




MEMORANDUM

TO: Superintendents

FROM: Dr. Michael Johnson, Commissioner 

DATE: April 23, 2020

SUBJECT: Guidance on 2019-2020 Graduation Ceremonies

With approval from the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services, below is guidance for school districts' consideration regarding conducting graduation ceremonies during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Educational institutions may conduct graduation ceremonies by following social distancing requirements: groups of less than 20 people, individuals must be 6 feet apart, non-speaking personnel must wear face coverings, and no physical interaction between participants.

The following are ideas for consideration:

- I. **Virtual or Live-Streaming Ceremonies:**
 - An educational institution may conduct a virtual ceremony by live-streaming to participants.
 - Up to 20 staff members (including any speakers) may be present at the location in order to organize and conduct the ceremony. Social distancing requirements must be followed. Face coverings must be worn by non-speaking personnel. If there is singing or projecting of voice, then a minimum of 10 feet between each person must be observed.

- II. **In-Person Ceremonies:**
 - In either of the below in-person ceremony types, the educational institution may arrange for students to be present to physically receive their diplomas, subject to the following requirements necessary to protect the public health, safety, and welfare:
 - i. **In-person ceremonies must be groups of less than 20 people.**
 - ii. The institution must ensure social distancing of 6 feet between every individual, and 10 or more feet between any speaker or singer and other individuals.

- iii. The institution must enact a clear protocol for dispersal of students after diploma collection that complies with social distancing requirements.
 - If a student has household members observing from a vehicle, the student may proceed directly to that vehicle.
- iv. All participants must wear face coverings.
- v. Diplomas may be conferred in the following manner:
 - Those who touch the diplomas or shared surfaces must wear gloves and face coverings.
 - The diploma should be placed on a surface at least 6 feet away from students waiting to be called.
 - The individual handling the diploma must move to a place at least 6 feet away from the surface.
 - The student's name can then be announced.
 - The student will collect the diploma from the surface and proceed to a designated area to maintain social distancing requirements.
 - Once the student is at least 6 feet away, the next diploma may be placed and another student's name called.

Example A: Drive-In Ceremonies

- Educational institutions may conduct “drive-in” ceremonies, where onlookers gather in their vehicles at the designated location and participate in the ceremony by remote means, subject to the following requirements necessary to protect the public health, safety, and welfare:
 - i. Onlookers may leave their homes to travel by vehicle to and from the school/ceremony facility, and must remain in their vehicle at all times.
 - ii. Each vehicle may only hold members of the same household.
 - iii. Vehicles must be parked with 6 feet of separation between vehicles.
 - This will be ensured by clearly marked parking stalls or directed by parking lot staff wearing reflective clothing and face coverings.
 - iv. Onlookers may not interact physically with school personnel or participants in other vehicles.
- Up to 20 staff members (including any speakers) may be present at the location in order to organize and conduct the ceremony. Social distancing requirements must be followed. Face coverings must be worn for non-speaking personnel. If there is singing or projecting of voice, then a minimum of 10 feet between each person must be observed.

Example B: Walk-Through Ceremonies

- Educational institutions may set up a protocol to allow students and a small group (less than 10) of family members from their own household to enter a facility at regular intervals to proceed to a designated photo and/or video area to pick up diplomas from a table.
- An example from one high school:
 - i. To receive diplomas, students will walk in the high school office entrance with no more than four family members from their own household. Staff with masks, staged at regular intervals of no less than 6 feet apart, will acknowledge students warmly from a distance of over 6 feet and show them the direction they should go, only allowing the graduate/family to

move along the graduate circuit through the music room, into the gym (see diagram below). Graduates will then separate from their family once onto the court (family going mid-court to take photos, students to the stage to collect diplomas). Once on stage, students will smile from a 6 foot distance to the Board President, Superintendent, and Principal (who are all over 6 feet apart from one another). The student's diploma will have been sanitized with a Lysol wipe when placed on a table. The student will pick up their diploma and pose for pictures. We will have a paid photographer to take pictures at a safe distance from family members who may also be taking pictures. Students will then walk off stage, meet up with family members, and walk out of the gym for to-go refreshments in the commons. They will then be ushered by staff out of a different hallway and door than the one they entered.

- ii. Three unmanned video cameras will be set up to record the graduation. We will edit the footage of graduates receiving their diplomas and combine it with other pre-recorded events, such as the speeches and the senior slideshow, for later online viewing.