

Superintendent's Video Message to Seniors and Parents

April 21, 2020

Hello. I'm Dan Cates, superintendent for High School District 211. I do not typically appear before you like this, but we all can agree these times are anything but typical.

As I envisioned communicating with you surrounding the matter of your graduation ceremony, I could not bring myself to share information about such a significant event in an email message.

Since the Governor first closed schools, we began contemplating how we might possibly celebrate your graduation in person, alongside your friends. We know that many of you have also been thinking about this with great interest.

I want you to know of our latest plans by hearing from me directly. Your graduation is the brightest moment we have, and many of us are doing all we can so that you can experience the fulfillment of your commitment over the past four years. At the same time, we all have limitations and responsibilities for one another and each other's family members surrounding our shared public health.

We want to thank the many people who responded to the recent survey. We received responses from about 2,800 students and 1,900 parents.

Across the District, our seniors and parents were strongly in favor of making arrangements so that we could hold an in-person graduation ceremony in either June or July, if our public health guidelines allow.

I want to confirm that we hear you. We are scheduling and making arrangements so that if public health guidelines allow us to hold a graduation ceremony safely in June, or in July, we will have a ceremony for you in June, or in July.

We are working to schedule dates at a large venue that could allow us to meet public health guidelines that may be in place.

This brings us to the matter of the virtual ceremony. Like you, we all spend many hours looking into our iPads and computer screens. A virtual ceremony would not be anyone's preference, if given a choice.

Our seniors confirmed this, with two-thirds expressing that they are not interested in a virtual ceremony.

Among parents, the results were a little different, with slightly more than half of parents expressing interest in a virtual ceremony.

So, this is what we are going to do with the virtual ceremony.

Because we have no way of knowing what restrictions might apply to large gatherings throughout the summer, we do not want to miss what might be our only opportunity to celebrate you.

Along with scheduling dates for a possible in-person graduation in June and July, we are also making arrangements so that families can access a virtual graduation on the date in May that we originally scheduled for your graduation.

To help ensure everyone's understanding, here is a recap:

- We will hold a virtual graduation ceremony in May on your school's original graduation date.
- If we are somehow able to have an in-person graduation ceremony in June or July, we will do so in addition to the virtual graduation.
- Once we confirm the details of all the arrangements, we will communicate them to you.

To our Seniors: We are doing all we can surrounding your graduation. Like always, you have been exemplary in your flexibility, your resiliency and your creative, positive energy. We all are better because of your presence and time with us.

Thank you.