**Supporting Students through Tragedy**

Dealing with the loss of a teacher during the school year is very difficult for every member of a school’s community, but it can be especially traumatic for the teacher’s current and former students. Below please find some information that may be helpful to you in assisting our students during this difficult time.

**Potential Student Reactions after a Loss**

* Show a decline in school performance
* Have difficulty mastering new material
* Become more irritable
* Become withdrawn
* Become anxious or depressed
* Become more likely to engage in risky behaviors such as substance abuse, promiscuity, reckless driving, and suicide
* Become focused on the loss

Whenever possible, students should be offered additional supports to assist them in maintaining their academic progress before academic failure occurs, which would represent an additional stressor.

**What Teachers Can Do**

* Listen to what students want to share with you. It may be difficult but just listening can be a powerful healing force. Be patient, as this will take time.
* Protect students from becoming re-traumatized. Sometimes other students may ridicule highly emotional students who cry.
* Connect with students who have suffered a loss by asking how they are doing; checking in with them on a regular basis; letting them know that you are available to listen; or giving them feedback about their attendance or classroom work.
* Model adult behavior that shows them how responsible adults to react to loss and respond to crisis. Adults may grieve, but they continue to act with consideration and maintain calm routines at school.
* Counselors can teach students about normal signs and symptoms of grief/trauma so that students can assess and understand their own behavior and learn new ways of coping.
* Be honest at all times, share your feelings.
* Use the teacher’s name when talking about them.
* Expect violent reactions.
* Use your normal voice and say, “dead, died, dying, death” as needed.
* It’s OK to say “ I do not know”.
* Reassure students that anger, guilt, sadness, fear, shock, etc., are normal feelings.