



## BLACK HORSE PIKE REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

### FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQ) REGARDING END OF SCHOOL YEAR EVENTS

UPDATED MAY 14, 2020

We understand that there have been a lot of questions surrounding senior class celebrations and events, including Graduation exercises. We understand the emotion attached to not being able to see a child walk across the graduation stage as expected at the end of the formal years of schooling. It is disappointing and frustrating.

Our first priority is safety. Safety of students, staff, and the community as a whole. As an organization with tens of thousands of stakeholders, in line with the call for closing schools in the first place was the health data that showed young people could be asymptomatic and still be hosts of the virus, thus infecting those that are more vulnerable, like our staff members, family members, and other community members. Epidemiologists are predicting with great certainty a return of the virus in the Fall, so we have many staff members who have expressed their own anxieties about returning or being around young people, particularly in a large gathering.

This document is intended to update the community relative to many of the questions that we have heard over the past couple of weeks in an attempt to explain our thought process and detail the restrictions placed upon schools.

1. **Are schools closed to the public under the Governor's Executive Order?**
  - a. Yes, as per Governor Murphy's Executive Order, schools are to remain closed to the public. Student participation in schools and access to schools is not considered essential. Additional guidance of the [Administrative Order can be found here](#).
2. **Can seniors have a graduation on the field with no spectators?**
  - a. Currently, under the Executive Order, enforced by local police and the Camden County Prosecutor's Office, gathering of ten (10) or more people in any one location, at any one time, not deemed essential, is prohibited. Please see the [May 9, 2020 Directive from the Office of the NJ Attorney General](#).
3. **Can seniors show up at the school and sign yearbooks?**

- a. See 2a. Currently, it is not permissible.
- 4. Can seniors drive through the parking lot while the staff is present to acknowledge them? Can staff organize a parade for graduates?**
- a. See 2a. Currently, as of May 9, 2020, parades, where large groups of people gather, are not permissible. However, the Colonel of the State Police later clarified his statement, and staff driving past individual homes is permissible.
  - b. Dr. Repici will continue to plan the graduation parades with police departments just in case by that time, large parades are permissible.
- 5. Why do I see other States having graduations where seniors are separated by 6 feet?**
- a. That is true, but other states have different restrictions based on the infection rates and determinations made by those state's health officials. In New Jersey, the Governor has made the determination based on the data he obtains from State Health Officials. Please see the [May 8, 2020 directive from the New Jersey Department of Education](#).
- 6. Why can't seniors have a Senior Prom?**
- a. Again, according to the May 9, 2020 directive from the New Jersey Office of the Attorney General, a prom would be considered a large gathering and prohibited. Please see the [May 9, 2020 Directive from the Office of the NJ Attorney General](#).
  - b. Here are some other considerations.
    - i. The current restrictions and closure of event halls prohibit such an event.
    - ii. In addition, a senior prom would violate social distancing guidelines as well. After all, it is a formal dance.
    - iii. Holding a prom anytime after the students are no longer our students creates a whole set of legal concerns that I have consulted about at length with Mr. Long, such as:
    - iv. The District has zero legal authority over adult, former students.
    - v. In the event that someone gets hurt, shows up under the influence, or gets into a fight or worse, we bare a significant liability, as we assume the legal risk of hosting the event, while simultaneously no longer possessing the legal authority we previously had over the same students.
    - vi. Our policy permits us to use a breathalyzer to admit students into a school-sponsored student event. In this case, this policy would no longer apply and could constitute an unreasonable search and seizure, creating additional liability.
    - vii. If a staff member or former student is there and gets infected and/or spreads the virus to others, the District faces tremendous liability, that will in all likelihood result in disclaimed coverage by our liability insurance carrier due to the egregious risk taken on by the District.

- viii. We have to consider the feelings and rights of our staff. Contractually, we have no authority to mandate that any staff work this event in the summer, or after the students graduate. This includes staff to monitor the event and sell the tickets. There are also logistical concerns such as whether a 30 year old comes as an 18 year old's date. As the student policies no longer apply, we would have less control over who attends. It is also our belief that the NJEA and NJPSA would advise their members not to participate in this event due to liability and safety concerns. Just because legal restrictions may be lifted does not mean our staff will not be impacted and want to avoid a gathering like this.

**7. What if the restrictions are lifted by June 1 or some other future date?**

- a. We are committed to celebrating seniors. If restrictions are softened or lifted, we will re-visit and alter our plans accordingly.

**8. What are other school districts doing?**

- a. All New Jersey School Districts are receiving the same information from the Governor, Attorney General, and Department of Education as the public at this point. There is no specific guidance or future predictions that would allow us to plan any differently. There is no specific guidance or indication that the State will alter restrictions in the next 5, 10, 30, or 100 days from now.

**9. What are the health risks of having students gather?**

- The virus is thought to spread mainly from person-to-person.
- Between people who are in close contact with one another (within about 6 feet).
- Through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs, sneezes or talks.
- These droplets can land in the mouths or noses of people who are nearby or possibly be inhaled into the lungs.
- Recent studies have suggested that COVID-19 may be spread by people who are not showing symptoms.

**10. Only 2 people will be permitted to be present with the graduate at the taping of the virtual graduation?**

See 2A. We have calculated exactly how many graduates we can film per hour in order to complete the taping in 6 days and have time to edit and produce the film to be able to present it on June 16th. In addition to the graduates, we will have the principal, vice-principal, videographer, and photographer in the room. Given the risks of infection and the current Executive Orders, we would be placing our staff in greater harm by allowing more than the three additional people in the auditorium at the time of the taping. Each graduate can invite two additional people into the auditorium with them during our filming of the virtual graduation. We believe loved ones can celebrate, comfort, and share in the joy of the moment by being present for the graduate..

We will also establish a covered, decorated outdoor location, where graduates and their families can take pictures while the students have their cap and gown. This outside area will be available to families between June 1 and June 15.