

Dear Parents and Seniors,

We were working on a new option for graduation that meets Mesa County Public Health guidelines and are receiving lots of negative feedback about the drive-thru option we are currently considering. As we can see by the flood of email we have received, both students and parents are not excited by this option. We will certainly continue our examination of options and wait until the original June 22 date to make any decisions, and announce it at that time, as originally planned.

Please accept my sincere apology for you hearing what we are exploring for our graduation ceremonies from the Daily Sentinel. The Health Department had asked us to report on what we were working on with regards to graduation and we talked about the plan. We did not know information would be released in the media Wednesday and had planned to send this out this morning. I am attaching the [guidelines from Mesa County Public Health](#), and you will be able to see that **none of the first options we had previously considered fit these requirements.**

I am extremely sorry for my comment that this had nothing to do with a student receiving a burger. When I was describing a drive-thru style graduation earlier in the day, someone had asked if it was similar to something like McDonald's. I simply wanted to make sure they understood it was much more complex than that.

With a drive-thru style graduation, students have the chance to see some of their classmates graduate, which many had said was very important to them. At the same time, families getting to see their child accept their diploma right in front of them seemed like something people would appreciate. Many found my comment very insensitive. I would certainly never want to offend our students or our families. I love graduation and fully recognize how important it is in a student's life as the culmination of their K-12 education. We want to make sure it feels as traditional as possible and have planned several things, such as playing "Pomp and Circumstance" with each new group, to reinforce that concept.

I had shared with you two of the options we were considering, which included the Air Force Academy-style ceremony where only students, principals, and members of the D51 Board of Education could participate in an in-person ceremony; and a traditional style with a limited audience. We had even considered a third option of a drive-in-style graduation. **None of these met the [guidelines](#) set by the Mesa County Public Health and local law enforcement.**

We looked across the state and found some districts doing a drive-thru-style ceremony. We discussed having the students and their families enter their own school parking lot on one side, in assigned groups of 10-12, and then coming to a central point in front of the school, where their principal, a D51 Board of Education member, and myself would greet them. The principal would then say the student's name and certify that the student has met all requirements. They

would then be formally accepted as a graduate by the Board of Education member. We all congratulate them by name. Students would take their diploma folio off of a table, as the current county requirements do not allow us to give them anything or shake their hand.

We plan to livestream and record the ceremony to create a graduation video for each school that includes special speeches. A professional photographer will be present to take a picture of the student holding his or her folio, along with the principal. The video and professional photo will be provided at no cost to families.

We know that these options are a far cry from a traditional ceremony, but we also know that some districts have simply cancelled all ceremonies and are mailing diplomas to students. We felt that receiving a personal congratulations from a board member and their principal and receiving the picture and video was better than a virtual graduation, or no graduation at all. Students will be on stage for a similar amount of time as they would be in a traditional ceremony, while family in their car and the virtual audience witness this momentous occasion in their lives and cheer them on. Students will have a mask in their school colors, generously provided by the D51 Foundation, with their school's logo on it. Masks can be removed for the professional photograph.

It is important to understand the constraints we have to follow to do **any** ceremony with our students at this time. We had moved the ceremony to August, then moved it up to July, as we thought that we may be able to do a traditional ceremony at that time. We hoped and still hope that by then we could have students in larger groups and not be constrained by the current requirements of the Mesa County plan for groups of ten, which includes both staff and students, who can be part of the small ceremony.

With the drive-thru option, students will be able to see at least 10-12 or more of their classmates as they are proceeding with their families in their cars. We are not trying to shorten the ceremony. Rather, we are trying to be sensitive to the families who are watching and waiting in their cars during a time of the year that will be warm, as some of our graduating classes are near 400 students. Law enforcement would be present at a drive-thru option, helping direct traffic.

We are doing all we can to emulate aspects of a traditional ceremony, while also meeting guidelines set by Mesa County Public Health and local law enforcement. Keeping our students and community safe and healthy is our top priority. We sent a survey out to students last month to ask them what a ceremony should have and have used that information as much as possible when planning our ceremonies. Many did suggest a drive-through or parade-style graduation if a more traditional ceremony was not possible.

This year's graduates have lost a lot. I have been encouraged to see our community rally around graduates to help them feel honored and recognized during this time. Schools have provided yard signs, and many are working on slideshows or video montages to highlight seniors. Community members have "adopted" a senior, and many local businesses are offering their support in various ways.

We want to honor our students and never want to send the impression that we would want a ceremony to accomplish anything else or take short cuts. We will do all we can, knowing there may be limitations that are out of our control. Please contact me if you have any questions.

Sincerely,
Diana Sirko

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