

Outdoor high school graduations in Massachusetts possible in July

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State House News Service

New state guidance allows for high schools to hold in-person, outdoor graduation ceremonies starting July 19, with certain safety precautions in place and as long as public health data around COVID-19 allows the state to continue along its reopening plan.

Graduation ceremonies held between now and July 18 are to “be held virtually or in extremely limited other circumstances following safety protocols (e.g., car parades),” according to the guidelines. Schools have been physically closed since March and will remain so throughout the rest of the school year, which has resulted in cancellation or postponement of many events associated with high school graduations.

The minimum standards for in-person graduations later in the summer include limiting attendance to graduates and their immediate family members, with pre-registration required, and prohibiting hugging or hand-shaking during a ceremony that “should be kept as brief as possible.” Venues must be cleaned prior to the ceremony, which can only be held in an unconfined outdoor space. All attendees would be required to wear masks, except for children under the age of 2 and people with medical conditions, though speakers could remove their masks during their remarks.

Gov. Charlie Baker’s office on Friday announced plans for a June 9 virtual high school commencement ceremony that will feature remarks from Baker, members of the New England Patriots, Boston Red Sox and Celtics, actor Steve Carell and

others, plus a Boston Pops Orchestra performance. In a message to school and district leaders, Elementary and Secondary Education Commissioner Jeff Riley also highlighted additional ways to celebrate the class of 2020, including a rotating display of photos on his department's website.

"As graduation time approaches, please encourage your high school community, particularly teachers, to share highlights about the graduating class on social media with the hashtag #ThatsMyStudentMA and tag the DESE account at @MASchoolsK12 on Twitter or @MassachusettsDESE on Facebook," Riley wrote.