



Imperial County Public Health Department

Early Guidance Regarding COVID-19 and Graduation Ceremonies

May 19, 2020

The outbreak of COVID-19 and subsequent school site closures for the remainder of the 2019-20 school year have created questions related to graduation ceremonies. Decisions to host safe and socially distanced graduations 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 follows local and state physical/social distancing orders and other guidance.

Understanding the milestone that graduation ceremonies represent, the Imperial County Public Health Department is providing the following guidance for public school districts, public and private schools to consider when navigating concerns while honoring graduations and at the same time following current [local and state] guidance.

VIRTUAL GRADUATION CEREMONIES

Districts and schools can honor graduating students virtually. Virtual graduation ceremonies are the safest. This approach is strongly recommended 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. Examples include:

Online: Schools can hold an online virtual (YouTube, Facebook Live etc.) ceremony similar to traditional graduation ceremonies in terms of commencement speakers, special presentations, and any acknowledgements of awardees. Viewing information can be disseminated to the graduates and their families.

Videos: Graduates, teachers, principals, etc., can create short videos with messages and send to their graduating classmates. This, with recorded speeches by invited speakers, can be used to create 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.

DRIVE-THRU AND DRIVE-IN GRADUATION CEREMONIES

Virtual events are strongly encouraged, although we recognize this may not be possible in all situations. Alternative celebration events may include:

Drive-thru ceremony: Students, and their immediate household members (not family members who live elsewhere), should arrive in waves and leave after the student is recognized. Students may not exit cars. This type of event will require precise scheduling, traffic control, and safety personnel, etc. and may be appropriate for small to medium-sized graduation classes in less trafficked areas.

Photo opportunities during drive thru ceremony: If a picture is desired, only the student gets out of the car for a picture. The student needs to be wearing a facial covering and practices social distancing. The student may take off his/her facial covering only for the picture. The photographer needs to be at least 10 feet away from students at all times. Once the picture is taken, the student returns to the car and proceeds out.

Drive-in ceremony: Students, and only their immediate household (not family members who live elsewhere)(should arrive and remain in cars for the entire ceremony. These ceremonies can be done at drive-in movie theaters, school 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 projection screens and sound equipment may be required. Coordinating with a local radio station to broadcast the ceremony may be an option. Students and families without vehicles would need alternative accommodations and transportation that complies with social distancing requirements.

GENERAL SAFETY PRACTICES TO BE IMPLEMENTED

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

- Districts and schools must ensure that 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 meal distribution or locker clean-out. Please ensure social distancing guidelines are followed.
- There should be no person-to-person contact during the ceremony. Individuals may not hand diplomas or any other items or shake graduates' hands.
- Students or families should not exit their car.
- School officials should remain at least six feet apart at all times.
- School officials should 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.

- Only staff should be allowed outside of their cars.

CONSIDERATIONS

- 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.
- Consider the timing of when ceremonies take place.
- For school officials not in 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.
- 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.
- Ensure that facilities are accessible to persons with disabilities and provide all necessary accommodations for students with special needs.
- 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 the local public health department, law enforcement, and other officials when planning these events to ensure that health and safety protocols are followed appropriately.