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OFFICE OF THE  
SUPERINTENDENT

## WCPS Announces Graduation Plan

COVID-19 presents a significant challenge for hosting high school graduations. One of the many responsibilities of a school system is to protect the health and safety of its students, families, and staff while hosting a successful commencement ceremony. As a community, we must face these challenges together by taking the individual steps necessary to keep ourselves and the people around us safe. It is important to continue to follow the public health mitigation strategies set forth by the Virginia Department of Health to protect our graduates and their families. Schools have an important role in preventing the spread of this virus and protecting vulnerable students and staff.

On July 6, 2020, Governor Northam moved Virginia from Phase II to Phase III. At that time, guidelines for school gatherings had not yet been established. They were subsequently released, providing schools with additional guidelines that must be followed. These guidelines issued by the governor's office and the Virginia Department of Education capped gathering limits, including graduation ceremonies, to 250 persons if all other physical distancing measures are observed. Unfortunately, at this time, larger gatherings, as customary with graduation ceremonies, are not permitted.

Warren County Public Schools surveyed students in May to determine their preferences for graduation. Survey results showed that over two-thirds of the graduating students from both high schools were in favor of a traditional graduation ceremony, if permissible. In May, gatherings were limited to 10 (Phase I) and 50 people (Phase II). Therefore, a decision regarding graduation ceremonies had to wait until Phase III gathering limits were released.

*"The Trek To Excellence Takes Everyone"*

Phase III limits have greatly affected the opportunity to have a traditional graduation. School leaders wanted to offer a program that was as close to a traditional graduation as possible, but still provided families with an individual touch. A drive-in ceremony was selected because it allows the graduate to walk across the stage, be recognized and receive his/her diploma, while family members gather nearby. This is not a drive-thru graduation ceremony. Traditional components are present in our plan, while still adhering to social distancing guidelines.

Warren County High School will graduate on Friday, July 31, 2020, at 8:00 am and 10:00 am. Skyline High School's graduation will take place on Saturday, August 1, 2020, at 8:00 am and 10:00 am. All ceremonies will be livestreamed on YouTube for friends and family unable to attend.

We understand how important the commencement ceremony is to our graduates and their families as this is the culminating event of thirteen years of hard work. While these circumstances are unique, we have developed a celebration that recognizes each graduate while adhering to the required guidelines.

Chris Ballenger, Ed.D.  
Superintendent