



Updated 5/14/20

When and where will Commencement be held?

Our Drive-In Commencement ceremony will be at the Wheeler School Farm in Seekonk, MA, starting at 10am on Friday, June 12th.

We strongly advise senior families to arrive at The Farm one hour before the ceremony. Parking will be at the direction of the Wheeler staff. Please follow their instructions and our signage. *Please note that we will not open the gates for cars until 8:30am, and families should not arrive before then.*

What kind of a Commencement will this be?

While there seems to be some confusion about the terminology, our plan is to have a drive-in (as opposed to a drive-thru) graduation. We will have a stage and large screens for projection, as well as FM transmitters that will bring sound to the cars in the audience. Cars will be lined up in rows facing the stage. Each graduate will be able to leave their car, line up at 6 ft intervals, and cross the stage to receive their diplomas. Music will be playing, and a picture of each graduate will be displayed.

I thought every Commencement is held at the Farm?

Commencement ceremonies at the Farm began in 2005, previously they were held at the Central Congregational Church in Providence, and even on Brown's Campus. Our Wheeler Commencement ceremonies have catered to the needs of the class and this year will be another piece of our history.

What if it rains?

In the event of rain, we are holding Saturday, June 13 for an alternate date.

Why has the timing changed back to the morning?

The Town of Seekonk would prefer cars to exit the farm in the daylight for safety reasons. We have LED screens which are visible in the daytime, so it's no problem for us to shift this earlier

in the day. We hope this will provide your family the opportunity to celebrate you following Commencement similar to our traditional events.

Will there be a post-Commencement reception?

Due to social distancing restraints, we will be unable to host a reception after Graduation this year.

We invite you and your families back on Thursday, June 10, 2021 from 5:00 - 7:00 pm for a special one-year Reunion event at the Farm.

Who can I invite to Commencement?

Given that attendance at a drive-in will be limited by the size of the venue, this year we will need to impose restrictions on the number of cars permitted at the ceremony. Each household of a 2020 graduate may bring one car to graduation - and all those who attend the ceremony should prepare to remain within that car for the duration of Commencement. Well before the day, we will share a form to collect information on those cars, and will provide more details about timing. We will offer opportunities to watch the graduation on the Wheeler website following the ceremony, which can be sent to anyone around the world.

Why such restrictions on guests?

Though we would love to have a typical guest list, with the whole class accompanied by their extended families, underclassmen, the full faculty and staff, and many alums, the current situation means that we had to come up with a compromise. There is space for ~150 cars at both locations we are considering, and the senior class has ~100 households. When you add in the event staff and organizers from the school, there simply will not be enough room to safely add more attendees. We will be sure there is a broadcast that will be available shortly after the ceremony for relatives and friends who love you and who wished they could have attended.

What if I want to bring an oversized vehicle?

We are requiring households to pre-register vehicles prior to the event. This will assist in our planning and get you parked easily on June 12. **We will not allow any oversized vehicles** ie, passenger vans, RV's, etc. Taller vehicles will be parked in the back to allow for visibility for smaller cars. We have two 9' x 23' screens and, like a classic drive in, the sound will be broadcast via FM car radio. We will provide the FM station upon arrival, through our production partners. There is a 200 foot radius of sound, so unfortunately this is not able to be broadcasted more widely.

What facilities will be open at the Farm (or the alternate locations)?

No buildings will be accessible. We have ordered regular and handicap portable bathrooms for this event. There are handwashing stations as well. We encourage everyone to practice safe hygiene and bring whatever alternative sanitizing solutions you prefer.

Will I be able to get out of my car and greet friends?

Unfortunately not. Our number one goal is for every Wheeler graduate to have the opportunity to walk across the stage to commemorate this important milestone. Our biggest fear is creating a COVID “hotspot” through this event or finding someone in our community sick. We will maintain social distancing and require everyone to remain in their cars, except for those speaking, accepting, handing out a diploma, or using the portable bathroom facilities.

Who will be speaking at Commencement?

We will hear from virtually the same speakers as at a regular graduation, including Ms. Pell, our featured speaker, Judge Edward Clifton, and the senior class presidents, Madeleine Lee and Arvind Sridhar. There will also be an invocation and a benediction, as usual.

What about performances?

Though most years we welcome the 18 Wheelers and Handbells to perform, given the challenges associated with Covid-19 (all of the singers would need to have their own mics, all ringers would need to be at least 6 ft apart), it simply isn't feasible in a live format. We are excited to show pre-recorded performances during the ceremony. Thank you to the Performing Arts Department for their commitment to this event.

Will there be a Commencement rehearsal?

As we are trying to maintain social distancing and limit the number of large gatherings at school, we currently do not plan to have a graduation rehearsal with the class, but will share detailed information with them about the ceremony in advance of the day of Commencement.

What about the annual Senior/Faculty/Staff Dinner?

This dinner, hosted by the faculty, celebrates each member of the senior class through individual tributes, etc. This year we will be hosting a virtual version of this, either as a class meeting, individual advisory gatherings, or both. Please check back for more details.

What should graduates wear to the ceremony?

In most years we provide more detailed and specific information about dress code, in 2020 we are keenly aware of the challenges associated with the prospect of purchasing new outfits for Commencement. This year, we ask that graduates dress in a manner that befits the occasion - dresses, skirts, blazers, and slacks are all examples of appropriate attire. We will, as we do every year, provide either a Wheeler bracelet (which graduates *may* wear during graduation) or a Wheeler tie (which graduates *should* wear during graduation) to each graduate.

Note: If you have any questions concerning appropriate dress, please be in touch with Mr. Boyd or your advisor before Commencement week.

Can I send a press release to our hometown newspaper?

If you would like a press release sent to your hometown newspaper, please send the following information to Wheeler Communications at wheelercommunications@wheelerschool.org by June 1st. A photograph may be included at 300 dpi.

- Student Name
- Parent/Guardian's Name
- Town
- Clubs/Honors/Awards to include
- Name of local newspaper

How will the ceremony be recorded?

We have hired a photographer to take pictures during Commencement, which we will make available after graduation day. A video of our Commencement ceremony will be available as a download from the Wheeler School Broadcasting [website](#). We will send an email to all senior parents with a link once the video is available.

Why not a "normal" graduation?

As you know, the current public health situation in the United States has meant many changes this spring. While we are all hopeful for that to improve, there is simply no way we will be able to have anything resembling a "normal" graduation at any point this summer and even into the fall (or even, really, until there is a widely available vaccine).

What other options has the school considered?

Based on feedback from students and parents, we quickly moved away from the idea of an online graduation. While we did consider a later date in the summer, the slowly changing public health situation (as well as major events like the Newport Folk Festival and Bristol 4th of July celebration being canceled) let us know that a large gathering at the Farm will not be happening any time soon.

How was student perspective taken into account?

It was clear from many conversations with lots of interested parties (students primary among them) that the main goal was to have an in person, on time celebration this summer rather than something online. While we know there is a great deal of passion for having an event which comes closer to a "normal" graduation, quite simply this is the closest we will be able to get for a good long while.

Updated 5.14.20