



June 3, 2020

Dear Portland Public Schools seniors and their families,

Class of 2020, let me start by congratulating you for having successfully navigated the challenges of school! Our goal as a school district is to prepare and empower you for what is next. Knowing what I know about your class, I am confident that we have met this goal.

I look forward each year at graduation to personally congratulating each graduate with a handshake after they receive their diplomas. I can't shake anyone's hand this year, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but I still hold out hope for an elbow bump or foot tap. I know how deeply disappointing it is for you that the coronavirus now makes it impossible to celebrate in the traditional way at this time.

I am very proud of your class, however, for working creatively with staff to come up with an alternative way to hold your commencement in a safe way in early August. I'm writing now to fill you in on the details about this event.

Working with the City of Portland, we have been given permission to use the parking lot at Ocean Gateway, on Portland's beautiful waterfront, for our graduation events. To comply with state public health and safety guidelines during the COVID-19 pandemic, the ceremonies for our 570 graduating seniors will be "drive-in" events. The graduation ceremony schedule is as follows:

- **Portland High School** will be on Wednesday, Aug. 5 at 6 p.m.
- **Deering High School** will be on Thursday, Aug. 6 at 10 a.m.
- **Casco Bay High School** will be on Thursday, Aug. 6, at 6 p.m.

Graduates will remain inside their vehicles, which will be parked in the queuing lanes at Ocean Gateway. Each graduate will be allowed to bring one car to the graduation ceremony, filled with family members and other supporters as desired. Your school will help make equitable arrangements for students whose families do not have access to a vehicle and work to accommodate two-household families.

Each ceremony will take place on an elevated stage. Graduates will be the only ones able to leave their cars to walk across the stage and receive their diplomas, maintaining safe physical distances. Face masks will be required of all participants when not in their cars. Speeches and performances will occur live. The ceremony will be broadcast live by WMPG, the University of Southern Maine's community radio station, located at 90.9 FM. The ceremonies will also be filmed and professionally photographed, and video and photographs will be available to students and families.

As you know, we surveyed you this spring and the results indicated that you preferred an in-person graduation to a virtual one. The first week of August was chosen because that time creates the opportunity to gather and celebrate prior to graduates leaving for college and careers in late August.

The Maine Department of Education (MDOE) has left decisions around graduation ceremonies to the discretion of local school districts. However, we still must conduct our ceremonies in accordance with Gov. Janet Mills' "Stay Safer at Home Orders." MDOE also cautions that, due to the dynamic nature of the pandemic, the state's [regulations and recommendations](#) are subject to change. Each school will be communicating further details, expectations and guidelines in advance of the ceremonies.

Class of 2020, I applaud you for making the best of the extraordinary challenges facing you. I look forward to being at your graduation. I won't be able to shake your hands, but I'll give you air hugs and wish you all the best as you begin the exciting next chapter of your lives.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'X Botana', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Xavier Botana, Superintendent

P460- ENG Graduation Letter