

Guidance for Graduation and End-of-Year Promotion Ceremonies During COVID-19

Updated July 7, 2020

The following requirements apply to graduation and end-of-year promotion ceremonies to be conducted in May 2020 and thereafter. **Effective July 7, 2020, this guidance has been revised to address the provisions of Executive Order GA-29 regarding the use of face coverings.** As the public health situation changes, these guidelines may be modified further.

In order for a school system to determine if a planned graduation or end-of-year promotion ceremony is permissible under Governor Abbott's current COVID-19 disaster orders, as well as any local orders not in conflict with Governor Abbott's orders, a school system is advised to first consult with its legal counsel regarding such planned activities. Assuming its legal counsel considers the planned activities permissible, the school system could then seek written approval from applicable local jurisdictions tasked with enforcement of COVID-19-related gubernatorial or local orders to engage in the planned graduation or end-of-year promotion ceremony.

Participation by a student or family member in a ceremony is voluntary and may not be required or compelled by the school.

1. Completely virtual ceremonies are approved to take place at any time.

2. Hybrid ceremonies (compilation video of students filmed individually or in small groups) are permitted to take place **effective May 5** under the following conditions:

- Prior to June 1, school employees, students and parents must comply with the guidance on *Minimum Standard Health Protocols on Visits to Schools During Campus Closures* except as authorized by this guidance. After June 1, school employees, students and parents must comply with the guidance on *Summer Instruction, Activities and School Visits*.
- Schools using non-school facilities to perform graduation or end-of-year promotion ceremonies must ensure compliance as if the non-school facility were a school and as authorized by this guidance.
- Prior to participating, individuals must be screened (via questioning) by school system employees for any of the following new or worsening signs or symptoms of possible COVID-19:
 - Cough
 - Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
 - Chills
 - Repeated shaking with chills
 - Muscle pain
 - Headache
 - Sore throat
 - Loss of taste or smell
 - Diarrhea
 - Feeling feverish or a measured temperature greater than or equal to 100.0 degrees Fahrenheit

- Known close contact with a person who is lab confirmed to have COVID-19 if exposure to the active confirmed case occurred within the last 14 days

Those found with any of these signs or symptoms must be excluded from the activity.

- The total number of individuals within close proximity during video filming/photos must not exceed five.
- No rehearsals will be permitted.
- Hand sanitizer or hand washing stations must be available at entrances to the building where filming occurs.
- Masks must be worn in compliance with the governor’s executive order. Schools may require the use of masks or face shields for adults or students for whom it is developmentally appropriate. Diplomas or other documents may not be handed from person to person unless gloves and masks are worn at all times.
- Care should be taken and effort must be made to mitigate virus exposure when participants come into contact with documents and other objects such as diplomas and awards.
- Bathrooms, doorknobs, and other commonly touched surfaces must be frequently cleaned and sanitized.
- A robust communication plan must be in place to address steps to be taken before, during, and after the ceremony to ensure that participants are aware of safety protocols at the ceremony and explicit instructions to graduates not to congregate outside of school sponsored ceremonies or events.
- If students’ family members are to be allowed to observe or participate in a hybrid ceremony, school officials should communicate with students’ families prior to the ceremony to determine how many family members will be attending so they can plan appropriately to implement social distancing measures, logistics, and other safety measures.

3. Vehicle ceremonies where all activities are outdoors are permitted to take place **effective May 15** under the following conditions:

- Prior to June 1, school employees, students and parents must comply with the guidance on *Minimum Standard Health Protocols on Visits to Schools During Campus Closures* except as authorized by this guidance. After June 1, school employees, students and parents must comply with the guidance on *Summer Instruction, Activities and School Visits*.
- Schools using non-school facilities to perform graduation ceremonies must ensure compliance as if the non-school facility were a school and as authorized by this guidance.
- Prior to attending the ceremony, participating students and attending family members must be screened (via questioning) by school system employees for any of the following new or worsening signs or symptoms of possible COVID-19:
 - Cough
 - Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
 - Chills
 - Repeated shaking with chills
 - Muscle pain
 - Headache
 - Sore throat
 - Loss of taste or smell
 - Diarrhea
 - Feeling feverish or a measured temperature greater than or equal to 100.0 degrees Fahrenheit
 - Known close contact with a person who is lab confirmed to have COVID-19 if exposure to the active confirmed case occurred within the last 14 days

Those found with any of these signs or symptoms must be excluded from the activity.

- Members of the same household (ten individuals or fewer, including the graduate) may be present in a vehicle together.
- School officials should communicate with students’ families prior to the ceremony to determine how many family members will be attending so they can plan appropriately to implement social distancing measures, logistics, and other safety measures.
- Graduates or promoting students may only be brought together for one event per class or breakout group. No rehearsals will be permitted.
- Diplomas or other documents may not be handed from person to person unless gloves are worn by those distributing diplomas or other documents to students.
- Masks must be worn in compliance with the governor’s executive order. Schools may require the use of masks or face shields for adults or students for whom it is developmentally appropriate. Care should be taken and effort must be made to mitigate virus exposure when participants come into contact with documents and other objects such as diplomas and awards.
- School employees at the ceremony must be limited to the minimum number needed to logistically support the ceremony.
- A robust communication plan must be in place to address steps to be taken before, during, and after the ceremony to ensure that participants are aware of safety protocols at the ceremony and explicit instructions to graduates or promoting students not to congregate outside of school-sponsored ceremonies or events.

4. Outdoor in-person ceremonies are currently permitted for counties as follows:

Between **May 15 and May 28, 2020**, an outdoor ceremony may take place in a rural county that has an attestation as described in the “*Texans Helping Texans: The Governor’s Report to Open Texas*” (April 27, 2020) that remains in effect 7 days prior to the ceremony.

An outdoor ceremony may take place in any county **on or after May 29**.

Be advised, this permission is subject to change as underlying public health conditions change.

Outdoor ceremonies must meet the following requirements:

- School systems must cap the number of total participants (inclusive of students, families, and staff) to a level that can be managed in the outdoor venue to maximize social distancing, both during the event and during entry and exit.
- Prior to June 1, school employees, students and parents must comply with the guidance on *Minimum Standard Health Protocols on Visits to Schools During Campus Closures* except as authorized by this guidance. After June 1, school employees, students and parents must comply with the guidance on *Summer Instruction, Activities and School Visits*.
- Prior to June 1, school employees, students and parents must comply with the guidance on *Minimum Standard Health Protocols on Visits to Schools During Campus Closures* except as authorized by this guidance. After June 1, school employees, students and parents must comply with the guidance on *Summer Instruction, Activities and School Visits*.
- Schools using non-school facilities to perform graduation or end-of-year promotion ceremonies must ensure compliance as if the non-school facility were a school and as authorized by this guidance.
- Prior to attending the ceremony, participating students and attending family members must be screened (via questioning) by school system employees for any of the following new or worsening signs or symptoms of possible COVID-19:

- Cough
- Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
- Chills
- Repeated shaking with chills
- Muscle pain
- Headache
- Sore throat
- Loss of taste or smell
- Diarrhea
- Feeling feverish or a measured temperature greater than or equal to 100.0 degrees Fahrenheit
- Known close contact with a person who is lab confirmed to have COVID-19 if exposure to the active confirmed case occurred within the last 14 days

Those found with any of these signs or symptoms must be excluded from the activity.

- Graduates or promoting students may only be brought together for one event per class or breakout group. No rehearsals will be permitted.
- Keep 6 feet or more of spacing between all participants, except that members of the same household (ten individuals or fewer, including the graduate if seated with the household) may be allowed to sit together in the audience but must be at least 6 feet away from any other family group at all times.
- Hand sanitizer or hand washing stations must be available at all venue entrances.
- School employees at the ceremony must be limited to the minimum number needed to logistically support the ceremony.
- Diplomas or other documents may not be handed from person to person unless gloves are worn by those distributing diplomas or other documents to students.
- Masks must be worn in compliance with the governor's executive order. Schools may require the use of masks or face shields for adults or students for whom it is developmentally appropriate. Care should be taken and effort must be made to mitigate virus exposure when participants come into contact with documents and other objects such as diplomas and awards.
- School employees must be stationed appropriately to ensure compliance with all requirements and to limit congregation.
- A robust communication plan must be in place to address steps to be taken before, during, and after the ceremony to ensure that participants are aware of safety protocols at the ceremony and explicit instructions to graduates or promoting students not to congregate outside of school sponsored ceremonies or events.
- School officials should communicate with students' families prior to the ceremony to determine how many family members will be attending so they can plan appropriately to implement social distancing measures, logistics, and other safety measures.
- Assigned seating for members of the audience should be considered to more efficiently ensure separation between household groups.
- Specific plans should be developed for arrivals and departures to ensure appropriate social distancing.