



STATE OF NEW JERSEY

# DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

A Memo from the New Jersey Department of Education

Date: May 8, 2020 (Updated: Link added May 9, 2020)  
To: Chief School Administrators, Charter School and Renaissance School Project Leads, Directors of Approved Private Schools for Students with Disabilities, Directors of Nonpublic Schools  
Route To: Building Principals, School Staff  
From: AbdulSaleem Hasan, Ed.S., Assistant Commissioner  
Division of Field Services

## COVID-19: Virtual Graduation Celebrations

On March 16, 2020, Governor Phil Murphy signed Executive Order No. 104 (EO 104), implementing aggressive social distancing measures to mitigate further spread of COVID-19 in New Jersey. Among other directives, Governor Murphy's Executive Order indefinitely closed all public, private and parochial preschools and elementary and secondary schools to students beginning on March 18, 2020. Executive Order No. 107 (EO 107), signed on March 21, 2020, prohibits gatherings of individuals for parties, celebrations, and other social events, which includes all in-person graduation ceremonies (see also [letter to education community](#) and [Administrative Order No. 2020-12](#) from Colonel Patrick J. Callahan, State Director of Emergency Management). Since the Executive Orders will remain in effect until further notice, only virtual graduation ceremonies can be planned at this time.

We recognize that this sudden disruption to the normal operating procedures could be jarring for school communities at all levels. The resilience and adaptivity required to thrive in the face of unprecedented situations are characteristics embodied by the Class of 2020. Recognizing that high school graduation is certainly a milestone for students and families, the Department has compiled tips and suggestions for holding *virtual* graduation ceremonies and related celebratory activities to honor this year's graduating class while ensuring the health and safety of the school community during the COVID-19 emergency.

### Virtual Celebrations

- Virtual Graduation Ceremonies offer a number of ways to celebrate this year's graduating class. From airing graduation messages on local network stations to designing virtual graduations on gaming platforms, virtual graduations offer districts an opportunity to involve the community in planning and facilitating a memorable ceremony. Below are some ideas for hosting a virtual ceremony:
  - Stream your ceremony on your district website or on another streaming service that includes prerecorded speeches or messages
  - Consider reaching out to celebrities or public figures to record speeches or messages for seniors in your school district
  - If resources allow, your district may consider developing a virtual reality graduation, where within a virtual graduation environment, student avatars participate in a graduation ceremony
- Schools can also consider asking members of the graduating class to take a leading role in the graduation ceremony. Senior students can be asked in advance to send video messages wearing their cap and gown and/or other regalia. During the virtual ceremony, students and their families will hear prerecorded messages from speakers, edited together in the flow of a traditional graduation ceremony, and students' names as well as messages will be announced with their photo displayed.

### Community Recognition

- Communities across the country have shown their support by making a special effort to recognize the Class of 2020. Some examples include posting banners with students' senior pictures around the school community,

listing the names of graduates in the local newspaper, and creating yard signs for all students to post.

- Some communities have secured digital billboards to publicize and celebrate the Class of 2020. The digital billboards display the students' names and personalized messages developed by school staff and students.
- We encourage school districts to coordinate any recognition efforts with various community stakeholders.

We welcome you to share your virtual graduation celebration or related activities by using the hashtag **#NJGrad2020** on social media.

c: Members, State Board of Education  
Lamont O. Repollet, Ed.D., Commissioner  
NJDOE Staff  
Statewide Parent Advocacy Network  
Garden State Coalition of Schools  
NJ LEE Group