

FROM
“A FIXED STANDARD OF CONDUCT”

MS. NAKAMURA defends her decision to fail a student who died.

NAKAMURA

You don't think so!?! Look around. Legislators talk about educational reform don't appropriate the money. Parents complain about teachers but don't want to join the local school council. Principals give lip service to fairness and change grades whenever it suits them. ... There was a teacher in Kansas last year. One-fourth of her students plagiarized the final semester project. She flunked them. The parents went crazy. They blamed *her*. Said she must not have explained the project correctly. Said *she* had failed the students because she missed a “teachable moment.” A teachable moment!?! What a cynical euphemism for expediency and cowardice that is. “Talk to the children. Let them share their feelings. Then pass them and we'll all learn from this.” ... You know what I said to my students at the beginning of the year. “This is a business. I'm ordering the materials from you and I want them on a certain date. I don't want them a day later or a week later.” ... The world runs on deadlines. People file taxes late, they pay a penalty. You let the meter expire, you get a ticket. The stock market closes at 3, not at 3:01. ... Would everyone be this upset if he had not died? They would have simply said, “He did not do the assignment, he plagiarized some of what he did do, *and* it arrived after the deadline. He gets an F.” Now all the rules get thrown out because he's dead? ... Is he so much better than the other students? Is he that special? Does he float in some sort of privileged air? ... I am *not* going to pass someone because they're too big for their desk. I'm *not* going pass someone because they're a star athlete. And I'm certainly *not* going pass someone because they've decided to write a poem instead of a research paper. And I'm not going to pass them because they died. My decision has absolutely *nothing* to do with his death. ... He made a choice. A choice to cut his heart open and write an impassioned elegy for his dead friend, whom he dearly loved. *That* was more important than the research paper. *That* was more important than passing the class. And *that* I will respect. *That* courage. ... And I will adhere to the same high principles as he does. I will fail him. ... With honor. ... Live by your choices. *And* their consequences.