



**DOVER HIGH SCHOOL
AND
REGIONAL CAREER TECHNICAL CENTER**



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May 11, 2020

Dear Dover School Board Members,

Graduation is not only the culmination of a student's high school experience but their K-12 journey. It is a rite of passage steeped in tradition and of great importance to both the graduates and their families. The COVID-19 pandemic has greatly impacted the school year and the fabric of our entire society since students were last in Dover High School on Friday, March 13, 2020, the same day that Governor Sununu issued Executive order 2020-04- An order declaring a state of emergency due to Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19). As the state of emergency due to the on-going public health crisis continues, one of the biggest challenges for Dover High School and schools across the state and country, has been what to do about their signature event, graduation.

In trying to develop a viable option for graduation, we have been in consultation with other area high schools, our senior class officers, and their advisors. We conducted a survey of senior families. The Department of Education has released two Year-End Event Planning documents, the latest of which was released on Friday, May 8, 2020. Finally, we have investigated options presented to us in terms of safety, cleaning and sterilization protocols, length of ceremony, restroom considerations, and seating capacity that meets social distancing guidelines.

The information we gathered from our students and families clearly indicated their desire for an event in which the class could come together for a live event. Families were given three options:

1. Wait until July or August to hold a live ceremony at Dover High School- 53%
2. Hold two graduations, a virtual graduation in June and a second ceremony in July or August- 35%
3. Hold a virtual graduation at the beginning of June- 12 %

This information was considered in the context of ensuring safety during a public health crisis and the importance of a timely graduation ceremony to ensure the availability of all class members so they would get the recognition they deserved.

We see the priorities for graduation in the following order of importance.

1. The provision of a safe event to protect the health of our approximately 330 graduates and their families, our staff, and the community at-large.

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2. The provision of a timely ceremony to ensure the participation of as many graduates as possible. Some graduates will be entering the military, joining the workforce, or leaving the area which calls for a timely ceremony to ensure their inclusion.

Our class officers offered three proposals which they sent to you. They are to be commended for the thoughtfulness of their work. We exhaustively examined these options. The drive-in option was scrutinized as a potential way to have a timely ceremony that could bring all the graduates together. The barriers for a class of our size were large. They included the length of time people would be at the venue based on the time it would take to get everyone appropriately parked and the length of the actual ceremony when students could only be out of their cars in groups of ten. Issues around handrails for the stage and the use of porta-potties are just two of the safety issues that percolated during the conversation. The ability to ensure people would stay in their vehicles and how to deal with people who congregate or do not stay in their vehicle was concerning.

Safety concerns cited in the latest advisory from the Department of Education are shared below.

- The Department wishes to clarify that the declared state of emergency and the related emergency orders do not necessitate the cancellation of all year-end events. If held, however, such events will require substantial modification from their traditional formats in order to comply with the Governor's Emergency Orders and to ensure the safety of all participants.
- **While the below represents the current guidance from the Department, districts must recognize that this guidance may change at any time as changing public health circumstances require. This guidance is not a guarantee that any particular event is compliant with the Governor's Emergency Orders. Rather, it is meant to provide practical considerations for school officials to consider when planning events that are compliant with the Emergency Orders.**
- **Which Emergency Orders are implicated in event planning?**
Emergency Order #16 (available here: <https://www.governor.nh.gov/news-media/emergency-orders/documents/emergency-order-16.pdf>) enacts a temporary prohibition on scheduled gatherings of ten or more persons. Although not mentioned by name, graduations, proms, baccalaureates, and other school social and recognition events are included within the scope of this Emergency Order. The prohibition on gatherings of ten or more persons first enacted in Emergency Order #16 was extended by Emergency Orders #29 and #40.
- **School sanctioned year-end physical gatherings are only permissible when students are able to easily socially distance – and maintain that distance throughout the event, including the periods before and after the scheduled event.**
Physical events can be difficult to plan because of the restrictions on group sizes (only gatherings of fewer than ten persons are permitted by the Emergency Orders), the venue's ability to accommodate social-distancing, and the need to discourage individuals from breaking social distancing protocols. At a graduation, for example, it may be very difficult for students to avoid offering a congratulatory hug or high five. Pre/post-ceremony mingling may also prove challenging. Districts should consider limiting audience participation to a maximum of two or less guests per student – dependent upon the ability to practice safe social distancing. As well, event planners may want to discourage attendance of those with pre-existing medical conditions that increase risk of COVID-19. Ultimately, it will be the school district's responsibility to manage and mitigate crowds accordingly and in compliance with all emergency orders.
- **Additional Considerations for all Physical Events**

Event planning must not only consider the event itself, but the pre and post event circumstances to ensure that individuals are not gathering during these times. That may mean thinking about staggered entrance or exit times or ensuring there is a plan for individuals to disperse and not congregate at the conclusion of your program.

In planning any event in which there will be participants or guests gathering physically, event planners are strongly encouraged to consider the following:

- **Screening:** Utilizing a screening mechanism for all those who will be attending. This could be a questionnaire to be completed ahead of time or a screening at the event itself. In some circumstances, temperature screening may be considered.
- **Masks:** Requiring that masks be worn by all event participants and/or spectators.
- **Social Distancing:** Requiring appropriate social distancing at all times.
- **Cleaning:** Implementing cleaning protocols for spaces/surfaces that will be repeatedly utilized during any ceremony or event and following the event.

These factors should be considered not only for the event itself, but for pre- and post- event time periods when the event participants are congregating and dispersing.

Finally, if an event is planned that will utilize in-person participation at any level, the Department encourages the school to alert local law enforcement and provide them the details of the event to ensure compliance with all Emergency Orders.

In light of these considerations, particularly safety concerns during an on-going health crisis, we propose the following format for graduation this year.

1. A virtual ceremony broadcast on Wednesday, June 10, 2020 at 7:00 pm.
2. The ceremony will include prerecorded speeches from the principal, class president, vice president, valedictorian, and salutatorian.
3. The week of June 1st students will be scheduled to come to Dover High School in their caps and gowns and other graduation regalia. A stage will be set up for the students to “walk” to receive their diploma. The student will be photographed/recorded. This photograph/recording will be included in the virtual ceremony during the presentation of diplomas portion of the ceremony.
4. The tassel ceremony will be prerecorded and will be at the conclusion of the ceremony.

If restrictions are lifted this summer, we would survey families again to see if the desire for a second outside ceremony still existed.

We will also be recognizing our seniors in the following ways this year:

1. Scoreboard Salute
2. 2020 Sign Campaign
3. Career Technical Center Completers Recognition
4. Senior Parade
5. Awards Ceremony- pre-recorded

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Peter Driscoll

Dover High School Principal