

Medicine Hat Public School Division

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**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

PROCEDURE CODE:	300 AP 004
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. The intent of this policy is to ensure the Division supports those impacted by a death in an empathic yet equitable manner consistent with best practices and policies. 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 across all cases and considerate of the grief processes of family and friends. 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 is 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. However, when the death of a student or staff member has a significant impact on the majority of students, staff, and/or the community, the Division Superintendent, in consultation with school administration and

division mental health services maintains the discretion to approve the use of division facilities for memorial events. Such events shall not occur during the school day and should not disrupt school events, including those that may occur after school, such as sporting events or clubs. School administration must be notified of any informal memorial events or gatherings, for example, candlelight vigils, that are not school sponsored but occur on division grounds outside of school hours; such events are not permitted during the school day as they may be disruptive to learning.

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. Memorials must be carefully placed and displayed to avoid causing emotional harm to students and staff. Additionally, school wide recognition of 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 include:
 - Flower arrangements
 - Banners
 - Pictures
 - Notes
 - Locker and student desk displays
 - Other items approved by the school administrator in accordance with health and safety protocols.
4. Memorials set a precedent for the future and must therefore be equitable and sustainable.
5. Permanent memorials for deceased individuals must be sustainable and should not incur any cost to the Division and are limited to endowments, scholarships, books with dedication, or other items with education significance. Financial memorials may be established as either



perpetual or one-time awards with a description of the purpose of the endowment or scholarship.

6. Going forward, memorials that require upkeep, maintenance, and/or assumed responsibility for the care of the memorial will not be permitted. This includes planting memorials, items of furniture, commissioned artwork, etc.
7. All requests for permanent memorials will be reviewed by school administration and a committee to determine the appropriateness as well as any benefits and/or risks of the memorial. The Division reserves the right to accept or decline permanent memorials.
8. Memorials following a death by suicide require extra consideration, as they must not glamorize, romanticize, or stigmatize the act of suicide.
9. 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 photo spreads of the deceased 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 individuals should be asked if they would like a copy of the yearbook; should students or staff wish to honour the individual, 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.

10. 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 members 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.

11. Existing memorials established prior to the adoption of this policy may remain intact. Existing memorials are typically the sole responsibility of the entity providing the memorial; division 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 Division reserves the right to remove a memorial if it is not in good standing, not maintained or able to be maintained, defunct, or contrary to the educational needs of division students.

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: October 7, 2024

