



STATE OF CONNECTICUT  
STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



TO: Superintendents of Schools  
FROM: Departments of Education and Public Health  
DATE: June 18, 2020  
SUBJECT: In-Person Graduation Ceremonies

The Office of the Governor, the Connecticut State Department of Education, and the Department of Public Health have received significant feedback from communities, parents, and students, related to restrictions on graduation ceremonies. After balancing the feedback from the public, our state leaders, and the input of public health experts, the Governor determined it was appropriate to allow limited in-person graduation ceremonies later this summer. This guidance permits smaller in-person graduation ceremonies, under the following standards and so long as the public health data supports the continued opening of our state. All local, state, and federal requirements must be adhered to in planning a high school graduation ceremony. Municipal officials, local law enforcement, first responders, and local health officials should be contacted as needed for advice or support. Please consider this a recommendation of best practices, but contemplate locally the approach to planning to best suit your community and ensure you are making determinations consistent with public health and safety outcomes.

**Guidelines for Graduation Ceremonies include, but are not limited to:**

1. **Date of Ceremony and Gathering Size:** In-person graduation ceremonies may begin today, so long as no more than 100 people gather.

Effective July 3, 2020, in-person graduations may continue so long as no more than 150 people gather.

It is anticipated that in mid-July, in-person graduations may continue so long as there are no more than 250 people gathering, so long as public health data continues to support moving to Phase 3.

Drive-in ceremonies may continue so long as they consider the Connecticut State Department of Education and the Department of Public Health guidance document issued on May 15, 2020 and clarification on June 3, 2020, and comply with Section 2 of Executive Order 7XX.

2. **Public Health Consultation:** Ceremonies should be planned taking into consideration advice from public health officials or municipal officials, as needed or requested. This guideline supersedes any prior correspondence or guidance suggesting that approval is required.
3. **Gathering Space and Social Distancing:** Any in-person graduation ceremony should be held outside in an unconfined space. Ceremonies shall not be held within a tent, or other enclosed space. The space must be sufficiently large to permit proper social distancing for any attendees not from the same household.

The space should be cleaned and disinfected prior to the ceremony utilizing a product recommended by federal guidances (CDC, EPA), including but not limited to heavy transit areas and high touch areas (e.g., bathrooms, railings, and microphones). The school must supply alcohol-based hand sanitizer (minimally 60% alcohol) at entrances and exits.

Signage, tape, chalk, or pavement/ground markings should be posted outside the venue and in aisles to direct attendees to follow certain pathways for entering and exiting from the graduation service. Staff should direct people to help maintain social distancing and direct successive, row-by-row entering and exiting.

- 4. Gathering Attendees:** The only people who may attend are the graduates and their immediate families or guardians. Attendees must pre-register with the district or hold a ticket to the event. No other persons should be allowed into the ceremony. Individuals who are particularly vulnerable to COVID-19 according to the Centers for Disease Control (e.g., older family members, and anyone with underlying medical conditions) are strongly discouraged from attending the ceremony.

Schools must communicate in writing to every graduate, their family, school personnel, and others who may attend that if they are feeling sick or are exhibiting any of the following symptoms (fever, cough, shortness of breath, chills, muscle pain, headache, sore throat or new loss of taste or smell), or have been potentially exposed to someone with confirmed or suspected COVID-19, that they shall not attend the graduation ceremony. A potential exposure means having household contact or having close contact (within 6 feet) with an individual with confirmed or suspected COVID-19 for a prolonged period of time (over 15 minutes) while the person is symptomatic or 48 hours before symptoms developed.

- 5. Face Coverings:** Wearing of a mask or cloth face covering is required for everyone in attendance before, during, and after the ceremony. The only exception is when a person is unable to wear a face covering due to a medical condition, or where it is not required by executive order, or where it would otherwise be against CDC guidelines in place at the time. Any person who refuses to wear a mask without stating that they have a valid medical reason may be denied entry to the ceremony. Speakers may remove their masks during their remarks, as long as they maintain proper social distancing (6 feet). The number of school staff on the stage should be limited to only necessary participants.
- 6. Seating:** Attendees who are not immediate family member must be spaced at least 6 feet apart; immediate family members may sit together without social distancing. If seating is fixed, rows should be blocked off and kept empty to allow for sufficient distancing between rows.

Graduates must be seated minimally 6 feet apart.

- 7. Entering/Processing/Exiting the Ceremony Location:**

**Graduates:** Students should be lined up in single file and spaced 6 feet apart (pavement/ground markings should be used to assist with students maintaining social distance and filing into and out of their seats). Only one graduate may be on the stage at a time. No handshaking or physical contact shall occur when a graduate crosses the stage, or otherwise outside of immediate families. Graduates may walk across the stage, have a formal picture taken, and move their tassel. If bestowing a diploma is important, an empty diploma cover should be laid out on a table to be picked up by the graduate before they cross the stage. The official diploma should be mailed to the student's home to alleviate confusion by a graduate picking up an incorrect diploma. Caps shall not be thrown in the air; students shall be encouraged to wave their caps above their heads, or some other gesture to encourage celebration.

**School Staff:** The number of school staff attending should be limited and should be seated on the stage at least 6 feet apart.

8. **Ceremony:** The ceremony should be brief and students and families should promptly depart the location in an orderly fashion following the directions of school officials. Staff should direct successive row-by-row exiting from the location and should remind people to maintain social distancing upon leaving the venue and to go straight to their cars.

Attendees should be reminded that no mingling or gathering outside the event is permitted.

No food or drink should be served. No communal gathering at the ceremony location before, during or after the ceremony may occur.

Restrooms need to be monitored by school personnel. Install visual social distancing markers/signs for restrooms to encourage graduation attendees to remain 6 feet apart, and ensure face coverings are worn at all times. Restrooms must be cleaned/disinfected frequently, and hand sanitizer needs to be made available at both the entrance and exit points.