



**STATE OF HAWAII**  
**DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**

P.O. BOX 2360  
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96804

OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT

April 1, 2022

TO: Complex Area Superintendents  
Principals (All)

FROM: Keith T. Hayashi  
Interim Superintendent

SUBJECT: **Updated Commencement and Transition Ceremony Guidelines for School Year 2021-22**

*(Revisions made to this memo: 4/20/2022 - 1) Requirements for attendees and participants have been updated, and 2) Guidance for lei giving has been added.)*

Due to the commitment school administrators, staff, and students have demonstrated in ensuring the health and safety of our school communities, the Hawaii State Department of Education (Department) is moving forward with planning guidelines for in-person graduation and transition ceremonies for School Year 2021-22.

This guidance aims to provide flexibility for schools in safely bringing together graduates and families for this momentous occasion as we continue to monitor COVID-19 conditions. Planning for ceremonies must balance the desire to honor graduates while ensuring schools do not create an added risk to exposure and spread of the virus. Student participation is voluntary.

See [Safe Gatherings](#) and your county regulations regarding social gatherings during COVID-19. Schools that are holding in-person graduation ceremonies may also consider virtual (online) options for persons who do not wish to attend an in-person event. This will also promote a smaller crowd size. In-person ceremonies must adhere to the following guidelines. This guidance is subject to change if there are any developments that would compromise the health or safety of students and staff.

**Venue**

The ceremony must be held outdoors or in a venue that facilitates the introduction of outdoor air (e.g., open doors and windows) or uses fans/filtration systems to enhance air cleaning. Third-party venues are allowed given the limitations of some Department campuses and facilities. Ceremonies at third-party venues must comply with the associated [county rules](#) for social gatherings.

### **Attendees and Participants**

Schools must remind participants prior to the ceremony to stay home if they have any COVID-19 like symptoms, have tested positive for COVID-19 within the past five (5) days, or have been directed to isolate or quarantine.

Graduates may be allowed to bring a pre-set number of household members as guests — to be determined by each school based on capacity, physical distancing, and ceremony format considerations. Household members should be grouped together during the ceremony and physical distance maintained between families whenever possible.

### **Performances**

In-person performances will be allowed if the school is able to maintain mitigation strategies including ventilation, masking indoors, and physical distance.. Solo performances and pre-recorded music are encouraged. Review your county regulations to determine whether additional mitigation measures are required.

### **Masking**

Masks must be worn at all times for indoor ceremonies. Masks worn indoors may be removed briefly for picture-taking and mask breaks that follow the Department's [COVID-19 Health and Safety Guidance for School Year 2021-22](#) (i.e., the individual taking a masking break must be at least six (6) feet away from others). Extra masks should be made available at the ceremony.

### **Hand Hygiene**

Hand washing and/or sanitizing stations should be easily accessible upon entry and throughout the venue to facilitate hand hygiene. Promote frequent hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette (i.e., covering coughs and sneezes).

### **Physical Distancing**

If schools pass out other items besides a diploma, it must be done in a manner that avoids the gathering of participants and is expedited to limit the amount of contact between individuals.

### **Lei Giving**

Lei giving is permitted in areas designated by the school.

### **Cleaning and Disinfecting**

Prioritize high-touch surfaces (e.g., water fountain, podium, handrails, or microphones) for cleaning and disinfecting. The most reliable way to prevent infection from surfaces is to regularly wash hands or use hand sanitizer.

### **Safety Procedures**

Security measures must be in place to ensure a positive and safe event. School staff, security personnel, and/or off-duty law enforcement support must be used to assist crowd control at the event site.

Schools must comply with guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Hawaii State Department of Health, State and respective County rules, including any new advisories in effect on the day of the event.

In the event of increased COVID transmission in communities close to the graduation season, the schools are encouraged to pro-actively plan for alternate formats that reduce the potential for in-person congregation and traffic. These options may include, but are not limited to:

- Student-only in-person ceremonies with virtual options for parent(s)/legal guardian(s) and guests.
- Hosting an additional ceremony with a maximum of two events to limit the financial and staffing burden on a school.
- Staggered drive-through or drive-in ceremonies where vehicles are limited to members of the same household, one person per seatbelt, and limited to one vehicle per graduate.
  - Note: In cases of separated or divorced parents, with prior notice and approval of school administration, separate cars would be allowable as space permits.
  - Vehicles requiring a special license to operate (e.g., trailers, buses) are not permitted.

Practice sessions are encouraged so staff and students are prepared and understand safety procedures before, during, and after the ceremony. Students and their families should be given a copy of the school's graduation ceremony guidelines beforehand and also be advised to consider their pre-graduation ceremony activities in order to limit their potential exposure to the virus.

Should you have any questions, please contact Phyllis Unebasami, Deputy Superintendent at (808) 784-6161 or [phyllis.unebasami@k12.hi.us](mailto:phyllis.unebasami@k12.hi.us).

KTH:pu  
c: Deputy Superintendent  
Assistant Superintendents