

HUNTINGDON AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT

Administrative Offices



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To: Senior Learners, Parents, and Guardians
From: Mr. Fred Foster, Superintendent
Re: **Class of 2020 Commencement Ceremony Updates**
Date: May 29, 2020

Dear Seniors, Parents, and Guardians,

First, let me begin by stating how we sympathize for all of our seniors and their families during this challenging time. All are experiencing different reactions on how we handle this pandemic, and we hope that the commencement event will provide a positive experience to recognize and honor our seniors. Our hearts are broken for all the seniors, as they have been since March 13, when those competing for state titles had the opportunity taken away, those preparing for the musical and end of year trips had those taken away, and how events/sports were cancelled in the Spring. It is heartbreaking, but in such times, we stay together and we find an inner strength to persevere.

My second and main purpose of this letter is to try to clarify a few questions/comments that have come up within the past weeks. First, why can we not use War Vets field for the ceremony? Second, why did we change from the survey and options provided to us before, to a "Drive-In" model ceremony?

Why can we not use War Vets field for the ceremony?

Per the guidance provided by Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE), the Department of Health (DOH) and Center for Disease Control (CDC). As I write this, we are currently in Red, that disqualifies anything we wanted to accomplish with graduation. That is where we started when we sent out the survey. Huntingdon County is going to Yellow. We can not have social gatherings over 25. Being in a car is as close to being as isolated as we can be, we discussed this with local EMA and law enforcement, as recommended by our solicitor, and they were on board with our "Drive-In" model related to meeting the guidelines. Even if we went to Green, one item of guidance, social gatherings increases to 250. That would still not allow us to War Vets Field in a traditional, or as close to a traditional model, as possible.

We are opening War Vets Field to allow pictures, in groups of no more than 25, with the understanding that social distancing must be followed and masks must be worn for the safety and welfare of all.

Why did we change from the survey and options provided to us before, to a "Drive-In" model ceremony?

Similar to above, the phases of Red/Yellow/Green have evolved and we now know that every 14 days is the measuring stick to ease restrictions. When we first presented the "virtual ceremony," it was not well-received by some folks, but after assessing and surveying, recognizing that there still may be an option for a more traditional ceremony later during the summer months, virtual was then accepted as an option to consider. We continued to monitor and analyze how to have as close to a traditional ceremony for our Seniors as possible. In our hearts and minds, after discussing with other schools and input from our solicitor, we felt the "Drive-In" model was an enhanced option over the "virtual" option.

What I have gathered and assessed that contributed to the problem, was we did not clearly communicate on the July and August dates. Were they just thrown out? Was this now our only graduation? Our communication to you all did not state clearly whether we were going to continue with those dates or not. For that, we again apologize. From our perspective, we did not want to eliminate those dates, we wanted to still assess and consider them. However, the further we get into exploring what "reopening" of schools will look like in the fall, and getting better (weekly, daily) updates from PDE/DOH/CDC as to what we can and can not do in each phase (Red/Yellow/Green), the less likely it becomes that we can actually do a traditional style graduation during those months. We did not throw in the towel, and we did not change to a Drive-In model solely to eliminate July and August as options. We plan to assess how June 4th goes and proceed from there. Quite frankly, we just don't know what may change or not change for July and August, so what we can control is what our options are as of today. As of today, the model that allows for you all to be together, actually hear the speakers at graduation in person and not just on a recording, walk across the stage, receive your diploma... Is the drive-in model. Downside, you have to be in a car. I can find many positives about being in a car, versus being outside on a hot humid day, but I'll leave that alone. I also showed my age in one conversation with a parent of attending the drive-in movies as a kid, in Huntingdon, that particular parent had never been to a drive-in, thus my age hit me.

Is any of this ideal? No. Do we want this for our seniors? No.

We do feel this is the best we can offer at this time. If that got interpreted that we lied to you all, or we did not listen to you, then for that, we are sorry.

We do love, honor, and cherish each senior. We want them to be proud and recognized for this first milestone in their young lives.

Respectfully,



Fred Foster,
Superintendent