

# Graduation Ceremony Guidance

May 2021



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*This document is part of [Ready Schools, Safe Learners \(RSSL\) Guidance](#) and applies to school districts, public charter schools, private schools, and other educational settings described in the Overview section of RSSL. For ease of readability, the terms “district” and “school” will be used.*

## Context/Introduction

Seniors’ final year of high school comes with traditions designed to recognize and celebrate their K-12 experience, accomplishments, and learning. Schools are encouraged to find ways to individually and publicly honor the Class of 2021’s efforts and achievements. Culminating graduation-related activities and celebrations can include the graduation ceremony, baccalaureate events, senior prom, senior trips, senior breakfasts, culturally-specific events, assemblies, and a variety of other events and important community traditions. As we continue to navigate a global pandemic, it is important that we work to find ways to honor and uphold these senior traditions and celebrations, while also prioritizing health and safety.

## Guidelines for Safe Year-End School Celebrations and Traditions

Districts and schools can honor students and celebrate these important milestones in ways that prioritize the health and safety of the participants and comply with guidance from the Oregon Department of Education (ODE) and Oregon Health Authority (OHA).

Districts must follow the sector-specific guidance based on the [Sector Risk Categories of their county](#), regardless of whether ceremonies and activities are held indoors or outdoors. OHA and ODE recommend that activities and ceremonies be held in outdoor spaces to the maximum extent possible.

In designing, planning, and hosting graduation ceremonies and activities, districts must adhere to the following requirements:

### Required:

- Ensure that any recognition, celebration, or ceremony is accessible to every student and family. This may include ensuring spaces are ADA compliant and/or providing translation or interpretative services. Provide all necessary accommodations for students with special needs.
- Consider available space as well as traffic flow of attendees in order to calculate capacity and determine the number of ceremonies needed.
  - If the ceremony is held outdoors, follow the [OHA 2351D Sector Guidance Outdoor Entertainment Establishments](#).
  - If the ceremony is held indoors, follow the [OHA 2351A Sector Guidance Indoor Entertainment Establishments](#).
- Review and implement [Statewide Mask, Face Covering, Guidance](#).
- Review and apply [Visual and Performing Arts](#) guidance.
- Ensure that hand sanitizer stations contain sanitizer with at least 60 percent alcohol content and are easily located and accessible throughout the venue.

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- ❑ Establish alternatives while prohibiting handshakes, high fives, fist/elbow bumps, chest bumps and group celebrations in order to minimize person-to-person contact during the ceremony (i.e. air high fives).

Schools planning a graduation or recognition ceremony should also review the following recommendations.

## Recommended:

- ⇒ Honor policies and practices that recognize the diversity of students and families to promote cultural inclusivity and equity. ODE fully supports policies and practices that promote cultural autonomy and gives students the ability to wear items of cultural significance honoring their unique and diverse cultures. For example, some African Americans wear African kente cloths, some Mexican Americans wear a serape, and some Muslim women wear a hijab. When centering the graduation needs of American Indian students and their families, a cultural practice for many is the wearing of culturally significant items such as eagle feathers, beaded caps, tribal insignias, moccasins and stoles during ceremonies (see [House Bill 2052](#) for proposed legislation to require this allowance).
- ⇒ Integrate student, staff, and community voice to develop both personalized and public recognition for students in the Class of 2021.
- ⇒ Consider limiting attendance and broadcasting the ceremony via a livestream platform and recording the ceremony to provide access to those not in attendance.
- ⇒ Create virtual recognition ceremonies or assemblies to acknowledge student accomplishments and transitions between grade levels (e.g., 8<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> grade).
- ⇒ Set expectations, policies, and guidelines well in advance to enhance awareness and preparation, and repeat them before the ceremony day and at the start of the ceremony, to ensure overall health and safety.
- ⇒ Assign a designated greeter or host to manage attendee flow and monitor physical distancing while waiting in line and during entering and exiting. Do not block access to fire exits.
- ⇒ Assign staff to monitor attendee access to common areas such as restrooms so that visitors do not congregate.
- ⇒ Mark the standing locations of graduates waiting in line to collect their diplomas to ensure students remain at least six feet apart to the maximum extent possible and mark safe walking pathways for students exiting cars.
- ⇒ Clearly communicate expectations and procedures related to photography. Districts and schools should provide someone to take photographs 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.
- ⇒ Provide an opportunity for students to walk across a stage or area and pose for a picture individually.
- ⇒ Individual students may be allowed to briefly remove their masks or face coverings while having their individual photo taken by the district or school. The student should avoid speaking while the mask or face covering is off, as speaking generates aerosols and droplets that can contain viruses.
- ⇒ Use amplifiers or other sound enhancing equipment to reduce the need to yell or increase the volume of speakers' voices.

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## Examples of Year-End Celebrations and Ceremonies

School districts around Oregon are thinking creatively about how to protect their communities and honor their graduates. Many already implemented safe and innovative alternative ways of celebrating seniors last year. Consider engaging with students and families to elicit planning ideas and input, coordinating with local community partners and businesses, and connecting with other communities and districts to spark creative ideas.

**Virtual ceremonies:** Schools may hold an online virtual ceremony similar to traditional graduation ceremonies in terms of commencement speakers and acknowledgements of awardees. Viewing information can be disseminated to the graduates and their families, and accessibility must be provided. Virtual keynotes, honored guests or special performances can be incorporated.

**Sports Field or Park Ceremony:** Schools may hold a graduation ceremony in large outdoor areas allowing for more physical distancing and air flow. Follow the [OHA 2351D Sector Guidance Outdoor Entertainment Establishments](#) for this option.

**Drive-in Ceremony:** Schools may hold a drive-in graduation ceremony in which families drive to their high school and stay in their cars. The ceremony must be accessible to every student and family, and the district must consider provisions for families that do not have access to a vehicle.

**Drive-through Ceremony:** Schools may hold a drive-through ceremony in which only students and their immediate family members residing in the same household arrive in waves and leave after their individual recognition. Students exit the car individually, in their cap and gown if available, to have a photo taken. These events require precise scheduling, traffic control, and school safety personnel, etc.

**Parades:** Schools may hold outdoor parades (honoring physical distancing) or car caravans with posters, lights and music to celebrate graduates in their communities.

**Individualized Ceremony 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 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 and prevent gatherings of people.

Thank you for celebrating Oregon's students and working to keep students, staff, and community members safe. Please contact [ODECOVID19@state.or.us](mailto:ODECOVID19@state.or.us) with any questions.