



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



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Dear Dover School Board Members,

Two virtual meetings were held last week to discuss an in-person graduation ceremony for Dover High School's Class of 2020. The meetings included the senior class officers, their advisors, parents, Board Chair Amanda Russell, Board Member Zachary Koehler, and me. At the meetings, parents shared their views on whether or not they supported an in-person graduation and at the second meeting the class officers presented a plan that would have one graduation ceremony for the class without spectators that would be broadcast and streamed so that the ceremony could be viewed in real time by family, friends, and community members.

The students worked very hard to research a plan that would meet Centers for Disease Control (CDC) guidelines around social distancing. They modeled the plan around that proposed by Concord High School but made modifications to the plan that reflect the physical set up of Dover High School. They are to be commended for their civic activism.

The priorities and responsibilities of the Dover High School administration have not changed around graduation. As stated last week they are:

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.
2. The provision of a timely and inclusive 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.

When we examine the in-person proposal we do not believe it is feasible because of our inability to ensure social distancing and mask wearing. We have observed graduations and celebrations both locally and around the country where graduates have not adhered to the social distancing guidelines. The impact of graduates not adhering to the protocols is much higher under current conditions than at ceremonies held when we were not in a pandemic. In conversation with Chief Breault of the Dover Police Department, he said that a police presence could be provided but at a graduation ceremony the police would be responsible to enforce provisions of emergency orders but not recommendations of the Centers for Disease Control. The Chief explained that Governor's orders give state and local police specific authority to enforce the order. Although the police department agrees with the CDC and HHS recommendations and believes it is important for all to follow the recommendations from both agencies, the police have no authority to enforce CDC or DHHS guidelines that are not a specific order of the Governor and authorized

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by an emergency order. In a ceremony with this many moving parts, through omission and/or commission, the likelihood of social distancing being maintained is nearly impossible.

I would also like to share other observations that continue to reinforce our commitment to the virtual ceremony that includes the opportunity to walk across the stage and receive a diploma.

1. Many students and parents have reached out to us in support of the virtual ceremony. Some students have mentioned that the survey was responded to by 119 students and does not necessarily represent the viewpoint of most of the class.
2. 31 of the members of the Class of 2020 have some sort of medical condition that would make it so they could not attend the ceremony as proposed by the senior class officers or they would be taking a risk to attend the ceremony. We have no way of knowing how many others have family members who might be at heightened risk because of pre-existing medical conditions or age. Some students have indicated to me they would not attend because of the risk to themselves and/or their unwillingness to put someone else's health at risk.
3. The plan relies on faculty volunteers. We have not asked the faculty yet to see if we could get the volunteers necessary and even with volunteers put them at risk when we have closed our schools. The use of community volunteers who do not know our students would not contribute to successful management of the event.
4. Risk and liability need to be considered. Liability waivers that cover individual students do not cover other people who might be impacted by holding this event. Because of these liability and risks issues, Exeter and Winnacunnet have pulled plans to have an in-person graduation. It is our responsibility to assess and weigh risk to protect our students, their families, staff, the community, and the District.
5. Previous suggestions have considered have smaller gatherings. These plans put people at risk more often than a single event.

A virtual graduation does not meet the desires of everyone and will not replace an in-person event. In these unprecedented times, we need to take this step to contribute to the health and safety of our community. We will certainly seek the input of our seniors on how the ceremony is put together.

Graduation is viewed as a community event as it showcases thirteen years of effort on the part of students, families, and the District to prepare our students for the next chapter in their journey. Many members of the community have offered ideas about how we recognize our seniors. I would suggest that the way our community could help us is by having a community-wide virtual Green and White Day on Friday, June 5th. It could provide a unique opportunity for Dover to recognize its seniors.

Sincerely,

Peter Driscoll
Dover High School Principal