



STATE OF NEW JERSEY

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

A Memo from the New Jersey Department of Education

Date: May 27, 2020 (**Updated May 28, 2020. Relevant updates are highlighted below.**)
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 Update: New Jersey Commencement Ceremonies

This Broadcast serves as an update to the May 8th Broadcast regarding planning and implementation of virtual graduation ceremonies. Recognizing that graduation is a major milestone for students and families, Governor Murphy is committed to providing flexibility to public school districts, charter schools, renaissance school projects and nonpublic schools (collectively "school districts") to honor this year's graduating class while ensuring compliance with the health and safety requirements to protect students, educators, and families during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. To that end, local school districts have three options for commencement ceremonies: virtual; drive-through/drive-in; and modified in-person, outdoor ceremonies. **Updated: Modified in-person, outdoor ceremonies may only occur on or after July 6, 2020; virtual ceremonies and drive-through/drive-in ceremonies that are otherwise compliant with Executive Order No. 142 may occur at any time.**

Decisions about the most appropriate type of ceremony for each community will be made at the local level in consultation with local officials based on the specific circumstances in each municipality and school district. For additional information on each ceremony type, including applicable health and safety requirements and guidelines, please see the New Jersey Department of Education's (NJDOE) [Alternatives to Traditional Commencement Ceremonies](#) guidance document.

Updated: School districts that plan to hold modified in-person ceremony must certify to the NJDOE, via an online submission form that will be made available on June 5, 2020 on <https://covid19.nj.gov/>, that their planned ceremony will comply with applicable requirements for gatherings, including those addressing social distancing. The form must be submitted no later than seven days prior to the scheduled date of the ceremony.

Districts should keep municipal officials, including the local Office of Emergency Management, local law enforcement, first responders, and local health officials informed of their plans for ceremonies.

Critical Factors to Consider for All Commencement Ceremonies

- Always prioritize the health and safety of students, staff, and other community members. Confer with local health officials to determine the applicability of any other rules or restrictions in addition to those outlined below that might be necessary to ensure the public health, such as whether it is necessary to restrict attendance or provide any additional protections for high-risk individuals. Prospective attendees should be advised to follow current guidelines from the New Jersey Department of Health (NJDOH) and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) regarding high-risk categories and necessary precautions.
- Individuals who are sick should be encouraged not to attend; see [CDC guidelines](#) for what individuals should do if they are sick and to see a list of possible COVID-19 symptoms. Consider posting signage discouraging anyone from attending if they or anyone in their household is experiencing symptoms of respiratory illness or if they have been in close contact with anyone diagnosed with COVID-19 in the past 14 days.

- Institutions should also consider conducting temperature screenings with non-contact thermometers of everyone entering the venue. Where such screenings are conducted, any person with a temperature of 100.4 °F or greater should be excluded from the event.
- Ensure that graduation ceremonies are inclusive and accessible for *all* students and families. Consider making livestreams available for those individuals who are excluded from the event.
- Limit the number of staff members to only those required to facilitate your planned commencement ceremony.
- Consider equity issues, such as access to vehicles to participate in drive-through/drive-in ceremonies.
- **Updated:** Districts should not hold graduation ceremonies on Primary Election Day, which has been moved to July 7, 2020 pursuant to Executive Order 120.

If you have questions regarding commencement ceremonies, contact your respective [County Office of Education](#).

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