

End of School Year Gatherings and Graduations

Revised May 28, 2020

Background

In his [directive issued on March 26, 2020](#), Governor Scott ordered that schools for students in grades PreK-12 shall remain dismissed for in-person instruction for the remainder of the 2019-2020 school year unless otherwise ordered. He further directed the Secretary of Education to issue guidance on or before Friday, May 8, 2020 on end of school year gatherings and graduations. As Vermont continues to see positive trends in the rate of spread of COVID-19, Governor Scott asked the Secretary to update end of school year guidance again on May 26, 2020 to further encourage safe and responsible in-person alternatives to traditional graduation ceremonies that meet public health guidance.

Public Health Context

The current public health data, in the context of most school calendars, does not support the practical re-opening of school for in-person instruction this spring. At this time group gatherings are limited to 10 people or less, with careful physical distancing and hygiene requirements. While this limitation is expected to evolve as Vermont continues to respond to COVID-19, it is expected the group size limitation will increase to 25 by early June if current trends hold.

Accordingly, schools, districts, and/or communities may plan in-person end of school year gatherings and graduations consistent with the limitations on the size of such gatherings; or plan any other such events that can occur virtually or by means other than in-person gatherings. All end of year gatherings and graduations should be designed to ensure equal access and participation by all affected students.

While these are still challenging constraints, the improving situation and more flexible health guidance are an opportunity for schools, families, and communities to creatively and memorably celebrate the milestones of the class of 2020.

In-Person Graduation Ceremonies

- In-Person graduation ceremonies are encouraged as long as they follow established public health guidelines. In advance of these events, schools should advise participants about the public health requirements for these gatherings including advising potential participants that those people with COVID-19-like symptoms must stay home. These symptoms include fever or chills, cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, fatigue, muscle or body aches, headache, new loss of taste or smell, sore throat, congestion or runny nose, nausea or vomiting, and diarrhea.

- Outdoor settings are encouraged and strongly preferred.
- Drive-in ceremonies, parades, and other types of gatherings that utilize vehicles to ensure family groups can maintain 6 foot between groups are encouraged.
- In other settings, a minimal distance of 6 feet should be maintained between family groups and households.
- Schools should take steps to ensure graduation certificates such as diplomas and award certificates are not handled by multiple people. These certificates and awards should be distributed through reduced physical contact.
- School staff should wear facial coverings (such as cloth masks) and maintain 6 feet of distance from participants including graduates.
- Graduates may line up for graduation processions provided 6 feet can be maintained between graduates, and graduates wear facial coverings.
- Facial coverings may be removed while delivering speeches and for pictures.

As an example, if the health guidance changes to allow 25-person gatherings, as we expect it to, schools can congregate graduates and their families in small groups of 25 spaced at least six feet apart to safely and responsibly accommodate a much bigger audience. It would just need to be organized in such a way that group sizes do not exceed the allowed threshold and all other health guidance is met. Creative solutions, that comply with the health guidance, are encouraged.

Use of School Facilities

Although school will remain closed for in-person instruction for the remainder of the 2019-2020 school year, we expect there will come a time when school facilities could be utilized during the summer for educational or community activities. These activities might include student support services such as tutoring and social-emotional learning opportunities, professional development and training for staff, or community programs such as summer camps. Districts are encouraged to do their part to provide extra-learning and summer enrichment opportunities for the communities they serve.

Waiver of School Calendar Days

School districts shall follow their established calendars for the remainder of the 2019-2020 school year. The State Board gave authority to grant waivers for unanticipated closures under 16 V.S.A. 1071(c) that are the result of “consultation with the Secretary of Education and the Commissioner of Health or an order of the Department of Health in the 2019-2020 school year.” Instructional days during the closure period from March 18 – April 13 pursuant to the [Governor’s Directive No. 5](#) are hereby waived for all SUs/SDs.