



## MEMO

**Date:** Tuesday, May 19, 2020

**Topic:** **Guidelines for Graduations**

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During the suspension of regular classes due to COVID-19, the health and safety of school community members continues to be a top priority. Park West School Division understands how difficult it is to students, teachers and families to miss out on milestones like graduation ceremonies. Unfortunately, traditional graduation ceremonies will not be safe for some time. Given this reality we are providing some guidelines for graduation and year-end awards ceremonies.

The most significant Public Health order impacting graduations is the direction that gatherings will be restricted to a maximum of 10 people in Manitoba due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This restriction applies to indoor and outdoor premises, family gatherings, places of worship and events such as weddings, funerals, and graduations.

### **Public Gathering Restrictions:**

Here are some things to keep in mind when planning for a different way to honor graduates:

- Gatherings larger than 10 are not permitted. This means that there may be no open air outdoor graduation ceremonies exceeding 10 people independent of social distancing.
- Ceremonies or events must be held outside. Inside ceremonies cannot occur.
- Vulnerable individuals must remain at home.
- Individuals who are sick must remain at home.
- All participants, including graduates, staff, guests or family members, must remain at least six feet apart at all times.
- To comply with the six-foot spacing, handshaking and hugs should not occur.
- Any seating utilized must be provided by the individual members of the public. Schools must not provide chairs or tables for public use.
- Schools will not be providing washroom facilities for students, family members or guests.
- Diplomas, awards, medals, programs, etc. must not be handed from person to person.
- Sharing or exchanging materials of any kind poses an increased risk for transmission/spread of COVID-19 and must not occur (exchanging cards, gifts, flowers, etc.).

## **Alternatives to Typical Graduation Ceremonies**

We understand the importance of human connections and that sharing graduation ceremonies with extended family, friends, and community members adds meaning. Below are some ideas that may be feasible depending on your local context. All events must comply with provincial Public Health orders:

- Virtual Ceremonies
- Video Recordings
- Social Media
- Graduation Parades
- Gallery Drives
- Drive-in
- Recording Individual Students at School
- Delaying Graduation Ceremonies

### ***Virtual Ceremonies:***

Schools can hold an online virtual ceremony similar to traditional graduation ceremonies. Commencement speakers and awards acknowledgements held virtually will allow graduates and families to view the ceremony from their homes. Viewing information should be disseminated to graduates and their families.

### ***Video recordings:***

Ask graduates to record and submit individual videos or pictures with short messages to their graduating classmates. Together with recorded speeches by invited speakers, a graduation video highlights 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.

### ***Graduation parades:***

Schools may schedule a graduation parade where graduates decorate their cars, line-up, and drive a prescribed route. Parades could be also of the walking variety. Community members may socially distance along the parade route and cheer graduates as they drive past. Only students, and only their immediate family members who are staying at home together and who are not sick, may arrive in the same vehicle. Grad escorts would not be permitted in vehicles. Traffic control may be necessary.

### ***Gallery Drives:***

Schools may print and post large yard signs with pictures and names of graduates in a specified location and allow people to drive by these signs slowly at will or at specified times. All people, including students, must remain in their cars. Traffic control may be necessary.

### ***Drive-in:***

Schools may opt to implement a drive-in style format for graduations. These ceremonies can be done at school parking lots, athletic fields, or other large parking lot venues that could be exclusively used for the graduation event. Large projected screens and sound equipment may be required. Students and families without vehicles would need alternative accommodations and transportation that complies with social distancing requirements.

- a) Families may arrive, and remain seated in cars, which allows for minimal physical engagement. Only students and only their immediate family members who are staying at home together and who are not sick may arrive in the same vehicle.
- b) Graduates may be called from their vehicle to walk across a stage or area and pose for a picture individually.
- c) Diplomas, awards, medals, programs, etc. must not be handed from person to person. Students could pick up pre-packaged materials that were prepared and sanitized prior to the ceremony.
- d) All non-grads attending the ceremony must drive up in an enclosed vehicle and remain in that same vehicle during the entire ceremony.
- e) Individuals should not get out of their vehicle during the ceremony for any reason. Parents, family members, and other guests may not leave vehicles for up-close pictures.
- f) Vehicle windows, sunroofs, and convertible tops should remain closed during the entire ceremony unless the vehicle is parked more than six feet from any other vehicle.
- g) No more than 10 people may be in a single vehicle.

### ***Recording Individual Students at School:***

Individual students may come to the school at prearranged times to walk across a stage in their cap and gown and have a photo/video taken. This may also be coordinated with time for students to pick up any personal belongings at the school. All efforts must be made to ensure physical distancing of six feet or more and avoid congregating among students. This effort requires precise scheduling and ample time.

When recording individual students at schools:

- Students must walk across a stage or area and pose for a picture individually.
- Students and family members should wait outside in vehicles or at locations that allow for appropriate social distancing until they are called into the school.
- No more than 10 total people (including the student, family, staff, and photographer/videographer) should be present in any room at one time.
- Ensure the ventilation system is operating to bring in the maximum amount of outside air.

### ***Delaying graduation ceremonies:***

Schools may choose to delay their ceremonies. However, postponing ceremonies could be challenging because of the evolving nature of COVID-19. Postponement carries the risk that circumstances may be no different later in the year than now. Postponement could lead to additional disappointment should it be that mass gathering restrictions are still in place. Postponing also increases the chance of conflicting with post-graduation plans.

### **Additional considerations:**

Before planning for graduation please consider the following:

- Given the importance of the graduation milestone, having an event outside the home may encourage people in high-risk groups (particularly older adults and people with underlying health conditions) or ill individuals to attend rather than stay at home.
- What accommodations need to be made to ensure equitable participation (e.g., students and families without access to a vehicle).
- Consider the timing of when ceremonies take place. Consider weather conditions, such as sun exposure, heat, and rain. Take appropriate precautions related to weather protection.
- There should be no meals or refreshments to prevent areas of congregation and additional areas to monitor. Students and families should be advised in advance that refreshments will not be available and restroom access limited to emergencies only.
- Schools should ensure proper cleaning of facilities.
- 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.
- These events will require scheduling, traffic control, school safety personnel, etc. and may be appropriate for small- to medium-sized graduating classes in less trafficked areas. Schools should consult with local public health departments and law enforcement in planning any outdoor event.
- There may be insurance requirements for permits if schools plan to use a drone use for a group or event picture (overhead shot of the parade for example) or if ceremonies involve fireworks. Any outside vendors providing such services should name Park West Division as an additional named insured for the event.