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**Rolf A. Waters**

Superintendent of Schools

PreK-5 Principal

**Robert N. Finster**

6-12 Principal

September 6, 2011

Dear Parent(s) and Guardians:

You may be aware that on August 26 Gabrielle Conlin passed away and our community lost one of its students. In an effort to answer questions that students may have we will be having someone visit classrooms to discuss the loss of our student. We will also be providing the enclosed reference "When Grief Comes to School" in order to give parents and staff a guide to help children understand. We recognize that this will not impact the entire school population but believe that there will be many questions from children in the early part of the school year. If you have any questions please feel free to contact us here at school.

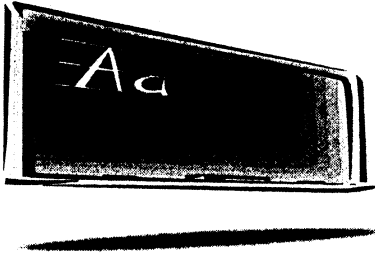
Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Rolf A. Waters'.

Rolf A. Waters

Superintendent

Harrisville CSD



## When Grief Comes to School: A Guide for Parents

By Mary K. Jones, CT. Director of Family Support Services  
Hospice & Palliative Care of St. Lawrence Valley

While death is a universal experience, it is always challenging for school staff and parents when a student, teacher or staff member dies. Instinctively adults want to protect children from this experience and children's natural curiosity seeks understanding. This death is a teachable moment and it offers parents an opportunity to address grief and loss with their children.

Provided below are suggestions for understanding how children grieve and how to support them in a safe, nurturing way at home.

If the school has not provided you with information about the death, contact the school to get the facts.

- Children are concrete thinkers. Keep language simple. Be careful with the information you share with your child. Stick to the facts and avoid sharing rumors surrounding the death.
- A universal understanding of what it means to be dead in the physical sense is helpful to children and a great reminder for adults. Explain when someone dies they can no longer see, hear, move, sleep, talk, go to the bathroom, eat or play with friends.
- As children grow, their understanding and awareness of loss expands. It is important to keep the information simple and never change the story. They will continue to revisit the story.
- It's okay to not have all the answers and tell the child, "That's a good question, but I don't know the answer."
- Be aware the death can bring up other losses. A death in school may have a strong emotional impact on your child. Ask questions about their response. Often times they are not responding to the death at school but their own loss of a loved pet or family member.
- Routines are important. Keep to bed time schedules, continue with chores, and be sure to build in down time if your child has a busy schedule.
- Encourage creative expressions. Ask your child if they want to send a condolence card, draw a picture or write a story about how they feel.

- Help them to understand that grief hurts. Help them to find ways to cope with these feelings.
- Understand that grief causes problems in concentrating. This short attention span is normal, but it can affect school work. Work with your child and their teacher to develop strategies to deal with this issue and set realistic goals.
- Check your local library for books about grief and loss. Children's books are great coping tools for the whole family in building an understanding about loss.
- Remember, the goal is not to get over loss, but to learn to live with the death.
- Grieving is a life-long process. When children are included in this process, it lowers their anxiety about death and grief and most importantly cultivates healthy grievers.

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