

May 15, 2020 - Senior update: Graduation, Caps and Gowns and more

Spring Lake Park High School Seniors and Families:

You are on our minds every day, seniors. While the spring has presented a series of challenges to all of our students and families, for our seniors, it has been especially hard. As you miss those senior year traditions, we feel the losses and disappointments with you. We are committed to doing what we can to honor your important milestones in this unusual environment.

You may be aware that last week the Minnesota Department of Education and the Minnesota Department of Health issued [Minnesota Graduation Ceremony Guidance](#). Among many key points, the guidelines are clear in prohibiting in-person graduation events – outside or inside – at this time. They also advise that the safest way to observe graduation is virtually.

We know how disappointing this is for many of you. We also know that many of our students have been thinking about this. We took the time to meet with and listen to some senior students this week about our current situation. We wanted to understand what's important to them and hear their feedback on some ideas as we all work to be flexible during this global pandemic.

With their insights and input, we are working to create as meaningful an experience as we can for the senior class. Clearly, keeping hold of an opportunity to gather in person is very important. It's also clear that we don't know what the future will bring, and none of us want to miss an opportunity to honor and recognize our graduating seniors.

With these things in mind, we are evolving our plans for graduation. Here are some highlights:

- **In-person graduation event – August 1 (holding this date):** We remain hopeful, along with many of you, that we will be able to gather in Panther Stadium on August 1 and share those special SLP graduation moments you don't want to miss - processional, cap toss. We heard a desire to be able to "walk the halls one last time" and we'd look to incorporate that into this time. This plan will continue, of course, to be subject to changing conditions in our state. And, we heard you, we are continuing to hold this date for a gathering.
- **Virtual graduation ceremony – June 5, premiering at 7 p.m.:** Regardless of what we are able to do on August 1, we heard from many students and families that it is important to honor and recognize each senior graduating this year. Doing something on or near the original graduation date was preferable to waiting and seeing what August brings.

We are joining most other Minnesota schools in producing a virtual graduation event. While this won't replace our ceremony, the video will recreate many elements of it. It will include visual and audio recognition of each individual graduate, student speakers and messages to the class. Some of you may have even started to hear from advisors today, as they prepare to introduce each of you!

The ceremony will be broadcast live on YouTube at 7 p.m. on Friday, June 5 and will be available to be re-watched at your convenience online. We will provide more details in the coming weeks but ask that you mark your calendar and plan to watch and engage on June 5.

- **Graduation photos at school:** We know getting the perfect graduation photo is an important part of the graduation experience. Given the loosening of certain social distancing restrictions, we're working on a plan now that would provide families with an opportunity to schedule a time to come to the high school and for students to receive their diploma and take photos in their caps and gowns in our Panther home. We will have more details soon.
- **Caps and Gowns**—We've altered our caps and gowns order – at no additional cost to families - to provide “keepsake gowns.” This means students will be able to keep their caps and gowns rather than return them as originally planned. This provides flexibility for an in-person graduation event later this summer. We are expecting caps and gowns to arrive the first week in June (as they normally would) with specific dates still to be determined. We are working to coordinate a date for you to pick them up as you also drop off your iPad. More details to come.
- **Senior Awards and Scholarships**—We are taking care to make sure senior awards and scholarships are announced and distributed to recipients as safely as possible. This, too, will have an online as well award delivery component. Right now, we are planning for the presentation to be available after noon on Wednesday, May 27. We will have more specifics next week.
- **Yearbooks**— Our yearbook production facility was closed down due to COVID-19. As a result, yearbooks will not be delivered until mid- to late-June. As soon as we have a more solid date for their arrival, we will be creating plans for getting these books to you.

We are proud of your accomplishments, seniors, and the patience and resilience you are showing this spring. You will certainly never forget this time, and it is our hope that you are continuing to discover your strengths and will look back on this with an appreciation for how you persevered through this historic moment. We will share another update – and more details - with you next week. In the meantime, we miss you and send our best wishes.

Matthew Boucher
Principal