

## **Celebrating High School Graduates during Covid-19**

Graduating high school is a significant milestone, not only for our students, but for their family and supporters as well. It is important to acknowledge this accomplishment in a meaningful way.

Our Grade 12 students have persevered through a very different experience than the classes before them, making the most of their experience. They deserve to be recognized, not only for the work they have done during the virtual learning period, but for their years of study that have led them through to high school graduation.

Similarly, our staff have played a significant role in helping these students along this journey.

Although we are unable to celebrate our graduates together in groups or have the usual parades through communities this year, we will be celebrating differently, in ways that are safe. And, when it is safe to do so, we will bring our graduates back together to celebrate as a group. The following document outlines some key guidelines that can help schools develop public health compliant graduation recognition events.

- Any acknowledgement/recognition approach should ensure that all students can participate.
- The overarching public health measures must be followed which include physical distancing of 2meters (6 feet), regular hand washing and cough etiquette. See <https://novascotia.ca/coronavirus/> for more information.
- In order to operationalize these events, School Principals will work with the Regional Centres of Education/CSAP and may use their administrative team or other designates as needed.
- The principles governing the organizing of these events are safety, care, and collaboration. Regional Centres of Education/CSAP will be available to assist with any issues schools have difficulty overcoming.

### **Ways to Acknowledge**

- Grade 12 graduation will look very different this year. In order to adhere to public health measures, there can be no group celebrations and school staff should not participate in any community events that bring groups together like parades. Rather, events will need to be celebrated individually, with in person components adhering to public health guidelines outlined below.
- Schools will have varying approaches to recognizing their Grade 12's, but they should ensure that all graduates have the ability and opportunity to participate. For example, there should be no events that are only available online if some students do not have access to the internet.

- Regional Centres of Education/CSAP will be available to assist schools with planning and/or making connections with schools across the province to share ideas.
  - As an example, some schools have been discussing events that have individual appointments for students to come to the school, receive their diploma with photographs in their cap and gown, and a slideshow recapping the year distributed when all is complete. In this instance we can ensure there are no crowd gatherings and physical distancing is maintained.
- Schools may wish to have celebrations for other students, like those moving from middle school to high school, however, there will be no in person component offered.

### **Dates**

- Graduation recognition can occur between June 18-30, provided their plans meet the guidelines outlined in this document. Please consult your Director of Programs and Student Services if you require additional information on preparation of diplomas.

These guidelines have been reviewed and approved by Public Health.

### **Guidelines**

- If teachers or school staff are handling diplomas or packages, they should take the following precautions.
  - Do not prepare packages if you are ill, even if you only have mild symptoms
  - Clean and disinfect area where packages will be put together
  - Wash or sanitize hands prior to preparing packages and after completion
  - Do not touch face, eyes when preparing the packages
- Students/families should be advised to wash or sanitize hands after collecting anything that has been handled by staff and may want to set aside the diploma/package for a few days before handling any further as an added precaution.
- Schools should:
  - ensure there are no groups of 10 or more congregating at the same time, using strategies like spacing appointments so small numbers of people are onsite at one time; there should not be group celebrations, people shouldn't be gathering/lining up in vehicles or parades happening
  - where possible, have the recognition take place outside. It is understandable that weather and other factors may make an outside event unrealistic.
  - ensure individuals follow proper physical distancing (2m apart) both inside and outside the building; unfortunately, there will be no hugging or handshakes this year to congratulate our graduates
  - place diplomas or any other items being given to students in an organized way, like alphabetically, on a table so that physical distancing can be maintained

- only allow the graduate to be accompanied by a maximum of 4 people. If any of the graduate's supporters are not part of their household/family bubble, they must maintain physical distancing (2m apart).
- remind the individual prior to them showing up to the school to follow proper handwashing and physical distancing protocol
- remind individuals not to come to the site or enter a building if they are feeling unwell and post signs to reinforce this message
- work to limit the amount of time individuals spend in the facility. This will vary based on the needs of individuals and should be ascertained in advance.
- have designated entrance doors and exit doors
- work with designated operations staff to ensure proper cleaning protocols are practiced, such as frequent disinfecting of high touch surfaces like doorknobs and railings and washrooms – this will be important for both the recognition event and for preparation

### **Graduation Gown Use**

- Gowns are often considered a symbol of graduation. If feasible, we encourage schools to use them under the following conditions.
  - Gowns from previous years can be reused, but schools should refer to bullet 1 under guidelines for protocol on handling and distributing packages.
    - If students are required to return the gowns, the school should develop a return process using the same process outlined in the accessing schools guidelines previously distributed.
  - Gowns should not be exchanged between students onsite. For example, if a school only has 5 gowns, they should not have one student drive in, use the gown and then have another student use that same gown.
  - Regional Centres of Education/CSAP can provide information on gown purchase options.
  - Many students have also purchased prom attire. Students could choose to wear this type of clothing or other attire for pictures or opportunities of acknowledgement.

### **Personal Protection Equipment (PPE)**

- As advised by Nova Scotia Public Health, use of PPE (masks, gloves, etc) is not required. However, if individuals choose to wear PPE while they are onsite as an added precaution, they may do so.
- Should individuals choose to wear non-medical masks, a good resource to learn more is:
  - English: <https://novascotia.ca/coronavirus/staying-healthy/#masks>
  - French: <https://novascotia.ca/coronavirus/staying-healthy/fr/#masks>
- Schools should ensure there is a place to dispose used PPE.

**Communication to Teachers and Families**

- Principals will consult with school staff in the planning of graduation recognition plans and communicate dates and procedures directly to students/families.
- Communication should include measures being taken to ensure safety.