



May 20, 2020

Graduation Update

Dear Everett Public School seniors and families:

We hope this letter finds your family healthy and well. Many have been asking how graduation will be handled with Governor Inslee's "Stay Home, Stay Healthy" mandate. I know this is lengthy, but I felt it was important for you to understand the planning process and why we landed where we did. We appreciate the dozens of creative ideas shared as we have sought the best way to honor and celebrate the 13 years you have committed to your education. We have made a commitment as a district to do what is right for all students, and that means picking the best possible option and making the experience similar for all four of our high schools, while maintaining the key characteristics of each school at their ceremony.

In addition to the many ideas sent directly to schools and the district, on April 22 we held a focus group with seniors and parents of seniors to gather ideas and feedback on ways we should celebrate if a traditional graduation was not possible. We took those ideas and summarized them into the top five ideas and sent those out in a survey to all seniors and their parents/guardians. We had around 1,200 responses to that survey, and we appreciate the additional comments received and your engagement in the process.

The prioritized options were then discussed with a graduation committee, with representation from our four high schools and the district, to determine which options were going to be feasible while following city, county and state mandates.

One thing we heard loud and clear is students want something tangible, they want to walk across a stage, be handed a diploma, and do not want something 100% virtual. We worked within our given parameters to keep that as a last option.

Many students and parents hoped graduation could either happen as is or just be postponed until later in the summer. Due to the extension of the social distancing mandate through May 31, and the phased-in approach shared by the governor, no gathering as large as a graduation is feasible for many months to come and likely into the fall, when many seniors will have left for college. Unfortunately, this option was not viable to pursue.

The same reason also makes a graduation in Everett Memorial Stadium, with graduates standing six feet apart logistically unfeasible. Containing an entrance and exit of more than 400 students at a time with family members, in addition to unknown weather, does not make the stadium an option to pursue. The new graduation parameters also disallowed this option.

Another option was the drive-thru diploma pick up. It was moderately approved via the parent and student survey, but the committee had concerns about equity and safety. In addition, graduates would not be allowed to step out of their vehicles for photos, which took a lot of meaning out of this option.

That left the final two options, the hybrid option and the 100% virtual option. We proposed the hybrid model to the state and our plans were determined to be out of compliance, so we went back to the drawing board again. Our letter to the governor initiated a state-wide process to have the Department of Health give parameters for state graduations. These were announced May 14. We adjusted our virtual plans and resubmitted them to the city and the health department and on May 18 received approval for an event which we believe will be the best way to celebrate our graduates within today's current confines.

PROVIDED WE ARE IN PHASE 2 of the governor's phased reopening, we are able to film individual graduates walking across the graduation stage in their cap and gown at Civic Auditorium. If we are not in phase 2 by June 10 we will try and postpone filming for a week or two hoping phase 2 will start. If not, we will implement plan B, which is 100% virtual and involves collecting photos of seniors to splice into the final digital graduation. We will be collecting photos for school slide shows that could be used in this back-up option.

We have contracted with Jostens to help facilitate a graduation ceremony for each high school which will combine an in-person and virtual experience. You will receive more detailed information shortly from your school, but presuming Snohomish County will be in phase 2 and we can proceed, commencement filming will be June 10-13.

On those days, graduates will receive a designated (precise and ample) time to arrive at Civic Auditorium, will park in the back by the gym and stay in their car until their number is called. They will be in their caps and gowns with masks and will be socially distanced via markings on the sidewalks, with no more than 5 in line at a time.

One at a time, with no family accompanying them, they enter the auditorium where there will be a videographer, photographer and administrator (never more than 5 in the room total). They will take off their mask, get recorded walking across the stage and picking up their diploma off the table, walk off the stage and get their photo taken, re-mask and go directly to their car. Then, the next student enters and repeats the same process. There will be accommodations for students who do not have transportation and assurance there will be no group gatherings, extra masks and hand sanitizer will be provided and cleaning precautions will be in effect. The recording will be spliced together afterwards with prerecorded speeches to make a complete digital graduation celebration.

About one week after the recordings occur, there will be a YouTube premier of each high school graduation.

Again, more details will come from your school. I hope you feel like you have had a voice in this process as we have done our best to honor your ideas while respecting mandates to keep everyone safe and healthy. We know you deserve an amazing celebration and believe this can be that for you and your family.

We miss having you in school and hope you and your family are well and staying safe. Please take care of each other and yourself.

Dr. Ian Saltzman
Superintendent