



Olga Hugelmeyer
Superintendent of Schools

May 18, 2020

Dear Parents and Guardians,

I hope you are healthy and well as we enter the last four weeks of this incredibly challenging school year. With less than 20 school days left, I felt it was important to provide an update regarding end-of-year events for the 2019-2020 school year, including high school graduation, senior awards ceremonies, and eighth grade promotion ceremonies.

Elizabeth Public Schools and the Elizabeth Board of Education waited patiently, weighed many different options, and developed several contingency plans with eternal optimism that the orders regarding social distancing requirements and restrictions on large gatherings would be relaxed enough by the last week of school for us to be able to have in-person ceremonies as our students deserve.

Regretfully, due to the current restrictions and the projected timeline of those orders remaining in place during these last few weeks of school, we have reached the conclusion that moving to virtual ceremonies for our seniors and eighth grade students is the necessary decision to ensure the safety of our students, team members, families, and community members. Living in the state with the second most cases of coronavirus in the nation, we knew that having public ceremonies was going to be an uphill climb and that this unfortunate reality could take place but wanted so badly for our students and their families to experience these ceremonies in person as they are traditionally celebrated.

Our hearts are especially heavy for our seniors in the graduating Class of 2020, understanding that this has not been the senior year that they had hoped and looked forward to for so many reasons. I thank our seniors for their sacrifice, resilience, and continued optimism in the face of unprecedented adversity; it matters.

Recently, I had the honor of meeting with approximately 35 student leader representatives from the Class of 2020. In our nearly two-hour virtual meeting, students were able to provide input and share thoughts regarding distance learning and virtual graduation planning. The voice of our students is extremely important as we move forward in finishing this school year strongly, and honor and celebrate this unique and special graduating class.

During my meeting with students, we spent considerable time discussing the decision to move toward a virtual graduation. In addition, we discussed other possibilities, options and ideas, including the possibility of a ceremony or recognition at a later date, such as November. We will certainly leave the door open for a recognition and/or celebration of the Class of 2020 at a future date.

Office of the Superintendent of Schools

Clearly, the decision to move to a virtual ceremony was made based upon an unpredictable, uncertain, and ever-changing future amidst COVID-19. Although we know an in-person ceremony is everybody's preference, in order to provide each student the opportunity to be recognized at this significant milestone, we must immediately start plans a virtual ceremony.

As we move forward with planning and identifying details for the virtual graduation ceremony, we will continue to communicate to students and families. Please know we will do whatever we can to create memorable end-of-year experiences to mark the achievements of our graduating seniors of the Class of 2020 as well as our eighth grade students.

High Schools Graduation

Each high school academy will host their own virtual graduation that will take place on June 15, 2020. To the extent possible, each virtual graduation ceremony will replicate as many components of an in-person graduation ceremony as is customary, including student speeches, honors, student recognitions, etc. Each ceremony will be streamed for families to view from the comfort and safety of their own homes.

Senior Awards Ceremony

Each of our high school academies will hold their senior awards ceremonies as a virtual ceremony. Our principals are working to livestream the ceremony on Facebook. We are inviting all of our seniors to view the virtual event online, and our principals will then coordinate the delivery of the plaques, certificates, and awards to the student homes.

Caps and Gowns and Lawn Signs

We will begin the distribution of yard signs congratulating our seniors and a bag full of items, including their cap and gown for graduation beginning the week of June 8. This distribution will be a drive-through pick up process as we will take all necessary precautions and implement social distancing measures. Our principals will be communicating directly with our graduating seniors about specific dates and times.

Laptops and Personal Belongings

Principals will also be communicating with seniors about procedures regarding laptops and retrieval of any personal belongings that may have been left in the school buildings following school closure on March 16.

Eighth Grade Promotion Ceremonies

Each elementary school will host their own virtual promotion ceremony that will take place during the last full week of school, beginning June 8. To the extent possible, each virtual promotion ceremony will replicate as many components of an in-person promotion ceremony as is customary, including student speeches, honors, student recognitions, etc. Each ceremony will be streamed for families to view from the comfort and safety of their own homes.

I want to close by reflecting on my meeting with our seniors. Students were able to express and share the difficulty of this journey, their loss, grief and pain, and the challenges of the new reality we are currently living in. In addition, they expressed their resolve, their problem-solving, their resiliency, their gratitude, and their empathy for others. We are so proud of our seniors from the graduating Class of 2020 and know that they will prove to be incredible leaders in their chosen colleges, careers, and communities in which they reside.

Sincerely,



Olga Hugelmeyer