

Graduation Ceremony Guidance

The novel coronavirus pandemic has required that local education agencies (LEAs) consider a host of unprecedented issues when deciding the type of graduation ceremonies they will have to honor the class of 2020. County superintendents are working with their local boards of education, principals, teachers and students as they plan their graduations, whether they be in person or online, during the fluid circumstances caused by COVID-19.

The West Virginia Department of Education (WVDE) convened a Graduation Taskforce to help counties share ideas about recognitions and ceremonies to honor the class of 2020. This guidance will assist them as they finalize and submit their end-of-year plans.

The provided information will serve as guidance for counties for implementation of best practices within the public health guidelines outlined by state health officials and issued by Governor Jim Justice. The state is currently proceeding through the Governor's plan, **West Virginia Strong – The Comeback**, to gradually reopen the state. Depending on the time of the graduation ceremony, guidance may change. It is important to review the Governor's plan as well as updates from the West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources (WVDHHR) at coronavirus.wv.gov for the most current information.

Decisions regarding graduation are made at the county level and are not within the purview of the WVDE. Whether plans include traditional ceremonies, drive-in recognitions, or other creative measures to honor the class of 2020, the WVDE has outlined the following information in collaboration with the WVDHHR to assist in the planning of safe and meaningful graduation activities.

Considerations for Plans:

- » In order to best guard public health, graduation plans should be developed in conjunction with local health departments and within the guidelines of orders issued by the Governor and public health officials.
- » If plans include a traditional graduation ceremony at a later date, counties must adhere to the social distancing, executive orders and health guidelines that are in effect at that time.
- » The public must be made aware that traditional graduation plans could change if restrictions are extended that prohibit these convenings.
- » Instructions should be communicated with students, families and the community prior to graduation to increase the understanding of processes and guidelines.
- » Plans should also be provided via written communication, videos, robo-calls or other audio/visual means. If possible, counties may consider livestreaming ceremonies to open access, however, families must be advised of the intent to stream activities in advance.



Social Distancing

- » To date, social distancing guidelines are still in effect and schools must adhere to 64 CSR 114 Public Health Standards for Businesses Remaining Open During the COVID-19 Outbreak related to the number of students and guests allowed in buildings at one time (2/1000 square feet).
- » Limitations for the number of guests per student allowed at the venue are recommended to manage possible contact and exposure.
- » Reminder: crowd size limitations may not permit the congregating of substantial numbers of people. These restrictions may change as graduation ceremonies are planned. Please review the Governor's most recent guidance at coronavirus.wv.gov.
- » Schools should consider outdoor venues to provide proper ventilation and space for graduations.
- » Programs held outside still require six-feet of distancing between all individuals involved and must adhere to crowd-size restrictions.
- » Counties may need to have several smaller events and divide the graduation class into smaller groupings.
- » If graduates stand in line while waiting to get their diplomas, they must maintain safe social distancing.
- » One or two family members per graduate should be directed to a staging area where they can take pictures. Once they leave the area, the next graduate's family members can file in to take pictures.

Directional Signage

- » Arrows should be drawn or placed on walkways to direct the flow of foot traffic.
- » Marks should be included on walkways to designate six-feet of social distancing.
- » Signs should be posted throughout the venue and individuals should serve as ushers to help direct graduates receiving diplomas and families taking pictures.

Health and Safety Precautions

- » With proper social distancing, hand shaking is not possible.
- » Hand sanitizer should be provided throughout the area.
- » All attendees should consider the use of face masks or coverings if it is the recommendation of health officials at the time of the ceremony.
- » Highly touched surfaces should be cleaned frequently (Please see Guidance for School Closing or Guidance for Student Retrieval of Belongings).
- » Consider a nonpermeable envelope for diplomas that can be properly wiped prior to distribution.

