



MEMO

Date: Tuesday, June 2, 2020

Topic: **Guidelines for Graduations**

The following will serve as an update to the previous guidelines sent on May 19. They are updated to include elements of the provincial Restoring Safe Services Phase-2.

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.

Public Gathering Restrictions:

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

- Public gatherings are increased to 25 people indoors and 50 people outdoors, where members of the public are reasonably able to maintain a separation of at least two metres from others, except for brief exchanges.
- Vulnerable individuals must remain at home.
- Individuals who are sick or showing COVID-19 symptoms must remain at home.
- All participants, including graduates, staff, guests or family members, must remain at least two metres apart at all times.
- To comply with the social distancing requirements, 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.
- It is recommended that schools limit access to in-school washroom facilities for students, family members, or guests. Washrooms must have frequent sanitization and should be monitored to ensure appropriate physical distancing.
- 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.

- 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 the same enclosed vehicles as graduates.
- If using trailers for the parade, social distancing must be observed at all times with a minimum of two metres between individuals in all directions. Sitting more than two students / participants at a single picnic table on a trailer is not an option.
- 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 open venues that could be exclusively used for the graduation event. Large projected screens and sound equipment may be required.

- a) These outdoor drive-in events may be held without limitation on numbers if people stay in their vehicles, or stand outside on the left side of their vehicles, as long as the windows of the vehicle next to them are closed and as long as people remain two metres apart at all times.
- b) Physical distancing must be observed at all times when outside the vehicle for essential purposes, such as to use the washroom, with a minimum of two metres between individuals when outside of their vehicles.
- c) Vehicles must be separated by a minimum of two metres.
- d)** Windows and sunroofs may be open; doors and trunks should remain closed.
- e) Only individuals from the same household may occupy the same vehicle.
- f) Families may arrive, and ideally remain seated in cars, which allows for minimal physical engagement.
- g) No more than 10 people may be in a single vehicle.
- h) Students and families without vehicles would need alternative accommodations and transportation that complies with social distancing requirements.
- i) Graduates may be called from their vehicle to walk across a stage or area and pose for a picture individually.
- j) Parents, family members, and other guests may not leave vehicles or vehicle areas for up-close pictures.
- k) 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.
- l) If staff or volunteers are required to have contact with any equipment (e.g. speaker), the equipment must be cleaned and disinfected after each use.
- m) Where washroom access is provided, frequent cleaning and disinfection must take place before, during and after the service.
- n) Physical distancing of two metres must be maintained for those waiting for washroom facilities.
- o) Employees must have access to soap and water or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer for hand hygiene, as well as appropriate cleaner and disinfectants.
- p) Employees and volunteers are required to stay home if they are sick or symptomatic.

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 two metres 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.
- Ensure the ventilation system is operating to bring in the maximum amount of outside air.
- No more than 25 total people (including the student, family, staff, and photographer/videographer) should be present in any room at one time.
- The maximum number of people permitted indoors is 25, except where distinct groups of 25 can be segregated to prevent contact with other groups through the use of separate exits and/or staggered drop off schedules, as well as monitoring access to the facility to avoid congestion.

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.