



APS Unveils Proposal for Virtual, Traditional Ceremonies for 2020 Grad Nation #WorthTheWait

With respect to social gathering restrictions in Georgia due to COVID-19, Atlanta Public Schools plans to hold virtual graduation celebrations for the Class of 2020 in May, delaying traditional ceremonies until the summer or a later safe date that adheres to Georgia Department of Health guidance. The district reached this decision based on input from graduating seniors across all 14 high schools.

Of the more than 1,650 APS seniors surveyed, an overwhelming percentage expressed interest for a delayed open-air (78%) or fall (71%) ceremony while fewer did so for a virtual ceremony from home (19%) or the Starlight Drive-In (27%) in May. Seniors originated #WorthTheWait, emphasizing their desires to walk on stage in their caps and gowns, even if delayed.

As part of the proposal, APS will:

- Conduct a virtual celebration during the regular graduation season between May 18 and 21 and plan for a traditional graduation program for each school when State and Department of Health guidelines allow.
- Work with schools to coordinate creative efforts for families to engage in at their homes and with their loved ones before and during the ceremony.
- Coordinate diploma delivery in May through mail or some other safe distribution method.

For the traditional ceremonies, APS is considering dates in late July using Lakewood and Grady stadiums as possible venues. If ceremonies must be delayed further, the district is considering other venues or ticketed ceremonies at each school, possibly scheduling them during the Thanksgiving or winter breaks to maximize attendance of graduates and their families.

It is important to note that the traditional, in-person ceremonies will only take place as planned when all state of emergency declarations have been lifted by both the State of Georgia and the City of Atlanta, and that the Georgia Department of Health has deemed it safe for mass gatherings.

If for any reason, the health and safety of our students, families, and guests may be at risk, the district will put the ceremonies on hold until they can be conducted safely.

UPDATE: April 22 12:30 p.m.

Atlanta Public Schools honors and cherishes graduation as an essential rite of passage, especially after the Class of 2020 faced the loss of proms and other end-of-the-year events. Conducting both a virtual and delayed option allows us to support the traditional graduation season for our seniors while honoring the wishes of the class to come together so they can experience walking across the stage with their peers and before their loved ones.

We want to congratulate the Class of 2020 for making it through 13 years of school and weeks of a global pandemic! We agree they are #WorthTheWait, so we pledge to them that we will work hard to celebrate them and ensure them of the pomp and circumstance they deserve.