

COVID-19 Guidance for Graduation/ End of Year Celebration Planning in JK-12 Schools

Graduations and end of year celebrations are important milestones in students' lives. Considering COVID-19 continues to circulate in the community, schools will need to continue to be vigilant in maintaining public health measures when considering end of year celebration options for students, including those who are graduating. Virtual ceremonies continue to be the safest option.

The aim and purpose of this document is to assist individuals, schools, school boards and businesses with information related to the Ontario Government's reopening framework as well as Toronto Public Health requirements to reduce the spread of COVID-19. It is important to know that breaches of some of these directions will constitute offences under provincial regulations or other public health legal requirements. While we aim to provide relevant and timely information, no guarantee can be given as to the accuracy or completeness of any information provided. This guidance is not intended to nor does it provide legal advice and should not be relied upon or treated as legal advice. Users seeking legal advice should consult with a qualified legal professional.

Below are some considerations for planning student graduations or end of year celebrations in JK-grade 12 schools.

- Schools and school boards planning school graduation ceremonies or end of year celebrations should carefully consider rules pertaining to organized public events and social gatherings. They should also consider limits on the renting of meeting and event spaces, which are set out in the regulations under the [Reopening Ontario \(A Flexible Response to COVID-19\) Act, 2020](#) (ROA), along with other applicable orders by the Province of Ontario and Toronto Public Health. Currently the province is permitting **outdoor** graduations and end of year celebrations by class and by homeroom/quadmestered class for secondary students.
- Educational institutions should consult with their legal counsel if they have any questions about the interpretation or application of the regulations in the context of graduation ceremonies or end of year celebrations

Choosing an in-person versus virtual ceremony

- Virtual ceremonies continue to be the safest option to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

- In-person ceremonies can only occur outdoors and following the below guidance. Care must be taken to ensure proper planning and protocols are in place if an in-person ceremony is considered.

In-Person Celebration Requirements

End of school year celebrations must meet the following requirements as outlined by the Ministry of Education:

- Celebrations should be organized by class for elementary school and by homeroom or quadmastered class for secondary schools. Only one class/cohort at a time can have a ceremony.
- All celebrations should take place outdoors – no indoor celebrations are permitted.
- Celebrations should only take place where physical distancing can be maintained.
- A maximum of two guests per student can consider attending, only if there is enough room for physical distancing of at least two metres at all times.

On the day of graduation or end of year celebration:

- Students must complete and pass the [COVID-19 Screening Tool for Students JK-12](#) before they come to school. School officials must ensure that the screening tool has been completed.
- The ceremony is only for one class cohort. Class cohorts cannot be mixed.
- Attendance must be taken for public health contact tracing purposes.
- Access to school buildings should be avoided except where required (i.e. washrooms).
- Have hand sanitizer (70-90% alcohol concentration) available for use.
- Masks should be worn at all times, as there may be times when physical distancing cannot be maintained.
- Each student is permitted to have two guests, from their household only. All guests must wear masks.
- Everyone must maintain a physical distance of two metres from others, except for members of the same household.
- The principal and other administration can attend the outdoor celebration as long as they maintain a physical distance of two metres from all participants and wear a mask. If other school staff wish to address the graduating class cohort, it is recommended that the class/cohort teacher read the address or that it is recorded to be presented at the outdoor ceremony.
- The celebration can be recorded or livestreamed so that friends and family can participate or view the ceremony afterwards.
- Students who prefer not to attend or cannot attend can be provided a virtual option to participate. Diplomas can be mailed to them if they are graduating.

- Students can also pick up diplomas following the [guidance for retrieval of personal belongings](#).

During the class ceremony/celebration:

- Students and their guests must wear masks at all times
- Students should be seated two metres apart from each other. Individuals who do not live together must be seated two metres apart.
- If using a tent, ensure all four sides are open to maximize airflow.
- If diplomas are being distributed:
 - The staff who is distributing the diploma should wash their hands prior to distributing the diploma. They should be wearing a medical mask and a face shield at all times while doing so.
 - Students should be called one at a time to pick up their diploma. Once the student has returned to their seat, the next student can be called. Alternatively the teacher can name the student and deliver their diploma to where they are seated.

After the class ceremony:

- Gatherings before and after the ceremony are not permitted. All students and their guests are not to attend school earlier than expected and are to leave school property immediately after the ceremony. Schools can plan a virtual celebration with students following the ceremony.
- Food and drinks should not be served.

Possible approaches

Examples of approaches that schools could take to support end of year celebrations include:

- outdoor recognition ceremonies with a single cohort, class, homeroom or quadmester
- outdoor assemblies with a single cohort, class, homeroom or quadmester
- outdoor class meetings in conjunction with retrieval of personal belongings
- driving or walking parade

Use of Gowns

The use of gowns is not permitted unless gowns have been purchased for personal use or if appropriate measures are in place to launder each gown between individual uses.

Graduation Pictures

- **The permissibility of graduation pictures is dependent on if photography is permitted in the province's Roadmap to Reopening and where we are in this process. If permitted:**
 - It is strongly recommend that group class pictures not be taken, either indoors or outdoors. Consider virtual options or having students take a picture at home and share it with the school to create a collage of the class or group.
 - If individual student pictures must be taken at school, they must be taken outdoors. Follow these measures:
 - Ensure there is a distance of two metres or more between the client and photographer at all times.
 - Clean and disinfect surfaces that are touched between student photographs.
 - To reduce movement, the photographer should organize their equipment/lighting, etc. before calling in the student.
 - The photographer and any assistants should wear a medical mask and consider a face shield in addition to the mask.
 - Students should keep their mask on until their photo is being taken.
 - The student may remove the mask for the photograph as long as they are 2 metres or more from others.
 - The photo shoot with each student should be kept as short as possible (less than 15 minutes).

For more information on COVID-19 recommendations for schools, please see the [Toronto Public Health Guidance for the Reopening of Schools JK-12](#).

Reference

Province of Ontario, Ministry of Health (March, 2021) **Public Health Measures and Graduation Activities**.

Province of Ontario, Ministry of Education (June 7, 2021) [Guide to End of School Year Celebrations](#).