STUDENT GRIEF & TRAUMATIC LOSS REFORM PROPOSAL

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Building a School System Prepared to Support Students Through Grief, Trauma & Loss

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WHY THIS MATTERS

When a student dies, the impact reaches far beyond one family.

Siblings, classmates, friends, teachers, educational assistants, coaches, administrators and entire school communities can experience grief and trauma.

Yet the response to student death and traumatic loss can vary depending on the school, administration, available resources and individual circumstances.

Grieving students deserve a consistent, compassionate and long-term support system.

Families should not have to navigate that system while simultaneously grieving the death of a child.

This proposal was developed following the loss of my daughter, Kaydance Ford, who died in a motor vehicle accident on May 23, 2025, alongside three of her friends and their coach.

I cannot change what happened to my daughter.

But I can advocate for changes that may help another student, another sibling and another family.

THE PROPOSED REFORMS

1. Board-Wide Student Death & Traumatic Loss Protocol
Create a standardized framework covering the immediate response, communication, student support, memorials, long-term follow-up and significant dates following a student's death.

2. Bereaved-Family Liaison
Provide each bereaved family with a designated school-board contact who can help coordinate communication, school matters, sibling support and community referrals.

3. Long-Term Student Grief Support
Establish planned follow-ups beyond the immediate crisis, recognizing that grief can resurface months or years after a death.

4. Sibling Support Protocol
Recognize surviving siblings as grieving students who may require academic flexibility, attendance support, trusted adults, regular check-ins and long-term accommodations.

5. Grief & Traumatic-Loss Training
Provide relevant school staff with training in childhood and adolescent grief, traumatic loss, appropriate communication, recognizing changing grief responses and knowing when additional support is needed.

6. Family Communication & Consultation Standards
Establish clear expectations for communicating with bereaved families and create opportunities for families to provide feedback about the school's response.

7. Independent Review & Accountability
Create a transparent process for families who believe a school's response to traumatic loss was inadequate, including timelines, review and escalation mechanisms.

8. Bereaved Family & Student Advisory Group
Include bereaved parents, youth, educators, mental-health professionals and community organizations in the development and review of board policies.

9. Integration Into Student Mental-Health Planning
Ensure grief and traumatic loss are explicitly considered within existing school-board mental-health strategies and action plans.

10. Consistent Transportation for School-Sanctioned Trips
Establish organized, board-approved transportation as the standard for school-sanctioned student trips, using an appropriate school bus or contracted coach bus.
Personal vehicles should not be the routine transportation method for school-sanctioned activities, with clearly defined exceptions where necessary.

PRIORITIES & IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE

PRIORITY 1 — Immediate Safety & Support: 0–90 Days

- Review existing student-death and traumatic-loss procedures.
- Identify a designated board-level bereavement contact.
- Establish an interim response protocol.
- Establish an interim sibling-support process.

- Review school-sanctioned transportation practices.
- Identify immediate gaps in staff training.
- Establish a formal family concern/contact process.

Expected outcome: No school should have to wait for a long-term policy review before having a basic, consistent response available.

PRIORITY 2 — Policy Development & Staff Preparedness: 3–6 Months

- Finalize the Student Death & Traumatic Loss Protocol.
- Establish the Bereaved-Family Liaison process.
- Establish the Sibling Support Protocol.
- Develop staff training requirements.
- Develop family communication standards.
- Establish family consultation and feedback processes.
- Establish transportation standards and exception procedures.

Expected outcome: The board has written, approved standards rather than relying primarily on individual school practice.

PRIORITY 3 — Implementation & Training: 6–12 Months

- Train principals and relevant school staff.
- Implement bereavement liaison procedures.
- Implement long-term student follow-up.
- Establish the Bereaved Family & Student Advisory Group.
- Integrate grief and traumatic loss into mental-health planning.
- Implement standardized school-trip transportation.
- Establish documentation and accountability procedures.

Expected outcome: The new standards operate across the board rather than existing only as written policy.

PRIORITY 4 — Evaluation & Public Accountability: 12–24 Months

- Evaluate implementation.
- Review family and student feedback.
- Assess training completion.
- Review transportation compliance.
- Identify remaining gaps.
- Report appropriate aggregated results.
- Update policies based on findings.

Expected outcome: The board demonstrates whether its reforms are actually working.

MEASURABLE SUCCESS INDICATORS

The success of these reforms should be measured by implementation, access, experience and accountability, not simply by whether a policy has been written.

1. Protocol Implementation
Target: 100% of schools have access to and are trained on the board's Student Death & Traumatic Loss Response Protocol within 12 months of approval.
Measure: Percentage of schools completing implementation and training.

2. Bereaved-Family Contact
Target: 100% of bereaved families are offered a designated board contact following the death of a student.
Measure: Percentage of applicable families offered a bereavement liaison.

3. Long-Term Follow-Up
Target: 100% of identified affected students are offered appropriate follow-up beyond the immediate crisis.
Measure: Documentation that follow-up opportunities were provided at defined intervals, while respecting family and student privacy.

4. Sibling Support
Target: 100% of identified student siblings are offered a documented support pathway.
Measure: Percentage of identified siblings offered academic, attendance, emotional and school-based support options.

5. Staff Training
Target: At least 90% of principals and designated school staff complete approved grief and traumatic-loss training within the first year, progressing toward 100% for required roles.
Measure: Annual training completion rate.

6. Family Experience
Target: The board establishes a confidential feedback mechanism and uses the results to identify improvements.
Measure: Percentage of participating families reporting that:

- They knew who to contact;

- Their concerns were heard;
- Communication was clear;
- Their child's needs were considered;
- Appropriate support was available; and
- They understood how to access further assistance.

Important: Families should never be required to provide positive feedback for the system to be considered successful. Negative feedback should be treated as information for improvement.

7. Response Consistency
Target: 100% of student-death responses are reviewed against the board's protocol.
Measure: Annual audit of applicable incidents to determine whether required response steps were completed.

8. Family Accountability
Target: 100% of formal concerns receive acknowledgment within a defined period and a substantive response within an established timeframe.
Measure: Percentage of complaints meeting the board's response standards.

9. Advisory Participation
Target: Establish a Bereaved Family & Student Advisory Group within 6–12 months.
Measure: Group established, meetings held, recommendations documented and board responses recorded.

10. Transportation Compliance
Target: 100% of school-sanctioned trips have a documented, board-approved transportation plan.
Measure: Percentage of applicable trips with completed transportation documentation.

11. Personal-Vehicle Exceptions
Target: Personal-vehicle transportation is treated as an exception rather than the routine standard for school-sanctioned trips.
Measure: Annual reporting of transportation exceptions, including the reason for each exception and whether required approval was obtained.

12. Continuous Improvement
Target: The board conducts an annual review of the policy and implementation data.
Measure: Annual report identifying:

- What was implemented;
- What remains outstanding;
- What families and students reported;
- What gaps were identified;
- What corrective actions are planned; and
- What changes will be made for the following year.

SUCCESS SHOULD MEAN MORE THAN COMPLIANCE

A policy should not be considered successful simply because a document exists.
The ultimate measure should be whether a grieving student or family can answer yes to the following questions:

- Did we know who to contact?
- Did someone stay connected with us?
- Did the school understand that grief continues beyond the immediate crisis?
- Did our siblings receive appropriate support?
- Did staff understand how to respond?
- Were our concerns heard?
- Did the system learn from our experience?
- Would the next family encounter a better-prepared system because of what we learned?

These questions should complement quantitative measures and should be used to guide continuous improvement.

PRIORITY SUMMARY

Priority	**Timeframe**	**Primary Objective**	**Key Success Measure**
Priority 1	0-90 days	Immediate support and gap identification	Interim protocols and contacts established
Priority 2	3-6 months	Policy development	Board-wide standards approved
Priority 3	6-12 months	Implementation	Staff trained and systems operational
Priority 4	12-24 months	Evaluation	Results reviewed and improvements made

Guiding Principle

Do not wait for the perfect policy before providing better support.
Immediate improvements can begin while longer-term policy development takes place.

CLEAR DECISION REQUEST

I respectfully ask the recipient of this proposal to provide a formal response and identify a specific path forward.

I am asking you to make four decisions:

1. WILL YOU SUPPORT A FORMAL REVIEW?

Commit to reviewing the current policies and practices governing student death, traumatic loss, student mental-health support and transportation for school-sanctioned trips.

2. WILL YOU IDENTIFY WHAT CAN CHANGE?

Identify which recommendations can be implemented within your authority, which require further consultation or funding, and which require provincial or federal action.

3. WILL YOU ASSIGN RESPONSIBILITY?

Identify the department, official, committee or elected representative responsible for advancing each recommendation that falls within your jurisdiction.

4. WILL YOU COMMIT TO A FOLLOW-UP?

Provide a written response and establish a reasonable timeline for reporting what action will be taken.

Requested Outcome

I am not asking for a promise that every recommendation will immediately be adopted.

I am asking for a commitment that the recommendations will be formally reviewed, prioritized, acted upon where possible, and advanced to the appropriate level of government where broader action is required.

I would also like to be invited to participate in any consultation, working group or policy-development process arising from this proposal.

THE BROADER GOVERNMENT QUESTION

Where a recommendation falls outside the recipient's authority, I ask that it not simply be dismissed.

Instead:

Please identify the appropriate level of government, ministry, agency or organization that has the authority to act and, where possible, forward or refer the recommendation accordingly.

The objective is to create a pathway from:
Proposal → Review → Priority → Responsibility → Action → Measurement → Evaluation

A CALL FOR CHANGE

No policy can take away the pain of losing a child.
But a better system can ensure that when a student dies, the children and families left behind do not have to navigate grief without a prepared system of support.

We cannot change what happened.
But we can change what happens next.

CONTACT

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