

The following are our goals and guidelines for communication student or staff deaths:

**Goals for trauma response communications:**

- Emphasize that our focus is on students' and staff members' well-being and safety.
- Share information about supports available to staff and students.
- Share accurate information with staff, parents, and students to dispel rumors as needed.
- Remind stakeholders not to propagate information in an attempt to avoid spreading rumors and being the source of information that is not ours to share and/or where there are official sources with more accurate information (e.g., police, coroner, fire, etc.).

**Guidelines for trauma response communications:**

- Follow family's direction/wishes: do not share specific details about incident without permission, including student name, details regarding accident or cause of death, etc., even if information is known via social media, the news, etc. If asked about specific details, fall back on "We aren't at liberty to share that information. We are following the wishes of the family regarding the release of information."
- Always consider the impacted family as the audience: be mindful of how your message will be received by the family. (i.e., if the family received a copy of the message, how would they react?)
- Stay in our lane and avoid being a source of information: information about an event that occurs outside of school hours is not ours to share; if we share information before law enforcement, the coroner and/or the family, we may be sharing information before all family members have been informed and/or we may become the source that media turns to.
- Avoid oversharing: share detailed information on a need-to-know basis (not generally entire distribution lists) both internally and externally. Unless we have permission from the family, we do not want to email out names, event details, etc.
- Do not discuss sensitive topics through digital means: share any information that you wouldn't want to be released publicly (e.g., suicide as cause of death) in person or by phone call with those individuals who need to know.
- Encourage that all respect the family's privacy unless we are given specific instructions from family on how they would like to receive support.
- Communicate in person as much as possible, or phone call if necessary. Follow up with email.

## Run of Show for communication of staff death

Task	Person Responsible	Notes
Someone on executive cabinet is informed of a staff death	"A"	This is the first person informed – we will call them person "A"
"A" calls superintendent, deputy, HR and Communications and shares information but indicates information isn't verified. NOTHING more is shared until information can be verified.	"A"	This group decides who is the closest to the information and person who passed, who may be able to verify information.
Assigned person verifies information with the family and gets approval to share certain information. NOTHING is shared without family approval.	Person assigned from group in previous line	This person will be the conduit with the family. This person may also need extra support as may be the closest to the person who passed away.
Once information is verified, deputy calls regionals and CAO, Communications calls the rest of executive cabinet.	Deputy and communications	Ensures executive cabinet is informed
School-based staff follow left ROS	District-based staff follow right ROS	

Task	Person	Notes	Task	Person	Notes
Regional calls principal	Regional	Principal probably was the first to know, regional provides as much support as principal needs	Cabinet member overseeing person who passed informs their team	Cabinet member	This can be done by someone else if cabinet member needs support
Superintendent notifies board	Superintendent	Call if possible	Superintendent notifies board	Superintendent	Call if possible
Communications provides draft family and staff emails for principal	Comm	Whatever other comm they ask for or need	If person had reach into schools, regionals call administrators	Regionals	Personal calls to administrators to provide support, night before if possible
Principal calls specific staff that may be most affected	Principal	This communication should be done the night before if possible	Communication provides draft staff comm	Comm	Who it is sent from can be determined by lead, but possibly HR or superintendent
Deputy calls Student Support Services to help provide counselor coverage at school	Deputy	Student and staff support	HR arranges for EAP and staff support to be at CRC the next day	HR	Staff support

Student Support Services calls counselors	Student Support Services	Student and staff support	Message sent to all district staff regarding the loss of a staff member	Superintendent	Compassion, grief, resources, information on next steps if available. Before school if possible
HR arranges for EAP and staff support to be at schools the next day	HR	Staff support	Potential follow up on services, how to support the family	HR	Follow up on any details available, services, etc
Principal calls a stand-up staff meeting before school	Principal	To inform staff			
Stand up staff meeting	Principal	Regional is there, comm helps with messaging as needed. Counselors on site			
Principal works with staff on how to communicate with students	Principal, teachers, counselors	Varies according to grade level. Support should be provided for teachers who want a partner to share the news			
Room set up for counselors and students	Principal, counselors	Provide opportunity for students who are grieving – based on grade level			
Message sent to all district staff regarding the loss of a staff member	Superintendent	Compassion, grief, resources, information on next steps if available			
Potential follow up on services, how to support the family	HR or Principal	Principal will communicate if just to their school staff, HR will communicate if it is more widely needed			

**This is general protocol, but each situation needs to be considered based on staff relationships**

<b>Matrix for communicating death in district</b>	Administrator comm to staff	Administrator comm to families	Support for students	District email to staff	District comm to families	News release
Death of certificated or classified school staff	yes	yes	yes	yes	no	no
Death of school staff family member	optional	no	no	no	no	no
Death of district staff family member	optional	no	no	no	no	no
Death of district / CRC staff	to CRC, yes, schools if the person had a lot of contact	no	no	yes	no	no
Death of cabinet-level staff	no	no	optional	yes	optional	optional
Death of superintendent	no	no	optional	yes	yes	yes
Death of board member	no	no	no	yes	yes	yes
Death of a student	yes	yes	yes	no*	no	no

\*The exception being if it is a death media reports on or has created significant chatter

## Run of Show for communication of student death

<b>Task</b>	<b>Person Responsible</b>	<b>Notes</b>
Principal or teacher is informed of death	Principal or teacher	This is the first person informed. If teacher, they inform principal
Principal calls regional but indicates information isn't verified. NOTHING more is shared until information can be verified.	Principal	Regional provides support and asks principal to verify information and get family approval to share
Principal verifies information with the family and gets approval to share certain information. NOTHING is shared without family approval.	Principal	This person will be the conduit with the family. T
Once information is verified, regional calls superintendent, deputy and Communications	Regional	Ensures correct information is shared and starts the communication process
Email to executive cabinet	Regional	Telling them about the death and communication forthcoming
Superintendent notifies board	Superintendent	Call if possible
Communications provides draft family and staff comms for principal	Comm	Whatever other comm they ask for or need

Principal calls specific staff that may be most affected	Principal	This communication should be done the night before if possible
Regional calls Student Support Services to help provide counselor coverage at school	Regional	Student and staff support
Student Support Services calls counselors	Student Support Services	Student and staff support
HR arranges for EAP and staff support to be at schools the next day if deemed necessary	HR	Staff support
Principal calls a stand-up staff meeting before school	Principal	To inform staff
Stand up staff meeting	Principal	Regional is there, comm helps with messaging as needed. Counselors on site
Principal works with staff on how to communicate with students	Principal, teachers, counselors	Varies according to grade level. Support should be provided for teachers who want a partner to share the news
Room set up for counselors and students	Principal, counselors	Provide opportunity for students who are grieving – based on grade level
Message sent families of students affected by the death	Principal	What happened, how to support student, what will happen, etc

## Sample staff letters

### Death of school staff member – to families

Date

#### GREETING

I want to share with you some sad news. On <date>, <staff member>, passed away. <staff member name, position, years at school, etc.>

We are all saddened by this event. <information of how the staff member passed away>. We have shared this information with our staff and students in their classrooms today so that they know the facts. Extra counselors were available today at school/will be available the rest of the week.

Our plan at this time to support students is to provide them with accurate information, opportunities for extra support if needed, and to keep our routines as normal as possible to help students feel secure. You can help your child by simply talking and listening to them. We don't always know how a student will be affected in a crisis, but you know your child the best of anyone. On our website are "[Tips for talking with your child about death.](#)" / "[Helping Children Cope](#)" which may be helpful for you. Due to previous similar events or losses, if you feel your child needs to visit with someone, please give us a call. We want to be sensitive to all our students' needs.

Thank you for your support and consideration. If you have questions, concerns, or need assistance, please contact us at 385-XXX. We will keep you informed when we hear more from staff member's family about when the memorial service will be and what you can do to help.

Sincerely,

Death of school staff member – to all staff – after school staff is notified

Date

## GREETING

Early this morning, school learned they lost a member of their school staff. Grade teacher name passed away in the night. name worked at school for the past number years. He/she has been with Everett Public Schools since date and any other information.

We have no information at this point about a memorial service for name. When that information is available, I will share it with you.

Counselors are gathering at school to support students and staff. If you have students who could use extra support, please let your school counselor or Dave Peters know. If you or a fellow staff member could use some extra support, the district [employee assistance program](#) can provide help.

Schools will keep routines as normal as possible to help students feel secure. You can help students by simply talking and listening. We don't always know how a student will be affected by a death, and you know your students best. I've attached some information about talking to a child about grief that you may find helpful.

Thank you for your thoughts for name's family during this time.

Sincerely,

Death of district staff member – to all staff

Date

Dear staff

It is with great sadness that I inform you of the passing of one of our beloved staff members. Name passed away (how and when as appropriate). name worked at department for the past number years. He/she has been with Everett Public Schools since date and any other information.

We have no information at this point about a memorial service for **name**. When that information is available, I will share it with you.

I understand that the sudden passing of **name** will affect many staff who knew **him/her** well. Everyone processes grief in different ways, so I ask that we give grace to each other as we mourn the loss of our coworker and friend.

Our thoughts and prayers go out to **name's** family.

Take care of each other,

Sincerely,

## Sample student letters

### Death of Student to staff for stand-up meeting

Dear **xx** staff

Please plan to be at a before-school meeting at **XX** time in the **XX** tomorrow morning. We have just learned that one of our students passed away today, and I ask that you all be at this meeting tomorrow morning to be ready for our students tomorrow as they learn of this death.

We do not know many details about the situation right now. Perhaps tomorrow morning we will be able to share more; however the most important thing tomorrow morning will be to ensure we have information and resources to share with our students.

I am sorry to be sharing this sad information with you, and I ask that between now and tomorrow morning and during the day tomorrow you help each other and our students deal with this loss confidentially and compassionately.

### Death of student phone and email message to staff:

Hello, **School** staff. This is **name**. I am calling with some sad news. It is with a heavy heart that I share a **number** grader at our school, **name**, has passed away unexpectedly this morning. We are all saddened by this tragic loss.

A message will be going out to families today. Counselors from the district response team will be at **school** tomorrow from **8 a.m. until 2 p.m.** to support students, staff and parents.

Tragedies like this remind us of how important our school community and the people in it are to us. Please take care of yourselves, your family and one another in this difficult time and be attentive to your student's needs as they process this sad news.

If you have questions, concerns, or need assistance, please call 425-**number**.

I thank you for your support of our students during this difficult time.

### Death of student to families

**date**

Dear **school** families,

I am sad to share with you that yesterday afternoon, **date**, we learned that one of our **number**-grade students died. **State here cause if appropriate**

We are all saddened by this event. We have shared this information with our staff and with students in their classrooms today so they know the facts. Counselors from around the district are here at **school** today to support students and staff.

We will continue to support our students with accurate information, opportunities for extra support, and normal routines as much possible to help students feel secure.

You can help your student by talking and listening to them. We don't always know how a student will be affected by a death, but you know your student better than anyone. If you feel your student needs to visit with someone, please give us a call.

If we learn of a memorial service or other arrangements for the student, we will share that with you.

Once again, if you have questions, concerns, or need assistance, please contact us at (**number**).

Sincerely,

### Death of student – school announcement and teacher follow up (for secondary)

*This is principal **name**. I have some sad news to share with you and it is with a heavy heart that I share this information. Yesterday afternoon, we received news that **student**, a **grade** at **school**, has died. We are all saddened by this tragic loss. The details around the cause of **his/her** death are still being considered. Out of respect for her family's privacy, I ask that we refrain as much as possible from entertaining rumors or speculation.*

*Some of you may have had family or friends die. Each of us has different feelings related to death. Some people may be sad, others angry, and some may feel normal today. All feelings are ok. In times of loss and grief, it is best for us to try to keep to our regular routine as much as possible. However, if you need to talk to someone, we have school counselors available. If you need that support today, your teacher will allow you to go to the **Career Center**.*

*Tragedies like this remind us of how important our school community and the people in it are to us. Please take care of yourself and one another in this difficult time.*



For staff: After I read the announcement, please let students know that that if they need a little time to process or if they need to talk with someone, please send them with a pass to the Career Center. We have additional counselors on hand.

As soon as is reasonable, return to normal classroom routine. This will be harder in some classes than others, but it is very important for everyone's healing to return to routines sooner rather than later. If most of the students are ready to move forward with class, but one or two need to talk further, please send them to the office where we have a place set up for those who need to talk further.

Again, it is very important for you to take care of yourself so that you can help care for our kids. Do what you always do in taking care of one another. Watch your colleagues. Do any of them need support? Let us know in the office if you are worried about a colleague.

Thank you. In times like this, I am especially grateful that I work with such a professional and caring group of people.