



# Guiding the Education Community Through the COVID-19 Pandemic

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## Considerations for Graduation Ceremonies and Other End-of-Year School Events 2020-2021

While the COVID-19 pandemic continues to impact school district operations, the New Jersey Department of Education (Department) recognizes the importance of celebrating the accomplishments of students and educators. This guidance is intended to assist Local Educational Agencies (LEAs) in planning graduation ceremonies and other end-of-year events, such as proms and awards ceremonies, that adhere to current health and safety requirements. Event planning should continue to be informed by the latest public health data and the Department recommends that plans be developed in consultation with local law enforcement and local public health officials.

The following sections outline the current requirements and recommendations for end-of-year school events. LEAs should closely monitor the issuance of new Executive Orders that may affect planning for graduation ceremonies and other end-of-year events. For the most up-to-date gathering limitation information, please visit the NJ COVID-19 Information Hub FAQ "[How can people safely get together](#)".

LEAs are strongly encouraged to hold ceremonies outdoors due to potential difficulties in maintaining social distancing and other public health protocols in indoor settings. LEAs should also be mindful of the State's travel advisory in effect at the time of the event. For the most up-to-date information regarding travel, please visit the NJ COVID-19 Information Hub FAQ "[Are there travel restrictions to or from New Jersey?](#)"

Requirements and considerations for awards and graduation ceremonies:

- For in-person ceremonies, **LEAs must limit the number of attendees based on the rules for such events effective on the date of the ceremony.**

- All venues must follow the indoor/outdoor gathering limits in place at that time as established by [Executive Order](#). The most up-to-date indoor and outdoor gathering limits is provided at [covid19.nj.gov](https://www.covid19.nj.gov).
- When planning in-person ceremonies, LEAs should consider developing back-up plans and informing potential attendees that the ceremony may be adapted, pending evolving public health metrics.
- LEAs may elect to use a large venue with fixed seating capacity, as defined by Executive Order, to host their graduation ceremonies and other end-of-year events. Note that the capacity limit for such venues excludes faculty, staff, and graduates, but includes other members of the public. Graduates, faculty, and staff must abide by social distancing requirements.
- LEAs should continue **monitoring local and state health information**.
- LEAs are expected to **prioritize the health and safety** of students, staff, faculty, visitors, and other community members, including abiding by the most current Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidance.
  - This includes notifying and keeping local emergency management, law enforcement, first responders, local elected officials, and local health agencies informed of the institution's planned ceremonies.
- Chairs and other equipment should not be shared, must be sanitized before and after use, and must be spaced at least 6 feet apart.
- LEAs should **be proactive and clear in communicating** event guidelines to those planning to attend. Information could be displayed on digital screens or distributed via e-mail in advance of the ceremony, for example.
- LEAs may want to consider holding smaller ceremonies throughout the day or over the span of several days to limit crowds, allowing for cleaning in between ceremonies, and allowing the attendees to leave the venue before the next group arrives. This could include, for example, dividing a large graduating class and conducting separate graduation ceremonies, etc.
  - In-person ceremonies will require monitoring of the number of people in attendance. Organizers should consider distributing tickets to students and families in advance of the ceremony or consider digital options and contactless scanners.
- Individuals who are sick should be discouraged from attending – see [CDC guidelines](#) for what individuals should do if they are sick and to see a list of possible COVID-19 symptoms. Prospective attendees should be advised to consider current guidelines from the NJDOH and CDC regarding high-risk categories and necessary precautions.
- All guests, graduates, staff, and participants are required to wear face masks, except when doing so would inhibit the individual's health or within other limited exceptions details in [EO 163](#) or any other Executive Order, as applicable.
- Institutions should provide approved sanitization materials for employees, students, and visitors.

## Requirements and Considerations for Proms

- For private catered events such as proms, **LEAs must limit the number of attendees based on the rules for such events effective on the date of the ceremony**.
  - These events must also adhere to the indoor and/or outdoor dining protocols.

## General Health and Safety Guidelines

LEAs must prioritize the health and safety of students, staff, and other community members, which involves notifying and keeping local emergency management, law enforcement, first responders, local elected officials, and local health agencies informed of the planned events. LEAs should confer with local health officials to determine the applicability of any other rules or restrictions in addition to those outlined above that might be necessary to ensure the public's health. Additionally, LEAs should ensure that ceremonies are inclusive and accessible for *all* students and families. Consider making livestreams available for those individuals who are excluded from the event and consider equity issues which may impact participation.

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