



*News from Commissioner Jeffrey C. Riley & the
MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education*

On the Desktop - May 21, 2020

High School Graduation Guidelines from DPH/HHS to Help Prevent the Spread of COVID-19

Dear Superintendents, Charter School Leaders, Assistant Superintendents, Secondary School Principals, Collaborative Leaders, Leaders of Approved Special Education Schools, and Private School Leaders,

High school graduations are an important ceremony in the lives of the graduate and their loved ones. High school graduation ceremonies should proceed with the following schedule and guidelines:

- Ceremonies held between now and July 18 should be held virtually or in extremely limited other circumstances following safety protocols (e.g., car parades).
- Ceremonies held beginning July 19 may take place OUTSIDE under the following standards **and** assuming the public health data supports the continued opening of our state.

General Standards

These standards are minimum requirements only and are not exclusive or exhaustive. The public health data and principles for disease prevention upon which these guidelines are based can and does change frequently. It is imperative that all local, state and federal requirements are adhered to in planning a high school graduation ceremony.

Any graduation ceremony held outside must be in an unconfined outdoor space that can accommodate social distancing and the flow of air. Tents or other enclosed spaces are not permitted.

Schools must communicate in writing to any graduate, their family, school personnel, and others who may attend that if they are feeling sick, are exhibiting any of the following symptoms (fever, cough, shortness of breath, chills, muscle pain, headache, sore throat, or new loss of taste or smell), or have potentially been exposed to someone with confirmed or suspected COVID-19, they should not attend the graduation ceremony. A potential exposure means having household contact or having close contact (within 6 feet) with an individual with confirmed or suspected COVID-19 for a prolonged period of time (over 15 minutes) while the person is symptomatic or 48 hours before symptoms developed.

Persons who are particularly vulnerable to COVID-19 according to the Centers for Disease Control (e.g., due to age or underlying conditions) should be discouraged from attending the graduation ceremony.

The outdoor space must have sufficient space to accommodate attendees who are not from the same immediate household spaced at least 6 feet apart.

Attendance

- Attendance must be limited to graduates and their immediate family members only. Families must sign up in advance of the graduation, and only those who have pre-registered may attend. Children under the age of 5, older adults, and those with vulnerable health conditions should be discouraged from attending.
- Staff or attendants must monitor the number of attendees entering the graduation ceremony and confirm that they had pre-registered.

Social Distancing

Seating

- Attendees who are not part of the same immediate household must be seated at least 6 feet apart. Members of the same immediate household are permitted to sit together and less than 6 feet apart.
- If there is fixed seating, rows should be blocked off and kept empty to allow for sufficient distancing between rows.
- Graduates must be seated 6 feet apart.

Entering and Exiting

- Every effort must be made to encourage the orderly arrival and exiting of individuals attending the graduation in a manner that encourages social distancing.
- Graduates must enter and exit 6 feet apart from one another in a single line.
- Social distancing measures include:
 - Signage or pavement/ground markings should be posted to have one-way aisles or otherwise direct attendees to follow certain pathways for entering and exiting from the graduation service.
 - If a line forms outside of the graduation, those waiting should be directed to maintain social distancing. Tape, chalk, or other markings should be laid on the ground outside of the venue in order to maintain social distancing of at least 6 feet.
 - Staff should direct people to help maintain social distancing.
 - Staff should direct successive, row-by-row exiting.

Face Coverings

- All attendees must wear face coverings before, during, and after the ceremony. The only exceptions are when a person is unable to wear a face covering or mask because of a medical or other disabling condition. Speakers may remove masks during their remarks.
- For children between ages 2 and 5, the wearing of a face covering or mask is at the discretion of the child's parent or guardian. Children under the age of 2 should not wear a face covering or mask. Children under the age of 5 are discouraged from attending the graduation ceremony.
- Any person who refuses to wear a face covering or mask without a valid justification may be denied entry.

Ceremony: Pre, During and Post

- The venue must be cleaned prior to the service, including heavy transit areas and high touch surfaces (e.g. bathrooms, microphones).
- There can be no communal gathering/reception either before or after the graduation.
- No food or drink is allowed.
- The venue must have sufficient access to alcohol-based hand sanitizers with at least 60 percent alcohol available at all entrances and exits.
- On the dais/platform, faculty and distinguished guests should be limited and must be seated 6 feet apart.
- Graduates may be invited to walk across the stage individually and turn their tassel in lieu of receiving the diploma. Alternatively, diplomas and awards could be distributed if bestowing the awards and diplomas is done cautiously (e.g. placing each diploma and award on a table as the graduate walks by to retrieve it).
- No hugging or hand shaking should occur.
- Ceremonies should be kept as brief as possible.
- Individuals must promptly depart the premises in an orderly fashion after the ceremony is over following the directions of school officials.

Additional Ways to Celebrate

As graduation time approaches, please encourage your high school community, particularly teachers, to share highlights about the graduating class on social media with the hashtag #ThatsMyStudentMA and tag the DESE account at @MASchoolsK12 on Twitter or @MassachusettsDESE on Facebook.

We hope to feature a rotating display of photos of the class of 2020 (from before the school closures) on our homepage, and we welcome any photo submissions you can send us. Please add them to our [online folder](#) and include the district in the file name as soon as possible.

Sincerely,

Jeffrey C. Riley
Commissioner