The state of grief support in schools

Grief in the classroom is an all-too-common occurrence

When educators were asked how many students each year typically need their support due to the loss of a loved one...

- 87% say at least one student needs support
- 25% say six or more students need support
- 93% of educators agree that childhood grief is a serious problem that deserves more attention from schools

Educators want to do more to help grieving students and recognize the importance of social-emotional support

- 95% of educators would like to do more to help grieving students
- 87% of educators agree that over the past five years, it has become more common for students at their school to seek out emotional support from teachers

Educators express strong interest in grief training

- 92% of educators think that there should be a greater focus on training educators to support grieving students
- 91% of educators say that they personally would be interested in participating in bereavement training offered through their school or district

Here are some measures educators have found helpful in preparing a class to support a grieving classmate. These include:

1. Offer students guidance on how to support their grieving classmate
2. Offer a private, one-on-one conversation for students who have questions or concerns
3. Encourage students to reach out to their grieving classmate
4. Hold a class discussion about the death before the student returns to class
5. Devote class time to creating an expression of support for the grieving student
6. Seek input from the students about how the class can commemorate their classmate’s loss
7. Utilize a grief-related book for class discussion or read a grief-related book for their class

The New York Life Foundation and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) conducted the online survey of 675 AFT members, including 458 classroom teachers as well as 217 paraprofessionals, school nurses, counselors, psychologists, social workers and other school staff members from July 26 through August 18, 2020.