

NEWS RELEASE

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Class of 2020 celebrates with virtual graduation ceremonies

Close to 1,000 Greater Saskatoon Catholic Schools' students will be celebrating graduations in front of a screen on June 25 instead of in front of a crowd of family and friends.

Restrictions on the size of gatherings because of the COVID-19 pandemic made traditional graduation ceremonies all but impossible. "It takes months to plan an event like a graduation. Given the information we had in early May, we made the decision to focus our efforts on a virtual celebration for our graduates," said Scott Gay, superintendent of learning at Greater Saskatoon Catholic Schools.

Restrictions on outdoor graduation gatherings have since been loosened, but Gay said planning was too far advanced to change course.

"Graduation is one of life's moments that everyone looks forward to," said Diane Boyko, Board of Education chair for the division. "Over a decade of work is supposed to be marked with a grand celebration, and not being able to do that in a traditional way was an emotional loss for everyone. We heard from parents, staff and students how important doing something special is to them, so a lot of people put in a lot of extra work to try and make students feel like they weren't missing out on this important celebration."

Virtual celebrations include a pre-recorded graduation mass celebrated by Bishop Mark Hagemoen, speeches from the division's Board of Education Chair Diane Boyko, Director of Education Greg Chatlain, and the schools' valedictorian and salutatorian.

"Giving each student the opportunity to walk across a stage to receive their diploma is one thing we were quite proud we were able to include in the virtual celebration," said Gay. Following strict protocols and schedules, students were recorded and photographed in their cap and gown as they were presented their diploma. "That's a key moment of graduation, and replicating that in some way was special for everyone."

Each of the seven high schools in the division will also have a giant banner hanging from the school as a visual sign of students' accomplishments.

Individual schools and parent groups also went out of their way to make the occasion special for grads. Some examples are porch-front photographs in formal attire and lawn signs for students.

Portions of virtual graduation ceremonies are available for media use at <https://go.gscs.ca/3ad8444>.

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