Closing and Transition Ceremonies

Obviously, closing out this school year will be different from previous ones. The cultural celebrations and ceremonies the entire community expects will still need to be acknowledged but held in different ways.

Here are some of the ideas surfacing and guidance on the mindset to approach them for your community. All of which should be done with explicit acknowledgement of the challenge and change from an in-person, live celebratory ceremony to one that is held virtually or asynchronously.

It's important to remember, even during this unprecedented time, distance celebration and ceremonies can still be infused with joy and authentic connection.

In this guide, you will find:
- **Synchronous Event Guides** describing in real time celebration/ceremony ideas
- **Asynchronous Event Guides** describing always available celebration/ceremony ideas
- **eCelebration Examples** to show a few examples of what others have already done
- **Readings for Resonance** for brief readings highlighting the thoughts of other communities aspiring with this events

The "Now"

Most CMOs and districts are communicating the postponement of events and taking a "wait and see" approach since the data from health experts is coming in at a daily pace.

The little ceremonies that can be created right now can have meaningful Social Emotional Learning (SEL) effects and create artifacts for transition ceremonies. For example, have students wear unique socks or hats, take a picture of them, tell a short story, and send them in by grade, class, or advisory to create a complete gallery for the school that can be inserted into any portion of the eCelebrations below or have it stand alone.

eCelebrations

All the following, as guidance for distance/eCelebrations, can be used for any events such as Graduations, College Acceptances, Grade Promotion, Prom, etc. Formats most appropriate for particular events or grades are specifically called out.

Much of this is translated from online schools who have been doing eCelebrations as a matter of course. There are specific examples of online school eCelebrations in the resources below.

Platforms for eCelebrations
These platforms can be used for both the synchronous and asynchronous events described below. This is not an exhaustive list.
- Facebook Groups
- YouTube Channels
- TikTok Private Access for participants to create Duets
- Twitter Private Accounts
- Google Site
- Weebly
- Wix
- Squarespace
- WordPress
- Assets hosted on your own site on your own server space

Synchronous Events
- The "Zoom" Celebration (Please see Zoom Best Practices)
  - The "Zoom" Celebration is one held via video conferencing software synchronously. This can use the video conferencing solution currently in use for distance learning.
  - This eCelebration has celebrants meeting live during a designated time to interact with one another and to hear from emcees and speakers.
  - Here's an outline for planning this type of celebration:
    - **Storyboarding**—developing the sequence and agenda of the event, transitions, and what would visually appear on the screen during each segment of the event.
    - **Scripting**—developing a script to guide the verbal narration throughout the ceremony.
    - **Roles**—establishing and assigning roles for the event (emcee, technical hosts, prize coordinator, announcer of the graduates, honor society induction, etc.)
    - **PowerPoint/Google Slides/Deck design**—developing the visual landscape of the event, including obtaining photos and quotes in order to develop a customized slide for each student.
    - **Survey design**—developing and deploying the post-event survey
    - Featured speaker and spotlight speakers—identifying and inviting the featured guest speakers and the three student spotlight speakers, providing them with technical specs (e.g., webcam required), and obtaining their bios.
    - **Event room build**—building the meeting room with optimal settings for participants.
      - This will vary by platform but events should be password protect the room sharing the location and password with only invited guests.

- If there is access to school sites, setting up a "participant" in the space where an event would have happened could be fun.
- **Invitations**—developing the invitation with a registration link, working with the registrar's team to identify graduates, sending the invitations through mail merge to promote personalization, etc.
- **"How to Attend"** instructions—developing and sending three event reminders (e.g. email, mail, robo call) to registrants, with clear instructions on how to attend the event and how to obtain technical help.
- Dress Code for the Event
- **Soundscape development**—integrating music into certain points of the event (e.g., celebration music, graduation-themed music, etc.).
- **Prizes**--Developing the prize contest questions, obtaining prize donations, and mailing out prizes.
- **Other Physical Artifacts** - Any physical artifact that is coming out of this event will need to get to the family/student. This can be done via physical mailing, family pick up (either now respecting physical distancing or at a later time when physical distancing is lifted), email (depending on the artifact)
- **Coordination with internal partners**
- **Dry runs**—managing two dry runs for the planning team, a dry run for the featured speaker and a separate dry run for the student spotlight speakers to ensure they can navigate in the room and that their audio and video equipment/webcam works.
- **Video development**—developing the countdown video that precedes the event.
- **Promotion**—promoting the event to current students, to graduating students in the capstone class, etc. Social Media outlets will be vital to this effort.

- Virtual Space eCelebration
  - Holding the ceremony in a virtual space (Minecraft, WoW, etc.) can enlist students who are already building worlds to be involved with the ceremony preparations. Students may already be creating their school spaces.
    - Here's a video of a [recent elementary school graduation in Minecraft](#), where the students built out their auditorium and stage
    - Some [UPenn students recreated their entire campus in Minecraft](#) after being inspired by the elementary school students
- Parades
  - Schools are organizing for car parades in school parking lots or down common streets allowing for physical distancing to be respected while also having an In Real Life (IRL) experience.

Asynchronous Events

- Participant Video Submission
  - Participants can submit their self-recorded (and approved) videos for inclusion in a compiled video
  - Guidance to include should be
    - Format (submission platform or file type guidance)
    - Time
    - Topic (prompts for occasion, "quote", "best memory",)
    - Dress Code (appropriate dress for occasion)
    - Deadline (cutoff time for submission)
    - Presentation (posting of compiled video, which can include a live cast reveal and viewing)
- Event Website
  - Building a website for the occasion can serve as a "permanent" testament of the event that is always available and can always be added to. Using site builders you already have access to is the easiest way to set up the site but there are a few free website builders and platforms to use such as Facebook Groups, YouTube Channels, TikTok Private Access for your participants to create Duet for the event, Twitter Private Accounts, Google Site, Weebly, Wix, Squarespace, WordPress, host your own site on your own server space, and others your tech teams may know.

eCelebration Examples

- San Jose State regularly holds eCelebrations for the iSchool graduates. Here are examples of their Video and Website eCelebrations:
  - [Graduate Video](#) - Hosted on YouTube
  - [Virtual Graduation Website](#)
- Elementary School students in Japan created their own virtual space graduation in Minecraft. Here's a video of a [recent elementary school graduation in Minecraft](#).
- The Los Angeles Times has made a call to all Southern California high school graduates to host an online prom by submitting details on their site.
  - LA Times call, ["High schoolers: Be our guest at online prom by sending us some photos"](#)
- Students are already taking some events into their own hands too
  - [TikTok video set by students at Eagle River High School in Alaska](#)
  - [Missouri High School students Zoom Prom](#)
- [Ideas on eCelebrations from Miami-Dade Schools](#)

Readings for Resonance

- ["Pandemic Notebook"](#) From The 74 - ""Pandemic Notebook" is an ongoing collection of first-person, student-written articles about what it is like to live through the coronavirus pandemic.

- ["An Open Letter to High School Seniors"](#) by Chris Dier, 2020 Louisiana State Teach of the Year
- ["eCelebrations: Virtual Graduations to Celebrate Online Students"](#) - from the Online Journal of Distance Learning Administration - a well researched article on the meaning of graduation celebrations, their cultural meaning, and types of virtual graduations found in the research
- ["How to Teach Social-Emotional Learning When Students Aren't in School"](#) - Aspects of ritual and ceremony to support SEL

Final Word

For many these celebrations are markers of accomplishments and long awaited ceremonies signifying transitions from one world to another. Unless already accustomed to these events at a distance, any eCelebration will feel different and only an approximation of the real event. The examples from elementary, high school, and college show that people are resilient and that they will still find meaning and community even at a distance because they know they are supported and valued.

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