



Statement – Outdoor Graduation Ceremonies

June 2, 2021

Today, the Premier encouraged schools to hold outdoor graduation events before the end of June. With only a few weeks left until the academic year ends, schools have already made plans to celebrate their graduates. During May and June, in consultation with and using guidelines provided by local Public Health Units, schools developed plans that were approved by boards. Students were also involved in developing these plans. They include “drive throughs,” virtually recorded sessions or other events that do not involve large social gatherings. Regardless of the format, considerable time and care has been put into planning this milestone. Asking schools to change direction and organize an outdoor event, while social distancing restrictions are still in place, is impractical and unrealistic. It would also lead to additional costs – to cancel and plan for a new event – that schools do not have the budget to accommodate at this time.

Since March 2020, schools, boards and educators have been asked to “pivot” numerous times, reverting from in-person, to virtual, to hybrid learning models. The education system has been turned on its head, and the learning environment has undergone numerous changes and revisions. And in every case, educators have responded as the professionals they are, doing what was necessary to comply with medical advice, emergency measures, lockdowns, stay-at-home orders and ongoing changes in government policy.

Now we are being asked to revert and pivot again, to cancel graduation plans already in place and organize outdoor events amid social distancing restrictions. This is simply not possible or practical. It is unrealistic and disrespectful to Ontario educators to expect such a considerable shift in planning at this point in the school year.