

## What is a Baccalaureate Ceremony?

A baccalaureate ceremony generally refers to a non-denominational service held a few days before high school or college graduation. These ceremonies are meant to be a more intimate time of reflection prior to the larger, louder rite of passage that is commencement. Deliberately non-denominational, the goal of this event is to honor graduates and help them find spiritual meaning in their time of transition and as they prepare for their next phase of life.

Most speakers selected to speak at the baccalaureate are community leaders, local religious leaders, faculty members, or students who offer wisdom to the graduating class. Though more serious in tone than commencement, speeches are usually intermixed with musical performances, dance, and spiritual readings. While commencement is still the main event, baccalaureates offer parents and students a more meaningful experience.

## Why do High Schools Have a Baccalaureate?

The baccalaureate as a ceremony has a long history, with roots in a 15th-century Oxford University practice where students were required to give a sermon at their graduation. Though public high schools are increasingly separating themselves from religious events, the value of a spiritually-aware ceremony remains relevant. As such, the baccalaureate still has three valuable functions:

1. **Marking the end of students' academic careers**  
Graduation is a significant milestone for most students. The baccalaureate is an opportunity for the community to show students support while also celebrating their intellectual and spiritual development.
2. **Giving students the courage to move on**  
A baccalaureate ceremony is significant for students who may feel frightened about the future, as it challenges them to think about their future holistically and with joy.
3. **Offering a blessing**  
Baccalaureates are an opportunity to bless graduates as they move to their next phase of life—celebrating who they have been while reminding them of the support surrounding them as they move into the future.

## What Do You Wear to a Baccalaureate Service?

Dress as you usually would for a religious service for a special occasion. Like graduation and other milestone events, the baccalaureate ceremony is a great photo opportunity for families. So, dress for photos, but be comfortable. The formal caps and gowns are not worn at a baccalaureate service.

For more information about Tigard High's Baccalaureate service, please contact:  
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