

Board Policy 6146.6: Special Recognition Diplomas for Deceased or Honored Students

The Governing Board values the academic achievements of students who, due to death, are unable to complete graduation requirements. This policy establishes guidelines for awarding posthumous or honorary diplomas to such students.

1. The District may award a posthumous or honorary diploma for 8th grade or high school to a student who:
 - a. Was enrolled and in good standing at the time of death, and
 - b. would have been a member of the graduating class.
2. Diplomas issued under this policy shall be clearly identified as “Posthumous Diploma” or “Honorary Diploma” to distinguish them from regular diplomas.

Administrative Regulation AR 6146.6: Special Recognition Diplomas for Deceased or Honored Students

Guidelines for Recognizing Deceased Students

Family Consultation

1. If the family requests recognition, the school shall consult with the family of any deceased student to determine their wishes regarding recognition.
2. Consultation will be conducted with compassion and support, providing information about applicable district policies and limitations. (AFSP & SPRC, 2018)

Uniform and Neutral Recognition

1. If the family consents, deceased students may be recognized in a neutral and consistent manner to avoid unintended messages or influence on vulnerable students. Examples include:
 - a. A general statement during the ceremony (e.g., “We take a moment to remember members of our graduating class who are no longer with us.”)
 - b. Inclusion in the graduation program under an “In Memoriam” section listing all deceased students’ names (without photographs, personal details, or causes of death) and separate from the roll of graduates.
 - c. A general moment of silence for all deceased students, without naming individuals
 - d. Memorials that single out the student or highlight the cause of death are prohibited to reduce risk of contagion. (AFSP & SPRC, 2018)

Prohibited Forms of Recognition

To preserve the focus on the graduating class and minimize risk of emotional distress:

1. Public mention of individual names during the ceremony
2. Display of empty chairs, caps, or gowns
3. Speeches or dedications focused on individual students
4. Recognition that references or implies the cause of death

“Highly visible memorials such as empty chairs... may unintentionally romanticize death.” (AFSP & SPRC, 2018)

Honorary Diplomas for Deceased Students

Eligibility

1. Students who were enrolled in the intermediate or high school and were in good standing at the time of their passing may be considered for an honorary diploma, pending administrative approval.
2. Students who passed away in elementary school are not formally recognized during the high school graduation ceremony, but their memory can be honored in other meaningful ways at their former school site.
3. “Good standing” is defined as:
 - a. Active enrollment at the time of death
 - b. Not under expulsion
 - c. On track to graduate based on academic progress, attendance, and behavior expectations
4. In cases involving chronic illness, disability, or other extenuating circumstances, eligibility may be determined by the school principal in consultation with the student support team.

Issuance Process

1. Honorary diplomas shall be offered under the following conditions:
 - a. Presented privately to the family, not as part of the public ceremony
Expressions of sympathy and support shall be provided to the family in a private and respectful manner. (AFSP & SPRC, 2018)

Recordkeeping

1. The District shall maintain records of all posthumous and honorary diplomas issued, including:
 - a. Student name

- b. Date of death
- c. Administrative approval date
- d. Recipient of the diploma

References

- California Education Code § 51225.5 – Honorary diplomas for foreign exchange and terminally ill students
- California Education Code § 51430 & § 51440 – Retroactive diplomas for deceased students (limited circumstances)
- AFSP & SPRC (2018), *School Guidelines for Suicide Postvention and Memorialization*
- BP 6146.2 – Posthumous and Honorary High School Diplomas