



2020 Commencement Information

We are about to head into week five of our pandemic response and all in-class instruction is still suspended. In early March, as we first began our provincial reaction, we were told to ban gatherings of over 250 people, and that was later reduced to groups of 50 people. Finally, the suspension of in-class instruction occurred soon after.

As a province, we have recently extended our state of emergency to April 28th. It is in this context that it is time to look ahead to the potential challenges for any commencement or graduation activities.

Our Surrey Schools Superintendent, Jordan Tinney, sent out a video message to you: <https://vimeo.com/409645152> . We know from listening to Dr. Bonnie Henry, our Provincial Health Officer, that it will be a long time until we can have large gatherings. Thus, it is simply not possible to have a grad dinner of more than 300 people and the commencement of more than 1200 people. In the latest video message from Jordan Tinney, Superintendent of Surrey Schools, we learned that the Provincial Health restrictions put in place to combat further spreading of COVID-19 in BC will be extended through to the summer at least. This means that no large gatherings are permitted for the foreseeable future. As such, all traditional graduation events, including Matheson's upcoming Commencement Ceremony, and the Dinner and Dance, unfortunately, will not take place this school year.

The end of school is a significant life marker for you. We, at Matheson, know that graduation and leaving public school only happens once in a lifetime. You, as the graduation class of 2020, have been waiting, planning, and organizing for your moment. The pandemic has thrown all potential plans into uncertainty. Our hearts go out to those who have designed and who have worked hard for their moment. In the current context, it is difficult to imagine the province permitting gatherings, which would far exceed 500 people. We need to start making different plans. I know this is very disappointing for our Matheson graduates and your families.

To compound the difficulty of this planning, we also don't even know what school opening looks like in the fall. Any opportunity of a commencement celebration means gatherings of hundreds of people. Again, that possibility seems far away in our current context. However, we are all in the hands of the Provincial Health Officer. The challenge is that we simply don't know what that would entail as we don't know the rules of social distancing one month out or in the fall.

I am asking Matheson's Graduation Committee to begin working with our graduating class and our graduation parent's committee on alternate plans for commencement. The most likely possibility seems that consideration could be given to some activities in the fall when hopefully restrictions will have been eased. With that in mind Matheson has already requested a commencement date in October at the Bell Theatre.

We know that this is disappointing for our 2020 graduates. The response to the health and safety of our community is our top priority. Many of our grads will want grandparents as part of their ceremony, and as we all know, it is the elderly who are most impacted by COVID-19. Let's care for our elderly and our community now. By doing this, the graduates of 2020 can celebrate alongside them for years to come. Rest assured, the Graduating Class of 2020 will be honoured and celebrated in other meaningful ways in the future. Stay tuned!

Regards,

Peter Johnston
Principal