

Operational Services

Exhibit – Memo to Staff Members Regarding Contacts by Media About a Crisis

If the media attempts to contact you about a death or other crisis, please follow these guidelines:

1. It is perfectly correct to tell a reporter that you would rather not comment on the incident especially if it has been an emotional strain. Rather than shouting “No comment” (which sounds like you are trying to hide something), say something like, “this incident has affected the school community greatly and I would prefer to not comment on it.” One should then refer the reporter to the Safety Program Coordinator or the designated spokesperson.
2. According to School Board policy and the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act, the only information about a student that the school is allowed to release is a verification of his or her attendance at the school. If the parents give permission, certain general information (address, date and place of birth, participation in sports or activities, awards received, etc.) may also be released. In the event of parental approval, that information will be given to the media by the Superintendent or the designated spokesperson.
3. Comments such as the following should be avoided: “He was a B student,” “She was having trouble in class and I had referred her to the social worker last week,” and, of course, “He was constantly in trouble for dealing drugs and smoking on school grounds.” For the most part, it is better to avoid comments about individual students. If a reporter persists with these questions, say something like, “Board policy prohibits me from commenting on any student. Furthermore, I do not wish to infringe upon the family’s right to privacy.”
4. If you are comfortable with it, you may make comments about how the crisis has affected you individually. If the incident involved an athlete, the coach might say, “_____’s death is very tragic and the team and I will miss him.”
5. You may also address actions the school is taking to deal with the situation. For example, “Although this is a terrible situation, we are fortunate to have a crisis plan to counsel students and faculty who are understandably upset.”
6. Do not agree to set up interviews with students. All requests for interviews should be directed to the Safety Program Coordinator or the designated spokesperson.
7. Do not speculate or comment on the cause of death, especially in an apparent suicide or murder. Tell reporters that information on the death should be obtained from the police department.
8. Remember, you do not have to answer any questions. Simply refer all reporters to the Safety Program Coordinator or the designated spokesperson.

Developed: January 2013

