



NORTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF
PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

ND Smart Restart High School Graduation Ceremony Guidance

May 2020

Kirsten Baesler
State Superintendent
Department of Public Instruction
600 East Boulevard Avenue Dept. 201
Bismarck, ND 58505-0440
www.nd.gov/dpi



Table of Contents

- I. Introduction**
 - a. Historic Milestone
 - b. Q & A

- II. Acknowledgements**
 - a. Partners & Acknowledgements

- III. Examples of Graduation Ceremonies/Celebrations with Social Distancing**
 - a. Virtual
 - b. Livestream
 - c. Drive-In
 - d. Parade
 - e. Outdoor Field
 - f. Large Arena, Auditorium

- IV. Planning for a Graduation Ceremony with Social Distancing Guidelines**
 - a. Preliminary Items for Districts to Consider
 - b. General Guidelines and Limitations
 - c. Additional Safety Measures
 - d. Intensifying Cleaning, Disinfection, and Ventilation

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused unprecedented disruption to our students and our traditional education delivery system. Our top priority continues to be providing a robust, quality education for North Dakota students in a safe manner. Thanks to the outstanding efforts of teachers, administrators, school board members, staff, parents and the students themselves, we have accomplished record amounts of innovation and transformation in education during an incredibly short period of time. North Dakota has led the nation in demonstrating agility and effectiveness while adapting to this extremely challenging situation.

Recognizing the milestone that high school graduation represents in the lives of our students and families, North Dakota has compiled potential solutions for local consideration. It is important that each school district consider whether a graduation ceremony or celebration should be held, and if so, how it can be held while respecting the recommended guidelines from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the North Dakota Department of Health (NDDoH). This guidance informed the ND Smart Restart plan that is allowing for a phased, safe re-opening of those limited sectors of our economy that were restricted to slow the spread of the coronavirus.

Implementation of the ND Smart Restart plan was based on meeting the following 8 criteria:

1. Widespread, rapid testing capability
2. Robust contact tracing and infrastructure
3. Targeted, effective quarantine and isolation
4. Protections for the state's most vulnerable
5. Sufficient health care capacity
6. Adequate PPE availability
7. New standard operating procedures for reopening
8. Plans for dealing with a resurgence or additional waves of COVID-19

Just as individual businesses have different factors to consider in determining whether to re-open, so do individual school districts in considering whether to hold graduation ceremonies. School district leaders should consider the status of COVID-19 within both their own community and surrounding areas when choosing a plan for graduation. Specific data for each county can be found on the NDDoH website at www.health.nd.gov.

If an outbreak of COVID-19 occurs in your area prior to your scheduled graduation event, the State Health Officer, in consultation with the Governor, may suspend any in-person portion of the event to protect public health and safety.

Question: Governor Burgum’s executive order currently requires all school facilities to be closed. Can a school still hold a graduation ceremony in a school facility?

Answer: Yes, graduation ceremonies may be held in school facilities, with some limitations.

The Governor’s Executive Order has been amended to allow graduation ceremonies/celebrations to be held using school facilities with proper social distancing, cleaning and other safety precautions. Decisions around whether to host graduation ceremonies will remain at the discretion of local school boards and superintendents.



Partners & Acknowledgements



Examples of Graduation Ceremonies Inclusive of Social Distancing

There are several solutions that can be utilized to host graduation ceremonies using social distancing:

Low Risk

- *Virtual Graduation Ceremony:* Schools could conduct a virtual graduation ceremony using TEAMS, Zoom or Skype meeting. Students, staff, family, and spectators could remain home and participate in a live graduation ceremony online. Speeches could be given, administration could still read the names of each individual graduate, allowing the appropriate time for recognition, and family and spectators would be able to view and support their loved ones.
- *Livestream Graduation Ceremony:* Schools host the graduation ceremony adhering to social distancing guidelines and broadcasting the ceremony via social media, internet, live TV. This scenario is similar to the virtual graduation, only that the administration and graduates would be present on-site, while family and spectators would watch from a distance using technology. Due to health and safety considerations, outdoors is preferred over indoors if possible.
- *Drive-in Graduation:* Families may arrive, and remain seated in cars, which allows for minimal physical engagement. This can be done at a park, large parking lots, or other open space.
- *Graduation parade:* Community members may socially distance along the parade route and cheer graduates as they drive past.
- *Outdoor Field Graduation:* The traditional graduation ceremony (adhering to social distancing guidelines) could take place, with graduates being spaced out and a limited number of attendees. Please refer to the seating guidelines located on page 6 for further information on social distancing if using this option.
- *Multiple Ceremonies:* Host a series of smaller ceremonies in the same venue. This would allow smaller groups within the graduating class to participate in a ceremony, with that ceremony repeated 2+ times to accommodate all high school graduates and any permitted guests. If using this option, the venue must be sanitized between each ceremony.
- *Graduation at Larger Arenas or Auditoriums:* This would include limiting guests to accommodate total capacity, seating families in every three rows in the stadium, and seating graduates 6 feet apart.

High Risk

Planning for a Graduation Ceremony with Social Distancing Guidelines

Preliminary items to consider for graduation ceremony

Districts should consider a variety of topics related to crowd size and social distancing when hosting graduation ceremonies. These may include:

- For attendees that are entering/exiting a space, implement one-way traffic and 6-foot spacing into and out of the building.
- It will be important to consider the use of restrooms and access to those facilities. Procedures should be put into place to limit crowding, and arrangements should be made to accommodate crowd size.
- Ceremonies may need additional staff to enforce safety guidelines.
- Spacing should be marked in advance to calculate capacity, number of ceremonies needed, etc.

General Guidelines and Limitations

- Strict social distancing guidelines should be in place.
 - Seating
 - Chairs:
 - There should be a minimum 6 feet between rows of chairs.
 - There should be a minimum of 6 feet between each individual chair within a row. Exceptions to the 6 feet apart rule can be made for immediate family members.
 - Bleachers or Bench Seating:
 - Use tape or another form of marking to designate seating places that are 6 feet apart. Exceptions to the 6 feet apart rule can be made for immediate family members.
 - There should be two empty rows of seating in between rows that are being used for attendees.
 - Physical Contact and Spacing Before, During, and After the Ceremony
 - There should be no physical contact between anyone who does not live together. This includes handshakes, hugs, moving the tassel from one side of the graduation hat to the other, and any other form of physical contact that may normally be associated with the graduation ceremony.
 - Pre- and post-graduation photos should be discouraged unless all individuals in the photograph are at least 6 feet apart. Exceptions can be made for family photos in which all people in the photo live in the same household.
 - If a processional is being used, individuals should walk in one at a time, with at least 6 feet of space between individuals. The school should have a procedure to have staff ensure that students do not start walking in until the

person before them is at least 6 feet in front of them and that the students walk in a pace that maintains that 6-foot minimum.

- Maximum Occupancy
 - Indoor or outdoor facilities must accommodate the NDDoH guidelines for seating and physical contact (addressed above) in order to be used for a graduation event.
- Spectators
 - NDDoH recommends that schools limit guests per graduate for any in-person graduation event. Schools may place further limits or restrictions on who can attend the graduation ceremony, including the option to not allow any spectators to attend. Schools should livestream the ceremony if possible to provide an alternative means of spectating and to limit in-person attendance.
 - Number of attendees should be based on the location of the ceremony and the ability of the space to adhere to the guidelines.
- **People who are sick should not attend the graduation ceremony. This includes students, their families, and school staff members.**
- **Members of vulnerable population groups should not attend the graduation ceremony. This includes the elderly, individuals with serious underlying health conditions, or those with weakened immune systems.**
- If the graduation ceremony is being held outdoors, the school should have a contingency plan in the event of inclement weather. The contingency plan for the graduation ceremony must also adhere to all social distancing guidelines. Please note that the contingency plan may include postponing or cancelling the graduation ceremony.

Additional Safety Measures that Should be Considered

- Mark the standing locations of graduates waiting in line to collect their diplomas.
- Position any graduate seating at appropriate distances, so that chairs are distanced from one another in all directions.
- Consider whether masks will be suggested or required.
- Consider how diplomas will be collected when a student's name is called. Staff may consider placing the diploma on a table for the student to collect. Students may choose to walk across the stage, collect the diploma from the table, and pose for a picture individually or appropriately distanced from a school/district official.
- 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.
- Consider timing of when ceremonies take place:

- If ceremonies are held outdoors, sun exposure and heat should be considered, and appropriate precautions should be taken related to shade, availability of water, etc.
- If ceremonies are delayed or postponed, appropriate information should be collected to ensure all graduates are informed and able to attend with advanced notice.
- Consider access to restrooms during the event.
 - Standard restroom facilities with running water and adequate handwash facilities are preferable to portable restrooms in meeting CDC guidelines.
 - If portable restrooms are used:
 - Additional portable restrooms should be provided to increase availability
 - Ensure adequate hygiene supplies such as toilet paper, soap, hand disinfectant
 - Foot-controlled handwashing stations, or an equivalent, are preferred to ensure good hygiene practices
 - If using contracted vendors to provide portable restrooms, please ensure that the vendor is aware of all procedures listed above.
 - If restrooms are open, have a procedure to limit the number of people in a restroom at the same time.
- No food or beverages should be served.

Intensify Cleaning, Disinfection, and Ventilation

- [Clean and disinfect](#) frequently touched surfaces within the facility at least daily (for example public restrooms, door handles, sink handles, drinking fountains.)
- Ensure ventilation systems operate properly and increase circulation of outdoor air as much as possible by opening windows and doors, using fans, or other methods. Do not open windows and doors if they pose a safety or health risk. Where safe and practical, prop doors open to avoid the need to touch door handles.
- Add additional access to hand sanitizer throughout the event space
- Thoroughly clean the entire facility after the graduation has completed.