

Hello SOMSD Family,

I hope this correspondence finds you and your loved ones well. As we approach the end of the school year, and in light of the Governor's updates over the past couple of weeks, we want to clarify our current position and provide some rationale regarding the graduation process and plans for our District.

We are specifically focusing on Columbia High School, and will address other students in our district who are being promoted from a 'milestone grade.' Over the last month, Governor Murphy has released information and guidance to districts regarding outdoor graduations after July 6th and in subsequent communications has shared the regulations that districts will have to comply with in order to hold graduations. We have reviewed these guidelines and the links are shared below.

I understand that we all yearn for a return to what we view as normalcy, including our much-anticipated rites of passage and culminating activities. However, I am confirming in this communication the following: **Our [virtual graduation and promotional activities](#) will be moving forward as our official ceremonies for the 2019-2020 school year.** The health and safety of our students and staff continue to remain our highest priority. It is a sobering fact that as of last Thursday, 6/4, 12 positive COVID-19 cases were confirmed at the countywide testing site in Maplewood.

With that being said, our Maplewood Health Officer, CHS Leadership Team and I will be having discussions with the CHS Class of 2020 student representatives and the CHS Home School Association (HSA) to talk about what is creatively possible in terms of celebrating this very deserving group. Of course, per the Governor's Executive Order, this (or these) event(s) would occur after July 6th, acknowledging the many obvious variables and limitations (i.e., lack of staff during the summer, gathering capacity limitations, social distancing, etc.,).

Lastly, this planning will be limited to the Columbia High School Class of 2020. We celebrate and appreciate all students who are preparing for a transition to a new school, however, we do not have the capacity to take on this planning for all district culminating activities. The final caveat is that this planning is fluid and could be impacted by changes in COVID-19 data, or Governor's decree.

Governor's Office and New Jersey Department of Education Communications:

- [COVID-19: Alternatives to Traditional Commencement Ceremonies \(5/28\)](#)
- [NJDOE COVID-19 Update: New Jersey Commencement Ceremonies](#)

Educationally yours,



Dr. Ronald G. Taylor