



# Class of 2020 having graduation at a distance

## Virtual ceremonies, drive-through events, lawn signs are signs of the times

By Jane Muller

The Class of 2020 will be celebrating graduation without the traditional gatherings that mark the milestone in their education.

Schools have been closed since mid-March and on-line teaching and distance learning have replaced time spent in the classroom. Graduation ceremonies are being recorded or live-streamed and students will be watching from home along with their family.

Graduating students at many of Halton's Catholic and public schools have received lawn signs that indicate there's a grad in the house. Grad packages have been distributed, providing items like keepsakes, t-shirts and grad gowns and caps. Class of 2020 composite photos are available now for students at some schools while others will be picking them up or having them delivered in September.

While virtual graduation/commencements featuring a valedictorian address, messages from school and board staff, student performances and individual student recognition, each is as individual as the school it represents. This uniqueness extends to other year-end celebrations that are taking place in school parking lots and on the front lawns and driveways of students' homes.

Staff members have been contacting families to arrange drop-off and pick-up times for packages, dealing with the logistics of distributing in some cases, hundreds of lawn signs. The delivery is often an event in itself, an opportunity for teachers and students to see each other from a distance and a chance for a photo of students with their signs.



Milton's Bishop Reding Catholic Secondary School parking lot was the scene of the big launch for Grade 12 grad celebrations. - Photo courtesy Bishop Reding

Drive-through events are also popular in this era of physical distancing. School parking lots are lined with staff holding signs with messages of encouragement and congratulations. School mascots show up, possibly a DJ and always the majority of graduating students take advantage of the invitation to visit the school albeit from inside a vehicle.

High schools that are providing "grad boxes" filled with swag are making a party out of their distribution. Students arrive at designated times throughout the day and have time for a photo, dressed in their cap and gown, in a staged area that features the school as a backdrop. Staff is there to welcome and cheer them from a distance and music includes the traditional grad proces-

sional "Pomp and Circumstance".

It's not the same as walking across the stage in front of an audience but some are hopeful that large group gatherings might be allowed in the fall. In the meantime, graduates will be honoured with virtual and distanced celebrations.

Students and schools are fully engaged in social media to celebrate the Class of 2020. Several schools are featuring grad photos of staff for the students to identify. There are trivia contests, student performances and tributes aimed at building momentum and excitement as the virtual grad approaches.

Yearbooks are generally going to be handed out in the fall but some schools are making virtual yearbooks available now to be followed by hard copies in the fall. Some schools have their award plaques available but others didn't get delivery in time due to production affected by COVID-19 and will pass them along to students in the fall.

There is disappointment that this year's graduates won't be taking part in a traditional ceremony this June. School staff has needed to reinvent the festivities. Many have involved students along the way to ensure their vision would be incorporated.

A few months ago a virtual prom would have sounded far-fetched. The Halton District School Board Virtual Prom on June 11 and had 1,654 people tune in.

In some ways the class of 2020 will have one of the most memorable graduations ever but that distinction can't distract from the absence of social gatherings that have historically been the centrepiece of graduation.

**Congratulations to Veronica Simpson**  
 Class of 2020  
 Gary Allan High School  
 "You can't slip and fall and accidentally buy your friend pants that fit." - Chris D'Elia  
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 Your very proud parents,  
 brother, and family

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