

Statement on Graduation Ceremonies

The Ohio Department of Education and the Ohio Department of Health urge school districts to be thoughtful and careful in choosing and planning the best way to celebrate graduation and other milestones. Several options are available and can be successfully implemented all while keeping safe practices in mind.

Virtual Graduation Ceremonies: Virtual graduation ceremonies are the safest. We strongly recommend this approach to maximize the safety and health of everyone involved. There are many good examples to be found on social media of virtual graduation ceremonies using technology.

Structured and Controlled In-Person Graduation Ceremonies: More care and complex planning is required in attempting structured and controlled in-person graduation ceremonies. Several schools and districts have already worked with their local health departments to develop creative ways to hold structured in-person ceremonies and create memorable experiences for participants that also follow social distancing best practices and comply with the mass gatherings limit of 10 people.

Some examples of school graduation ceremonies that meet these criteria are:

Drive-thru graduations. There are a couple variations of this approach:

Variation 1: Students and their families drive up to the school (wearing masks). Only the student gets out of the car to receive the diploma, the principal says the name of the student on a loud speaker, a photo or video is taken of the student by school staff, and the family drives away. All of this is done in a single-file line with police presence.

Variation 2: In this variation, all family members stay in the car. The senior is in the front seat and the principal passes the diploma through the car window and shares congratulations. Everyone wears masks. The student is photographed by school staff in a separate location. This could be held in alphabetical order. Again, all of this is done in a single-file line with police presence.

Single family in-person graduation: Families are called into the auditorium one-by-one (no more than 10 people total including the school administrators), the student walks across the stage, receives a diploma and walks out of the auditorium and back to the car. The next family enters. Attention should be paid to disinfecting surfaces (door handles, hand railings, etc.) that may be repeatedly touched. Also, strict parking management and regulation is needed to prevent congregating in parking lots and outdoor locations. This can be done by appointment only to ensure a smooth process for all.

School districts seeking to hold these types of alternative celebrations should involve the local health departments, and law enforcement partners to ensure that health and safety protocols are followed appropriately.

Postponing graduations also is challenging because of the evolving nature of this disease. Postponement carries the risk that circumstances may be no different later in the year than they are at the present time. The manner in which the virus will progress is unknown. Postponement may lead to additional disappointment should it be that mass gathering restrictions are still in place. Postponing also increases the chance of conflicting with post-graduation plans.

It is important that every effort is made to avoid mass gatherings which potentially would allow the virus to spread quickly. The Ohio Department of Health has defined mass gatherings as a group of 10 people or more who do not live in the same household. The ban on mass gatherings includes any outdoor ceremonies even if social distancing is achieved.

We know this is a disappointment for our many seniors and their families. We share your sadness and thank you for your cooperation as we remain committed to holding these ceremonies in the safest way possible for all Ohioans.