

PDSB to host a virtual grad ceremony and encourages schools to celebrate within the guidelines

By Rob Paul

For the second straight year, graduating classes in Ontario won't be able to celebrate the way graduates before them have. There won't be indoor graduation ceremonies, nor proms as the school year winds down.

Like last year, everything will be either virtual or in an outdoor fashion that doesn't invite people to be in close proximity to one another.

In a statement regarding graduation ceremonies, the Ontario government stated end of school year celebrations are important milestones for students, families and staff, as well as the school community. It is also important to continue to focus on health and safety at this critical point in the pandemic.

Although the Peel District School Board (PDSB) invites schools within the Region to celebrate within the rules this year, it will also be honouring the graduating class of 2021 by hosting a virtual celebration on June 23 from 7 p.m. to 7:30 p.m.

Students, families, and community members are invited to join the event, which will be live-streamed on the board's YouTube channel ([/www.youtube.com/user/PeelSchools](https://www.youtube.com/user/PeelSchools)).

The celebration will feature student performances from Central Peel and Cawthra Park Secondary Schools, as well as Tribune Drive Public School. It will also include a presentation by former PDSB student and former Youth Poet Laureate of the City of Mississauga Pujita Verma. Wali Shah, Cawthra Park Secondary School graduate, public speaker and former poet laureate, will return as host for this year's graduation celebration.

Throughout the month of June, the board will recognize and celebrate graduating students by sharing inspiring stories, creations and #PeelGrads moments on its social media channels. Peel residents are asked to join in on the celebrations by tagging @Peelschools and following #PeelGrads on Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook.

Knowing how big a milestone graduations are in students' lives, it's a hope of the PDSB that students and their families will have some form of celebration to recognize the accomplishment.

"The Peel District School Board encourages schools to continue with plans to host virtual graduation ceremonies, as this will help ensure equitable access to students, staff, and families; honour the commitments they have already made; and provide stability should the pattern of virus transmission change," said a PDSB spokesperson.

The end of school year celebration requirements must follow specific rules under the COVID-19 guidelines. Celebrations should be organized by class for elementary school and by homeroom or quadmastered class for secondary schools with a maximum of two guests per student allowed to attend; all celebrations should be outdoors with no indoor celebrations permitted; celebrations should only take place where physical distancing can be maintained; and gathering before and after celebrations is not permitted.

"PDSB has committed to following the direction of the Ministry of Education, which has issued specific guidance about in-person, outdoor celebrations," the spokesperson said.

It will be up to each individual school within Peel to decide what options are feasible for them to celebrate graduates given the circumstances of the pandemic.

"We have shared the Ministry of Education directions with our schools," said the spokesperson. "Some schools may choose to hold

outdoor graduations that abide by these directions as well as further health and safety protocols that may be forthcoming from Peel Public Health.?

The Ministry of Education and Government of Ontario recommend that schools approach celebrations in one of the following fashions, outdoor recognition ceremonies by class, homeroom, quadmester; outdoor assemblies by class, homeroom, quadmester; outdoor class meetings in conjunction with retrieval of personal belongings; or driving and walking parades.

As another form of celebration from the PDSB for this year's graduates, there will be an online yearbook for people to send the best wishes to graduating students, share words of wisdom, or submit their favourite school memories.

The #PeelGrads online yearbook can be found at padlet.com/PDSBCommunications/ClassOf2021.