



New Hampshire

Department of Education

YEAR-END EVENT PLANNING GUIDANCE

The Department of Education (the “Department”) has received a number of inquiries from schools and educators about planning proms, graduations, and other traditional year-end events amidst the current state of emergency necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic. The Department applauds the efforts of schools, parents, and educators to recognize the achievements of our students and to find creative ways to honor and celebrate these important milestones in the lives of our students.

The Department wishes to clarify that the declared state of emergency and the related emergency orders do not necessitate the cancellation of all year-end events. If held, however, such events will require substantial modification from their traditional formats in order to comply with the Governor’s Emergency Orders and to ensure the safety of all participants.

While the below represents the current guidance from the Department, districts must recognize that this guidance may change at any time as changing public health circumstances require. This guidance is not a guarantee that any particular event is compliant with the Governor’s Emergency Orders. Rather, it is meant to provide practical considerations for school officials to consider when planning events that are compliant with the Emergency Orders.

Which Emergency Orders are implicated in event planning?

Emergency Order #16 (available here: <https://www.governor.nh.gov/news-media/emergency-orders/documents/emergency-order-16.pdf>) enacts a temporary prohibition on scheduled gatherings of ten or more persons. Although not mentioned by name, graduations, proms, baccalaureates, and other school social and recognition events are included within the scope of this Emergency Order. The prohibition on gatherings of ten or more persons first enacted in Emergency Order #16 was extended by Emergency Orders #29 and #40.

What sort of modifications are necessary to be compliant with the Emergency Orders?

On-line events held via Zoom, Google, WebEx or other conferencing platform are, of course, permissible.

School sanctioned year-end physical gatherings are only permissible when students are able to easily socially distance – and maintain that distance throughout the event, including the periods before and after the scheduled event.

Physical events can be difficult to plan because of the restrictions on group sizes (only gatherings of fewer than ten persons are permitted by the Emergency Orders), the venue’s ability to accommodate social-distancing, and the need to discourage individuals from breaking social distancing protocols. At a graduation, for example, it may be very difficult for students to avoid offering a congratulatory hug or high five. Pre/post-ceremony mingling may also prove challenging. Districts should consider limiting audience participation to a maximum of two or less guests per student – dependent upon the ability to practice safe social distancing. As well, event planners may want to discourage attendance of those with pre-existing medical conditions that increase risk of COVID-19. Ultimately, it will be the school district’s responsibility to manage and mitigate crowds accordingly and in compliance with all emergency orders.



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Vehicle-Based Events

An example where this might be possible would be to allow attendees and spectators to remain in their cars (windows down), parked in every other parking spot, with the master of ceremonies using amplification to conduct the program. The program may allow, for example, only graduates to exit vehicles in small groups – remaining socially distanced from other students – and appropriately dispersed to retrieve diplomas. Alternatively, graduates might be presented their diplomas in a “drive-up” style, with graduates never exiting their vehicle.

Another example might be to conduct a community parade through residential neighborhoods that allows families/graduates to parade in their cars with local residents able to stand in their yards to greet the graduates at a distance.

Events where spectators and participants remain in their vehicles do not implicate the Emergency Orders related to gatherings of ten or more peoples, as persons isolated in separate vehicles do not constitute a “gathering” within the meaning of the Orders.

Indoor Events

For events that do not involve participants and spectators remaining in their vehicles, a school could arrange a ceremony within a school building where participants and spectators are spread out among the classrooms such that there are fewer than 10 persons in any one room. The ceremony could be broadcast into the classroom and small groups of graduates could proceed to the gym/auditorium to obtain their diploma. It would be important to ensure there was not congregating of participants before or after the ceremony and especially during entry and exit of the building, which should be staggered in timing.

Outdoor Events

It may also be possible in certain circumstances to hold an outdoor event, with more than ten participants/spectators, such as an outdoor graduation (if wide social distancing is observed continuously, then the congregants may not constitute a “gathering” of ten or more persons under the Emergency Orders). As an example, this has been done successfully in other areas of the country, i.e., Air Force Academy graduation held on April 19, 2020. This is the most difficult event type to plan because it requires meticulous and continuous social distancing, not just of the event participants but also of the event guests.

Additional Considerations for all Physical Events

Event planning must not only consider the event itself, but the pre and post event circumstances to ensure that individuals are not gathering during these times. That may mean thinking about staggered entrance or exit times or ensuring there is a plan for individuals to disperse and not congregate at the conclusion of your program.



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In planning any event in which there will be participants or guests gathering physically, event planners are strongly encouraged to consider the following:

- **Screening:** Utilizing a screening mechanism for all those who will be attending. This could be a questionnaire to be completed ahead of time or a screening at the event itself. In some circumstances, temperature screening may be considered.
- **Masks:** Requiring that masks be worn by all event participants and/or spectators.
- **Social Distancing:** Requiring appropriate social distancing at all times.
- **Cleaning:** Implementing cleaning protocols for spaces/surfaces that will be repeatedly utilized during any ceremony or event and following the event.

These factors should be considered not only for the event itself, but for pre- and post- event time periods when the event participants are congregating and dispersing.

Finally, if an event is planned that will utilize in-person participation at any level, the Department encourages the school to alert local law enforcement and provide them the details of the event to ensure compliance with all Emergency Orders.

The Department encourages districts to be creative in planning student recognition and other events. If schools have ideas they would like to discuss with the Department, please contact Chris Bond at Christopher.Bond@doe.nh.gov.

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