

GRADUATION CONSIDERATIONS



When the COVID-19 outbreak caused Governor Jim Justice to close school buildings and move the state to a remote learning model, the education community was required to immediately adjust to a new way of teaching and engaging students and families.

Principals, teachers and school service personnel made immediate adjustments to meet the academic, social-emotional and nutritional needs of children. While they continued to work, educators missed their children. They missed teaching them, taking care of them in person and the daily interactions with students and their families.

Graduations have been among the casualties of the outbreak. Counties and schools have made difficult decisions in postponing, re-thinking and canceling these milestone celebrations. It was very difficult in early May to forecast absolute plans for graduation ceremonies later in the summer or timelines that could be considered.

Now that various services, businesses, youth camps and larger scale activities are resuming operations in the state, it is possible for counties/schools to host in-person high school graduations. Given that at this time there is no way to mitigate all the risks involved in attending public events, people must make their own decisions on whether or not to attend open capacity activities given their own or their family's health vulnerabilities.

Should counties choose to host in-person graduation ceremonies with larger crowd capacities, the information contained in this document will assist them to incorporate protocols endorsed by the state's leading public health officials. To the extent possible, counties should make efforts to establish alternative ways to view and celebrate graduations for those unable to attend in person.

The following aligns with Governor Jim Justice's guidance to reopen the state as outlined in his plan *West Virginia Strong – The Comeback*.

In-person graduation ceremonies for West Virginia schools are permitted starting June 22, 2020, in outdoor venues only.

OUTDOOR GRADUATIONS

- » Outdoor events must be structured to allow for appropriate social distancing and other safety measures to be in place.
- » Six feet of social distancing is required (see above).
- » Face masks or coverings are strongly encouraged.





Safety Precautions

- » Communicate expectations and guidelines to the community in advance to ensure understanding and compliance.
- » Members of the same household may sit close to one another; however, household groups must maintain six-feet of social distancing from one another.
- » Seating should be limited or adjusted to ensure appropriate spacing between rows or seats.
- » Six feet of social distance must be designated between graduates.
- » Handshaking and hugging are not permitted.
- » Directional signage must be prominently posted to guide families to seating.
- » A system should be established to maintain separation of families wanting to take pictures of graduates.
- » Avoid crowding in common spaces by designating specific entry and exit points to assist with crowd control. As needed, enlist assistance from local public health officials to create crowd-flow plans and local law enforcement to direct vehicle and pedestrian traffic.
- » Hand sanitizer stations should be provided throughout the area.
- » Markings must be placed on the ground for six feet of social distance between graduates in line to receive diplomas/certificates.
- » Live stream events online or on television to offer alternatives for those who wish to view the ceremonies without traveling to the venue or for those that are particularly vulnerable such as elderly family members.
- » Smaller outdoor events are still preferable to reduce the spread of the virus.
- » Consider issuing tickets to better control crowd size.
- » Incorporate fun and creative ways to celebrate and support safety such as encouraging graduates to design or decorate their masks without restricting airflow.
- » A system for distributing diplomas, certificates or other materials must include best practices of six feet of social distancing, proper hand washing/sanitizing hygiene protocols and best practices to preserve public health.
- » Anyone feeling ill must stay home and schools will provide remote learning support until their return.

