merchandise) should not be distributed through schools. Students may choose to wear personal memorial items; however, if such items are deemed by school staff to be disruptive, potentially harmful, or emotionally triggering to others, students may be asked—sensitively and privately—to remove them. Staff will respond with a trauma-informed, compassionate approach and may involve school-based mental health support if needed.
 7. Financial memorials should be considered with care. Whether perpetual or one-time awards, named endowments and scholarships may cause emotional distress, reinforce grief, or create perceived inequities. Consider having families contribute to an existing award centered on broad categories such as athletics, academic achievement, or citizenship, rather than a named award. All requests will be reviewed by school administration and a division representative to determine the appropriateness as well as any benefits and/or risks.
 8. Yearbooks are an annual way to commemorate the activities and achievements of staff and students throughout a school year. Yearbook memorials for both staff and students must be consistent in formatting and content, so as not to create disparity. Including a memorial page entitled “In Loving Memory” would be appropriate, with the student/staff school photo and their name. Alternately, placing the student’s photo alongside their classmates in their homeroom, or the staff member on the staff page, is also appropriate.

Statements acknowledging the loss of a student or staff member may also be included but should be brief and simple; statements such as “We are saddened by the loss of these members of our school community this year” are appropriate. Full-page memorial photo



spreads of the individual are not permitted; however, it is acceptable if there are photos of the individual participating in school events throughout the yearbook. The family of the individual should be asked if they would like a copy of the yearbook; should students or staff wish to, they may write messages in this copy before it is presented to the family. Messages must be reviewed by school administration for appropriateness. Administration and school mental health staff must oversee any yearbook memorials before their publication.

9. Graduation ceremonies are intended to be a celebration and recognition of the academic achievements of all graduates of the Division. In the event of a student death during their graduation year, school administration will work with the family to properly recognize the student's scholastic achievements during the graduation ceremony. Appropriate recognitions include:
 - A symbolic plant, flower arrangement, or other meaningful item, purchased by the school may be present on the stage during the graduation ceremony at the request of the parent or guardian, and will be acknowledged by the school administrator during their remarks.
 - A moment of silence during the ceremony to collectively recognize the deceased member(s) of the graduation class.
 - The presentation of an honorary diploma or certificate to the parents or guardians of the deceased student, at their request; diplomas will be awarded providing all necessary graduation requirements were previously met, while certificates may be awarded in instances in which they have not. A family member or representative will be invited to accept the award on the student's behalf.
10. The Division recognizes that previous memorials were created with care and compassion. As we transition to a trauma-informed approach guided by best practices, schools are encouraged to complete an environmental scan of existing memorials and consult with a division representative as needed, within the spirit of this procedure. Where necessary, permanent memorials may be respectfully modified, renamed, or removed in consultation with families and school communities. The Division is committed to upholding remembrance in ways that protect the emotional safety of all students and staff.

Policy adapted from National Association of School Psychologists *Memorials: Special Considerations When Memorializing an Incident*, Lakeland Joint School District No. 272 *Memorial Guidelines*, and Edmonton Public Schools *Acknowledging Student, Staff and Trustee Deaths and Bereavements

Approved: December 8, 2025

