



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.**

### **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.

### **What sort of modifications are necessary to be compliant with Emergency Order #16?**

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.** 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 type of event is the most difficult to plan because of the restrictions on group sizes (gatherings of 10 or fewer), 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. Ultimately, it will be the school district’s responsibility to manage and mitigate crowds accordingly and in compliance with all emergency orders.

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.



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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.

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 no more 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.

Even with these safety protocols, we would encourage appropriate risk mitigation protocols, including asking those symptomatic to remain home, discouraging gatherings before and after the organized – and controlled – program, etc.

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](mailto:Christopher.Bond@doe.nh.gov).