

Senior Graduation Video Message

Chris Gdowski, Superintendent

4-23-2020

Hello seniors families parents. It's Chris Gdowski superintendent. I wanted to share a message with you about graduation. I thought some of you are probably getting tired of me sitting here behind the desk with the same background so I got a few props in hand given that we're on the heels of Easter and there's an analogy of some of the work we've been doing on graduation that works well with baskets.

We've all heard the adage before of don't put your eggs in one basket. And that summarizes well the work that high school leaders and other leaders in our system have been doing to come up with a really great graduation plan. We know there's lots of students that would like us to put all of our eggs in this basket here. We will call this the in in-person traditional graduation ceremony basket. I get why most of you, not all of you but most of you, would want to put all of your eggs in that basket. That's the graduation that all of us have had and we want for you to have too. But the reason why we don't put all of our eggs in a single basket in life is that when you do that you put a lot of risk potentially in one place. If you drop the basket or get a hole in the basket there's obviously bad things happen to the eggs inside. And likewise there's some risk in putting all of our eggs in the in-person graduation basket. Some of those risks include the possibility that we have some students who are medically fragile or have medical conditions and they won't be able to attend an in-person graduation if that's the one and only way we celebrate this great accomplishment of completing all the years of school in K-12. We just have some students who can't do it. There's also risks that we could get really close to the day of the ceremony and the public health circumstances maybe such that they tell us that we cannot go forward. So we would pull the plug and be without doing anything to celebrate this accomplishment for you. There's a lot of other possibilities around in-person graduations that are tough to predict right now. You may or may not have masks on for a ceremony like that. It could just be students or you might be able to have parents, siblings or grandparents. Most likely heavy-restricted, ticket-restricted venues. All of those things are in the mix and that's why we are planning to put eggs in that basket and find a time in late-July or August to have an in-person graduation opportunity. But we're not able to put all eggs in that basket because of the risk both for some kids not being able to participate and because of the possibility that it could be canceled on us at the last minute.

And hence were putting some eggs in this basket here, the virtual graduation basket. There's a lot of upsides to this one and a lot of downsides too. We know it falls short of what kids dreamed about, parents and family members dreamed about for many many years. The upsides around a virtual graduation is that we know that every single student can participate - whether they are medically fragile students, or someone joining the military here later in May and will be deployed into basic training or elsewhere. Or if you're a student who may not be here because you relocated come July or August or you started college or some other chapter in your life. The upside to a virtual graduation is that all of the students in those kinds of circumstances are able to be a part of it and celebrate their important accomplishment as well. So we are planning to put some eggs in the virtual graduation basket that would happen in May. Lots of eggs in this in-

person basket as well where we hope to do an outdoor, most-likely, ceremony subject to all those variables I just talked about.

And then there are some eggs in this other basket. Actually a bowl. I got this bowl from a village woman in a small island community in the Okavango delta in Botswana last summer. It's one of my favorite things to look at on my desk each day. I got a couple of eggs in this basket and I would say this is the smaller high school basket. It includes places like Pathways and Vantage Point, our charter schools that tend to have a lot smaller graduating classes and may have students with needs and interests that putting the eggs in both of these baskets may not be the best path for them. There could be situations, for example, where a drive-in graduation works well for one or more of those schools. So we went to accommodate that when it works best for that community of students and parents.

So that's where we stand now. All of the plans we are committed to getting out to you next week which is the week of the 27th I believe, with the big caveat that there's some things, especially this basket over here in terms of in-person, we know that there's a lot of things beyond our control that can influence whether it happens and how it happens. Hopefully you will be patient with us.

The other thing I just want to put out there and have on your mind is there some skepticism in some of the conversations I've been involved in with state-level officials about high school seniors conducting themselves in a way that public health officials and others can trust to be respectful of social distancing. A lot of people say of course you can expect Second Lieutenants in the Air Force to keep eight feet apart and follow the rules because of their training and commitment they have to serve our country for years thereafter. I know you are younger and the stakes aren't the same as being a second lieutenant in the Air Force but I really do trust all of our students. If we have the opportunity and privilege of doing the outdoor graduation, in-person graduation this year, that you will step up and be responsible, follow the rules and allow us to continue that. The worst thing that could happen would be that the first one of those to be in the spot where a student, or many students, don't live up to the expectations we have to live by with social distancing and we get shut down for all the other graduations that we have planned.

So those are some thoughts and that's a roadmap for where we are heading down the road. In the meantime, please continue to be patient and know that we're going to do a lot of things beyond what I've described here to make graduation a special time for you. We have interest, that teachers do, in seeing you in-person sometime before late-July or August. We hope to have some plans finalized for that soon. We look forward to having some inspirational speakers beyond people like me who aren't all that inspiring to have important messages to deliver to you this time. If we wind up having the privilege of doing both ceremonies out of both baskets here, we are committed to having them look different so it's not just a repeat of both. We want to be meaningful and special and worth your time to participate in both.

So that's what's coming. Keep your eyes open there will be more messaging coming out from the district for your principal next week. Take care and have a great weekend.