

## -----WEBSITE CONTENT -----

# An Important Message Regarding Honoring the Deceased at Graduation and Promotion Ceremonies

Before finalizing these guidelines, MCS reviewed a nationally and internationally recognized curriculum developed to help schools meet the crisis prevention and intervention needs of students, staff, and families, as well as researched additional recommendations from academic and mental health experts. Our decisions are grounded in best practices designed to support the well-being of all students while honoring those we have lost.

Graduation and promotion ceremonies are a special time to celebrate the hard work and accomplishments of our students. We also understand it can be a time to remember classmates who are no longer with us.

MCS has thoughtful procedures in place to honor the memory of students who pass away before graduation and promotion ceremonies, ensuring the moment is handled with care and respect while also keeping the focus on celebrating the graduating class.

### **The following guidelines will be followed to honor deceased students:**

- Parent(s)/guardian(s) must make a request to the principal if they would like their student recognized during the ceremony.
- The student's name will be printed in the program and will be read aloud during the ceremony.
- Awarded diplomas or certificates will be presented privately to the family.

It is important that all student deaths are recognized equally, regardless of the cause. Using different approaches based on the circumstances of a student's passing could unintentionally cause additional pain or reinforce stigma. At the same time, we understand the importance of protecting the emotional well-being of our students. Because adolescents are particularly vulnerable to the risk of suicide contagion, any recognition will be respectful, appropriate, and carefully designed not to glamorize or romanticize suicide.

### **Why Not a Chair or Other Recognition at Ceremonies?**

MCS is proud of the mental health supports and suicide prevention systems we have in place. We do not shy away from this topic and encourage students to have open conversations in a safe and supportive environment. After tragic events, the district

regularly offers intervention from our District Crisis Response Team, and students always have ongoing access to school counselors for support.

Graduation and promotions are times of celebration — moments to recognize the hard work and dedication our students have shown throughout their academic journey. While we will honor all lives lost in our MCS by reading their names aloud during the ceremony, we must balance respect with the primary purpose of celebrating students being promoted or graduating.

Research has shown that highly visible memorialization, such as empty chairs or similar recognitions, after a suicide can unintentionally increase risk among vulnerable youth who may be struggling with their own mental health challenges. For this reason, MCS utilizes approaches that honor students while minimizing unintended harm.

If choosing not to participate in certain memorials or activities could save even one student's life, MCS believes it is our responsibility to take that action.

MCS remains committed to finding meaningful and safe ways to remember students—ways that celebrate their lives, the impact they made, and the community they helped build. We continue working together to support, remember, and care for every student.