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**For Immediate Release**

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## SUSD Celebrates the Class of 2020, Virtually

**SCOTTSDALE, Ariz. (May 13, 2020)** – Commencement ceremonies for the nation’s graduating seniors are taking new forms in 2020, due to the ongoing Coronavirus pandemic. When surveyed recently how it wishes to celebrate its achievements, a majority of the Scottsdale Unified School District (SUSD) Class of 2020 favored a traditional, in-person graduation ceremony this summer, if public health guidance indicates it is safe to do so.

In previous years, SUSD high school graduation ceremonies have drawn more than 1,000 participants each. This year, crowds of that size would go against guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) on [large gatherings](#).

Anticipating that these pandemic-forced emergency measures would not relax significantly enough to accommodate safe May 21 graduation ceremonies, the schools are getting creative to celebrate the accomplishments of the Class of 2020. Principals at SUSD’s five brick-and-mortar high schools – Arcadia, Chaparral, Coronado, Desert Mountain and Saguaro – and its online high school, Scottsdale Online Learning (SOL), have been working in recent weeks to ‘reinvent’ graduation ceremonies.

“After hearing from our seniors that they would still like some sort of celebration at the end of the school year, even if it can’t be in person, we started planning virtual ceremonies through videos,” says SUSD Assistant Superintendent for Secondary Education Dr. Milissa Sackos. “We could not let May 21 come and go, unheralded.”

“The video tributes will include student speeches, music and the announcement of the graduates’ names,” Sackos adds. “We think the graduates and their parents will be pleasantly surprised.”

SOL will kick off the graduation celebrations on Tuesday, May 19, followed on Thursday, May 21 by SUSD’s five, campus-based high schools sharing their virtual celebrations.

The SOL celebration will take place ‘live’ on Zoom beginning at 6 p.m. on May 19 from participants’ respective locations. SUSD Executive Director of Support Services Dr. Steven Chestnut will offer remarks and SOL Counselor Gary Griggs will introduce the graduates. Family members will have the opportunity to provide personalized congratulations to their graduate at the program’s conclusion.

Chaparral High School’s virtual commencement ceremony will begin at 6 p.m. on May 21, with a slideshow of student photographs. The official program will begin at 6:30 p.m. and will include student speakers who tried out virtually for the honor and were selected by junior class teachers.

Next in the line-up that evening is Arcadia High School. The Titans' virtual ceremony, which will be released at 7:30 p.m., will feature student speeches and musical performances. Principal Todd Stevens will offer his remarks to the graduating class; faculty will then read each graduate's name. Seniors have uploaded their photographs, which will be shown as their names are read.

Saguaro High School's graduating seniors will be recognized in their virtual ceremony that begins at 7:45 p.m. It will feature student musical performances and speakers, comments by Principal Ann Achtziger and student-submitted photographs while each graduate's name is read.

Coronado High School's 8 p.m. graduation ceremony will include student speeches, student performances, faculty speeches, congratulatory remarks by Principal Amy Palatucci and a reading of the graduates' names while their photographs are shown.

Desert Mountain High School graduates will also be celebrated online at 8 p.m. on May 21. Following school tradition, students will emcee the event. In recent weeks, class speakers and musical groups have auditioned to be part of the program, and seniors voted on which faculty member they want to address the class. Principal Dr. Lisa Hirsch will provide remarks, as well.

"The Class of 2020 has been through a lot since mid-March," says Sackos. "Our seniors deserve a big send-off." For more information, please visit [www.susd.org/Graduation](http://www.susd.org/Graduation).

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### **About the Scottsdale Unified School District**

Located northeast of metropolitan Phoenix, the District serves the educational needs of students and families of 23,000 students across 29 campuses. Approximately 240,476 people reside within its boundaries. The District's award-winning academic, arts and athletic programs draw students from Phoenix, Paradise Valley, Fountain Hills, Tempe and Scottsdale. A highly experienced, professionally certified teaching staff fosters a diverse and rigorous educational environment to develop the potential in every individual learner. Offering gifted learning, special education, career and technical education, and a variety of athletics, arts and enrichment programs and clubs, SUSD provides the rich environment today's students need to explore their interests, develop important social skills and grow into tomorrow's leaders. For more information, visit [www.susd.org](http://www.susd.org) and follow along on social media: [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/ScottsdaleUSD): @ScottsdaleUSD, [Twitter](https://twitter.com/ScottsdaleUSD): @ScottsdaleUSD, [Instagram](https://www.instagram.com/ScottsdaleUnifiedSD): @ScottsdaleUnifiedSD, [Nextdoor](https://www.nextdoor.com), [LinkedIn](https://www.linkedin.com/company/ScottsdaleUSD) and [YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCv8v8v8v8v8v8v8v8v8v8v8).