

Elizabeth School District Commencement Proposal

Proposed Plan For: Elizabeth High School

Proposed Date: Saturday, June 6, 2020

Proposed Time: 9:30 am

Proposed Location: Elizabeth High School Main Athletic Stadium/Field

Rain Date: Saturday, June 13, 2020

We respectfully submit the following proposal to hold modified, in-person, commencement exercises for Elizabeth High School (EHS) graduating seniors.

We appreciate your consideration of this opportunity to allow students, families, and the wider community to celebrate the accomplishments of the 150 graduates of the EHS Class of 2020 in a medically sound way that seeks to limit the uncontrolled spread of the COVID-19 virus.

We present this plan with the understanding that it will be evaluated for approval by Elbert County Public Health and agree follow the guidance established by Elbert County Public Health

Elizabeth High School would host an outside commencement ceremony for students only, with minimal staff facilitating, on Saturday, June 6, 9:30 a.m., at Elizabeth High School Athletic Stadium/Field.

No spectators or other observers will be allowed on the school property, except individuals in cars during the periods of drop off and pick up. In addition to graduates, a limited number of school district staff and partners (for example, police/emergency responders, American Legion, professional photographer) will participate in management of entrance and exit to the site, conducting the ceremony and keeping the site safe.

Any student or staff member at high-risk for severe illness from COVID-19 will be excluded from the event (for example, people 65 or older, people with chronic lung disease or moderate to severe asthma, who have serious heart conditions, who are immunocompromised, who have diabetes, chronic kidney disease or liver disease).

The ceremony will be broadcast live via the district YouTube channel.

The school is willing to revise this proposal for greater clarity or enhanced health safety, as mutually agreed upon between the school district and public health.

Commencement Ceremony Process/Plan

- 1) All access doors to the school building will be closed and locked, except the main entrance to Elizabeth High School. School staff and local law enforcement will greet all vehicles entering campus through the main (south) entrance. All students are expected to arrive by driving their own vehicles or by being dropped off by a parent or adult driver. The athletic field has a fence around the entire perimeter facilitating access control to location of the ceremony.
- 2) Students who drive their own vehicles will be directed by school staff to park in assigned parking spots in the student parking lots, maintaining one parking space between each automobile. A map of the location of every student's assigned parking spot will assist local public health in contact tracing, if needed after the event. Staggering of student dismissal from their vehicles will eliminate student gathering as they are directed down into the stadium.
- 3) Drivers transporting students to the ceremony will be directed to drop their student off in a designated spot at the opening of the athletic parking lot. Students will be directed to the stadium. Drivers will be directed to leave the parking lot at the north entrance.
- 4) All students and staff will be expected to maintain a minimum of 6-foot social distancing at all times, including entering and exiting the ceremony.
- 5) Upon entering the stadium, students will be directed to continue appropriate social distancing and will be guided to their chairs on the football field. Student names, diploma covers and sashes will be placed on each student seat.
- 6) All seating will be spaced in a minimum of a 9' by 9' grids to enhance social distancing for those that are seated to allow for movement to and from the seats. The Athletic Field can accommodate 680 people using the 9-foot grid. At approximately 150 graduates, less than 25% of the field would be utilized for graduate seating (+/- 9 rows of 18 seats), leaving plenty of remaining space for staff seating and a stage/podium with microphone.
- 7) Students will be directed to be in their seats by 9:25. This will give administrators 5 minutes to provide verbal details regarding the process of the ceremony. This will be in addition written instructions already provided.
- 8) A stage will be set to face the graduates approximately 20 feet away from the front row of students. Ceremony officials (school and district officials) will be seated on the stage at least 6 feet apart and away from the podium. Staff will be seated in chairs next to the stage, at least 9 feet apart. Student speakers will remain seated until directed to come to the stage to speak.
- 9) Graduates will be asked to stand up at their seats, be recognized for accomplishments such as academic honors, scholarships, enlistment in the armed services, honor societies, etc. and then sit down.
- 10) Each row will be directed to stand and proceed toward the stage at the appropriate time. Flags will mark the 6-foot distance each graduate must maintain while moving to and from the stage.

- 11) All graduate's names will be announced and recognized, regardless of participation in the live event.
- 12) A photo station will be set up next to the stage. When students are called to come across in front of the stage they will remove their mask for the photo opportunity and then replace it after the photo is taken. The professional photographer will capture students posing in their cap and gown and displaying their diploma cover. The student will then return to their chair.
- 13) Following the students crossing the stage and returning to their seats, they will be asked to stay seated at the conclusion of the ceremony so each row can be excused and directed back to the main parking lot in an orderly fashion to ensure social distancing.
- 14) No associated social gatherings of students or faculty will occur at the stadium prior to or following the ceremony. The event will be no a no-touch, no contact event. There will be no handshakes, hugs, document exchanges, doors to open/close, etc.
- 15) Designated staff will leave the site of the ceremony first and station themselves in predetermined locations along the route from the field back to the parking lot in order to assist with an orderly exit that complies with the social distancing requirements.
- 16) At the end of the event, students will be asked to stay seated at the conclusion of the official ceremony so that each row can be excused (usher style) in an orderly fashion and directed back through the main stadium gate and into parking area.
- 17) Students will not be allowed to gather on-site after the ceremony. They will be asked to return to their cars and leave the school property.

General Requirements/Procedures

- 1) All students and staff will be required to wear face mask coverings over the nose and mouth at all times, with the following limited exceptions:
 - a. While individual photographs are being taken by an official photographer
 - b. While graduates or staff are speaking at the podium
- 2) The event will have at least one stationary video camera, and potentially a drone video camera and a roving videographer. The drone would not fly above participants and a roving videographer would maintain at least 6 feet distancing from all participants.
- 3) A permission slip/behavior contract will be signed by each participating student and family addressing risk mitigation. This form includes a health screening survey that will be completed the day of the ceremony and prior to entry. The health screening survey includes questions about fever, cough, congestion, chills, or other symptoms exhibited by the student or others in the household in the previous 14 days. Students and staff may be required to have their temperature taken with a touchless thermometer. Any positive answers will result in exclusion of the student from participation in the ceremony. The contract would include a requirement for all participants (students and staff) to report COVID-19 symptoms experienced within 14 days after the event to Elbert County Public Health

- 4) Assistance will be provided for students with special needs who wish to participate, including location of seating and help with entry and egress. The site is wheelchair accessible.
- 5) EHS will provide an alternative option in the event COVID-19 data contraindicates hosting in-person ceremonies.
- 6) EHS will hold the ceremony a week later in the event of adverse weather.

Basis for Proposed Plan

- 1) We believe the proposed plan provides a high level of confidence the event will avoid contributing to the spread of the COVID-19 virus among the participants, and in the community. This is based on the following claims and principles:
- 2) A high school graduation ceremony is a one-time event rather than an ongoing operation and it is limited in duration to approximately 60 minutes.
- 3) The majority of participants in this event, if held as proposed herein, are individuals at low risk of contracting or suffering serious effects from COVID-19 (the case rate for 10 to 19-year-olds in Colorado is approximately 0.2%). More than 80% of the participants will be under the age of 19.
- 4) The current testing, emergency response, and healthcare system capacity are believed to be more than adequate to accommodate any possible increase in COVID-19 cases that could result from this event.
- 5) The El Paso County Public Health Guidelines for Planning Graduation Ceremonies During the COVID-19 Pandemic were recently approved by the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment and the Governor of the State of Colorado. Elbert County has a slightly lower COVID-19 case rate than El Paso County, the Elizabeth area is significantly less densely populated than Colorado Springs metro area where the vast majority of schools are located, and the size of the graduating class for EHS is significantly smaller than high schools in Colorado Springs (for example, Academy 20, District 49 - Falcon, Colorado Springs District 11, Harrison, etc.) which typically have two to three times more graduates than EHS.
- 6) There have been no outbreaks in Elbert County (versus 10 outbreaks in El Paso County – see attachment from CDPHE).
- 7) This event avoids the kind of environments and situations where outbreaks have occurred – enclosed environments, longer periods of time, poor air circulation, and a high density of people (for example: meat packing plants, call centers, indoor sporting events, public transportation, assisted living/skilled nursing facilities).
- 8) The overall trend in the state of Colorado is a loosening of social distancing policies based on sustained decreases in the number of COVID-19 cases, hospitalizations and deaths.
- 9) Every aspect of the ceremony will be conducted outside, significantly reducing the chance of COVID-19 spread.

- 10) Unknown people will not be attending the ceremony. All participants will be known individuals with direct connection to the school or a local public agency (for example, Elizabeth Police Department). This creates a very high expectation for compliance with established and agreed upon regulations and, in the case of infection after the event, the ability to easily conduct contact tracing. For over a decade, EHS graduates have been very cooperative and highly respectful of norms/expectations during commencement exercises. The school does not have a history of pranks and non-compliance during commencement exercises.
- 11) Ample parking, entrance and field space allow for easy social distancing.
- 12) The timing of the event is important. Students want to enter the next phase of their lives, college, work or the military. The longer the event is delayed into the summer, more students will be unable to attend the ceremony. Additionally, the case rate is more predictable in early June (trends high a higher confidence level in the near term) than late June or July.
- 13) Face masks will be provided by the school, eliminating the possibility of non-compliance due to lack of masks.
- 14) The proposal addresses students with special needs or who may require assistance.

The board, staff, students and parents of Elizabeth Schools thank you for your consideration.