



Illinois State Board of Education

Illinois Department of Public Health and Illinois State Board of Education Joint Guidance Regarding COVID-19 and School Graduation Ceremonies

Updated: May 2, 2020

The outbreak of COVID-19 and subsequent school building closures for the remainder of the 2019-20 school year have created questions related to graduation ceremonies.

Decisions around whether or not to host safe and socially distanced graduation ceremonies will remain at the discretion of local school boards and superintendents. Districts and schools may choose to postpone graduation ceremonies, although it is not known when large-scale in-person events will be able to be safely held. Alternatively, districts and schools can choose to honor graduating students in a way that prioritizes the health and safety of participants and complies with state and local social distancing orders and guidelines. Understanding the milestone that graduation ceremonies represent in the lives of our students and families, the Illinois State Board of Education and Illinois Department of Public Health are providing the following guidance for public school districts, public and nonpublic schools to consider when navigating these concerns at the local level.

Virtual Ceremonies

Districts and schools can honor graduating students virtually. Examples include:

- **Virtual ceremonies:** Schools can hold an online virtual ceremony similar to traditional graduation ceremonies in terms of commencement speakers and any acknowledgements of awardees. Viewing information can be disseminated to the graduates and their families.
- **Videos:** Ask graduates to send individual videos with short messages to their graduating classmates. This, with recorded speeches by invited speakers, creates a longer film highlighting the graduates' school experiences and provides a long-term memento.
- **Social Media:** Highlight graduates on social media each day with special hashtags that allow for family, friends, and community members to congratulate individual students (who agree to participate) with photos and messages.

Ceremonies that Maintain Social Distancing Guidance

Virtual events are strongly encouraged, although we recognize this may not be possible in all situations. Allowable in-person graduation events include:

- **Drive-in:** Students, and only their immediate family members who are staying at home together, should arrive and remain in cars for the entire ceremony. Before or after the ceremony, students may exit their cars individually, in their cap and gown if available, to

have photos taken so long as social distancing requirements are followed. These ceremonies can be done at drive-in movie theaters, school parking lots, stadium parking lots, or other large parking lot venues that could be exclusively used for the graduation event. Multiple ceremonies may be needed depending on the class size. Large projected screens and sound equipment may be required. Students and families without vehicles would need alternative accommodations and transportation that complies with social distancing requirements.

- **Drive-through:** Students, and only their immediate family members who are staying at home together, should arrive in waves and leave after their individual recognition. Students may exit the car individually, in their cap and gown if available, to have a photo taken. These events will require precise scheduling, traffic control, and school safety personnel, etc. and may be appropriate for small to medium-sized graduating classes in less trafficked areas.
- **Individualized Ceremony at School:** Individual students may come to the school at prearranged times to walk across a stage in their cap and gown and have a photo taken. This may also be coordinated with time for students to pick up any personal belongings at the school. All efforts must be made to ensure social distancing and prevent mass gatherings of people.
- **Individualized Ceremony:** Visit each graduate's home, while remaining outside and at least six feet away, to congratulate and take photos of each graduate in their cap and gown and holding their diploma. This type of recognition may need to be conducted over the course of several days depending on the class size.

The recommendations below must be employed, as appropriate, if drive-in, drive-through, or individualized ceremonies will be held.

1. Districts and schools should, if possible, ensure students receive diplomas and caps and gowns in advance through the mail or delivery so they can arrive dressed and with their diplomas in hand. Students or families may also collect these items at the school during packet pick-up, meal distribution, or locker clean-out. Please ensure social distancing guidelines are followed.
2. There may be no person-to-person contact during the ceremony. Individuals may not hand students diplomas, or any other items, or shake graduates' hands.
3. Mark the standing locations of graduates waiting in line to collect their diplomas to ensure students remain at least six feet apart at all times and mark safe walking pathways for students exiting cars.
4. Clearly communicate expectations and procedures related to photography. Districts and schools should provide someone to take multiple pictures of all individual graduates and provide the photos free of charge to families in order to reduce concern of missing these important moments. Please ensure students and families are aware of photography policies.
5. Students may walk across a stage or area and pose for a picture individually.
6. Anyone outside of their car must wear a mask or face covering. Individual students may remove their masks or face coverings while having their individual photo taken by the district or school. Only staff and a limited number of students may be outside of their cars.

7. Consider available space in order to calculate capacity and determine the number of ceremonies needed. Consider limiting attendance and broadcasting the ceremony via a livestream platform and recording the ceremony to provide access to those not in attendance.
8. Consider the timing of when ceremonies take place. For individuals outside of their cars, consider weather conditions, such as sun exposure, heat, and rain. Take appropriate precautions related to weather protection. Consider if cars need to be turned off during the ceremony. Only staff and a limited number of students may be outside of their cars.
9. There should be no restroom access or refreshments to prevent areas of congregation and additional areas to monitor. Students and families should be advised in advance that restroom facilities and refreshments will not be available.
10. Ensure that facilities are accessible to persons with disabilities and provide all necessary accommodations for students with special needs.
11. Set expectations, policies, and guidelines in advance, and reiterate those before the ceremony day and at the start of the ceremony, to ensure overall health and safety.

Districts should consult with local public health departments, law enforcement, and legal counsel in planning any in-person events.

We congratulate all the graduates and their families and wish everyone the best for safe, healthy and happy graduation ceremonies.