



It's Time to Celebrate!



Dear Reader,


“Bigger than life” days are far from common – those days that make you stand taller, dream bigger, and want to be your best self. Taking the time to recognize these moments is so key on the journey of life.

We believe that graduation is important – an incredible moment of achievement. You’ve been bold and courageous on the homeschooling path, choosing a self-directed and unconventional approach. Your efforts and achievements are worth recognizing and celebrating!

- Honoring the journey reflects respect – respecting the education, the family and community, and the purpose for each individual.
- It also promotes gratitude, to God for His leading and provision, and to the many people who’ve helped you along the way. It’s a time to share the happiness of the end of a long road.
- Lastly, it’s a poignant moment of reflection on the transition taking place. It is the closing of one door, looking at the positives gained from past experiences – and the opening of another, a chance to realign and renew one’s direction and purpose.

Whether you’re planning a small ceremony for a few close friends, or a larger event at a regional or statewide convention, we hope this guide will equip you to create a meaningful graduation ceremony that reflects the dignity of people and the excellence of achievement. We know our future leaders are among our homeschool graduates.

Like a pebble tossed into a pond, the ripple effect is felt all around. The work you are undertaking will uplift and encourage more than you know. We wish you the best as you plan this exciting finale!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Karl Thompson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Karl Thompson
Owner, HomeschoolDiploma.com



Homeschool Graduation Guide

A Guide to Success!

Part I — Basic Principals of Success

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BASIC HOW TO GUIDE

Planning a graduation does not have to be hard.

- The Foundation, Determine Your Structure Beforehand
- A Word About Costs
- Design a Timeline for Organization
- Assemble Your Support Team
- Communicate Effectively
- Remain Flexible
- Don't Skip the Rehearsal
- Follow-up





The Foundation: Determine Your Structure Beforehand

There are so many decisions to make... where do you begin?

- Do you start with the people who you want involved, then strive for consensus on every decision?
- Or, do you start with some basic decisions, then invite people to join in your vision?

Our advice is to **start with the basic decisions, and then invite families to participate.** By doing so, you are providing leadership that families can more easily unite behind.

Here are some basics to determine before enlisting graduates:

- “Why” – a simple guiding mission statement for the event.
- “Who” – clearly define who may participate as a graduate.
- “What” – spell out a basic ceremony structure, type of reception, and a ballpark estimate of costs.
- “When” – schedules are busy, so set a date early and stick to it.

Then, invite your senior families to participate and offer input on other details:

- Choosing the venue
- Determining how to highlight their graduate: posters, photos, video, etc.
- What music to provide, whether live or taped
- Decorations

A Word About Costs

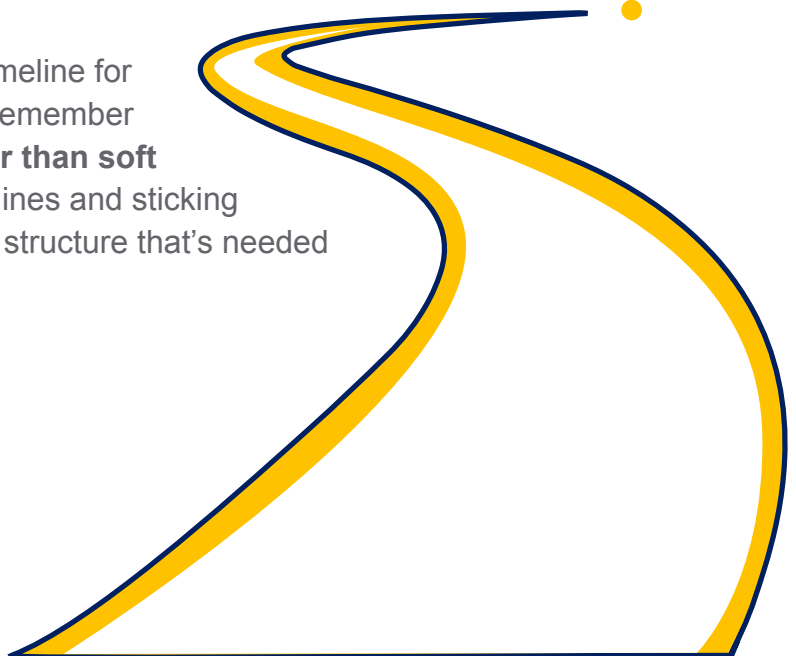
Getting everyone to agree on costs can be a big challenge. You can provide strong leadership by communicating clearly about what costs to expect. Here are some ballpark numbers to get you started:

- Diplomas are a must – a professional document starts at \$30.
- Complete regalia (cap, gown, and tassel - generally under \$35. Extra honor items start at \$8.
- Food – estimate \$2 per guest for a simple cake and beverage reception.
- Decorations - \$3 per guest will cover signage and school color embellishments like table covers, balloons, and streamers.
- Banners and backdrops - backdrops can be found at party stores for \$18. Banners can be custom printed at your office supply store for \$25.
- Estimate the number of guests, multiply the number of graduates x 15.

Design a Timeline for Organization

A simple graduation can be planned in just a few weeks if necessary; however, most veteran leaders say, “Start early!” We recommend that you **begin in the fall for a spring event.**

The next chapter provides a detailed timeline for staying on track throughout the year. Remember that **hard deadlines work much better than soft deadlines.** Communicating clear deadlines and sticking to them will provide the leadership and structure that’s needed to keep everything running smoothly.

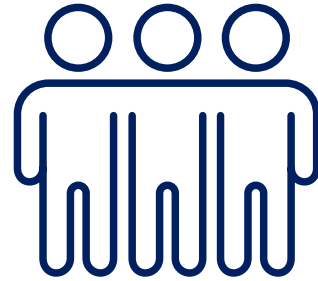


Assemble Your Support Team

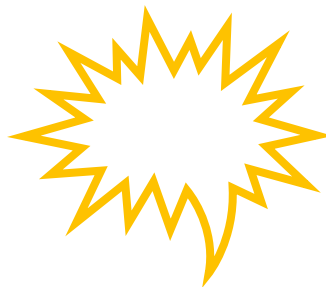
Volunteers are the heart of an organization and make all the difference for an event like this. Finding the right folks depends on the tasks being delegated and every volunteer has a talent to be shared. **Many homeschool groups have found that their Junior Class provides a great source of volunteer energy and enthusiasm.**

Depending on the size of the event, you may need individuals or teams for:

- Leadership (*that's you*)
- Communication with families
- Planning the ceremony
- Planning the reception
- Negotiating and contracts
- Student biographies, photos, videos
- Ordering regalia, diplomas, announcements
- Sound and video technology



See Chapter 3 for tips on enlisting volunteer help.



Communicate Effectively

Effective communication is the key to success, the glue that holds together the many moving pieces and people. As the leader, your biggest responsibility is to make sure that everyone has the information they need. Information builds confidence!

When in doubt, **over-communicate!** Use multiple channels (text, email, phone, social media, etc.) We recommend setting up a Facebook group or similar forum where ideas can be exchanged freely. Make sure you choose a format that allows everyone to participate.





Remain Flexible

Change is a certainty! As we like to say, “Plan A never works.” 😊 Your most important elements need a backup plan:

- Outside events need a tent or inside venue in case of rain.
- Have a “Plan B” for speakers, key volunteers, and sound tech.
- Cushion important due dates so you can meet important deadlines.

Don’t Skip the Rehearsal

As tempting as it may be, don’t miss this important opportunity to iron out many important details. If there is a glitch, you’re sure to find it with a rehearsal!

- Practice in the actual venue for the ceremony.
- Schedule the practice early on the Graduation Day, or the night before.
- Include everyone involved in the ceremony (musicians, parents, photographer, etc.).
- Test the audio/video equipment.
- Check the traffic flow for the processional, ceremony, and recessional.
- Make sure transitions are smooth.
- Review and confirm with everyone what is expected and when.

Follow-Up

A few simple follow-up actions will pave the way for an even better event next year.

- Review the notes taken throughout the process. Your experience will be a wealth of wisdom for future leaders.
- Volunteer feedback is key to making events better! Be sure to solicit input from your team very soon after the event.
- Say “Thank You” to your team. You may want to include small tokens of appreciation (like a photo frame) for key participants.





TIMELINE DETAIL FOR A SUCCESSFUL EVENT

Once you set the date, the event timeline will be easy to determine! You'll create a master plan scheduled backwards from the graduation date.

- Begin Early, 6-9 Months Before Event
- Check Progress, 3-6 Months Before Event
- Details, 1-3 Months Before Event
- It's Time, The Week of the Ceremony
- Follow-Up
- Take Time



BEGIN EARLY



CHECK PROGRESS



DETAILS

THE
BIG
DAY!



Begin Early, 6-9 Months Before Event



Team:

- Leaders determine the structure of the event before inviting input.
- Establish the graduation date (usually late May thru early June).
- Establish a ballpark budget (each graduate may need to contribute \$50 - \$100).

Participants:

- Hold an initial graduation meeting inviting all interested people.
- Gather contact information of everyone and share this document.
- Establish your communication methodology (Email, Facebook, Dropbox, etc.)
- Assemble task teams and define the leaders.
- Set all meeting dates, such as January progress, May rehearsal, June follow-up, etc.



Venue:

- Estimate attendees (each graduate x 15)
- Book the venue for the event: (see Chapter 4 for more info.)

Event:

- Design the order of ceremony in detail (see Chapter 6 for more info.)
- Define how you will showcase each graduate.



Select and Book :

- Your professionals (keynote speaker and emcee)
- Technical support and photographer
- Musicians

Check Progress, 3-6 Months Before Event



Event:

- January Progress Meeting: Hear opinions, allow questions, provide feedback.
- Ceremony Program: Create a basic layout with space designated for each graduate.
- Choose your color palette if you do not have predetermined school colors.
- Determine where to include school logo and/or class motto

Gather Student Information:

- Formal diploma information
- Determine photo requests: Senior photo for the ceremony program
- Pictures portraying the journey of the students for a slide show
- Gown size and regalia honor items

Order Graduate Supplies:

- Diplomas
- Regalia (can be as simple as a cap and tassel or full honor regalia)
- Announcements



Design:

- Define the order of the Graduation Ceremony and specific details
- Design the program layout

Complete:

- Secure your professional speakers and tech support
- Final verbal commitment or payment from participants



Details, 1-3 Months Before Event



Students:

- Try on purchased regalia and encourage your graduates to resolve any sizing issues immediately.
- Verbally invite any important guests (grandparents, etc.).
- Each family may need to prepare remarks, etc. for their time on stage.
- Gather student momentos to highlight their interests for a display table.
- Announcements should be sent 3-4 weeks before the event.

Order Products:

- Decorations
- Reception supplies
- Ceremony programs

Venue:

- Finalize decorations.
- Check parking, sound system, layout, etc.
- Create signage for venue: parking, information, restrooms, lost-and-found, reserved seating, reception, etc.



Ceremony Prep:

- Re-communicate schedule to graduates and define the dress code.
- Create a master document to inform all team members:
 - . . . Detailed timeline of setup, rehearsal, event, and cleanup.
 - . . . Who is doing what and when.
 - . . . Where everyone is sitting.
 - . . . Who is providing hospitality for special guests.
 - . . . Where essentials are located: restrooms, lost-and-found, first aid.
 - . . . Parking plan and drop-off plan for handicap accessibility.

It's Time, The Week of the Ceremony

- Mandatory rehearsal - make sure all questions are answered.
- Confirm with all volunteer leaders that their responsibilities are on solid footing.

The BIG Day (or if possible, the night before):

- Place signage.
- Set up chairs, tables, and serving area for the reception.
- Decorate the venue.
- Communicate gratitude to your volunteers . . . then have fun!

Follow Up

Clean-Up

- Try to leave the place better than you found it!
- If possible, cleanup should be handled by a fresh team of volunteers.
- Cleaning crew needs to know:
 - . . . Location of the cleaning equipment.
 - . . . Where to place the garbage.
 - . . . What to do with the leftover food.
 - . . . Where/how the stage needs to be rearranged.
 - . . . Who is responsible for locking up.

Follow-Up

- Thank You's are beyond important for your entire team.
- Provide a token of appreciation for team leaders and VIPs.

Post-Event Feedback

- Solicit specific feedback from volunteers and graduates.
- Invite all volunteers one more time for a thank you meeting or . . .
- Contact participants by email and provide a follow up questionnaire.





Take Time!

Congratulations, you've created something amazing! What happened was important to our future leaders, their families and the community. Take time to recognize your achievement - you grew as a person and contributed to something big!







BUILDING YOUR SUPPORT TEAM

Volunteers are the heart of an organization!

- Who is a Volunteer?
- How do You Find Your Team?
- How to Work with Volunteers
- How do You Delegate Tasks?
- Event Categories
- Communication is the Key to Success
- Remain Flexible

Who is a Volunteer?

- A special kind of person with a big heart
- A person who wants their valuable time to make a difference
- A person who wants to give back to the community



How do you Find Your Team?

- Enthusiastic parents of the graduating seniors are an excellent source
- Graduating seniors have ideas and want to be active participants
- Junior class families want to prepare for their turn by helping you.
- Teachers, administrators and pastors may want to guide the process.
- The venue or church may have a built in volunteer team.

How to Work with Volunteers

- Respect each volunteer and their talents because you can't do it all.
- Know your volunteers, it's key to building a solid team.
- Discover their interests because it gives you insight into their talents.
- The number one motivator is feedback!
- Encourage growth and show appreciation.
- Be accessible where your volunteers are comfortable seeking advice.



How do you Delegate Tasks?

- Define the specific event needs you want to delegate.
- Match volunteer strengths and enthusiasm for specific tasks.
- Be exact when discussing volunteer responsibilities.

Event Categories

- Depending on the size of the event, you may need an individual or a team.
- Leaders for each:
 - ... Communication-sending information to all graduates and families.
 - ... Ceremony design, graduation program and practice.
 - ... Reception decorations, food, and clean up.
 - ... Student information (biographies, photos and video clips).
 - ... Technology and sound system (someone familiar with venue's system or someone who can provide one of their own).





Communication is the Key to Success and Builds Confidence

- Information is powerful for success! Make resources readily available.
- Create a master team contact list to be available to everyone.
- Schedule Team meetings provide up-to-date information.
- Use different Communication methods to reach everyone.
- Show interest - listen twice and speak once.
- Build trust with honesty.
- Give a sense of direction, be specific, allow questions and be supportive.
- Write personal thank you notes - they will be appreciated more than a text or an email.
- Recognize a person for going above and beyond what was asked.



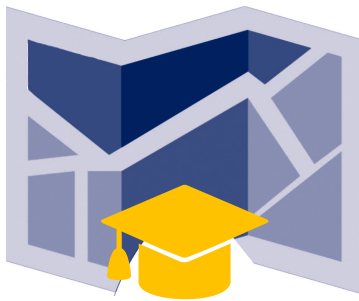
Remain Flexible

- Change is a certainty! Have a “Plan B” for the most important elements.
- Have a back-up plan for venue, speakers, sound systems, and video presentation.
- Provide lots of time and reminders for due dates and deadlines.



THE VENUE

**Celebrating together is what makes events so memorable.
You can Zoom your distant friends and relatives.**



- **Basic Considerations**
- **Your Local Church**
- **If you Have to Rent a Venue**
- **Negotiating the Price**

No Matter the Size, Basic things to Consider for the Ideal Venue . . .

- Location - Central
- Parking - Class size x 4 with extra space for staff
- A welcoming atmosphere perfect for celebrating
- Ceremony and reception space - each student x 15
- Technology capabilities

Your Local Church May Offer Everything You Need . . .

- Permanent seating with a raised area for the graduation ceremony
- Large section for the reception with an attached food service area
- A sound system that has been tested weekly
- A knowledgeable custodian familiar with the building

If You Have to Rent a Venue . . .

- Know what you have to spend in your budget
- Clarify what is included/not included in the price
- Book early - 5 months in advance for 100+ guests, 1 year for 400+ guests
- When can you have access for set up, rehearsals, event, and clean up
- Visit the venue you are considering before signing a contract

Negotiating the Price of Renting a Venue

- The end of the quarter or month offers better pricing than the beginning.
- Flexible dates - avoiding Saturdays will help reduce the cost.
- Flexible times - early in the day gathering versus afternoon party
- Providing your own volunteers



HONORING THE GRADUATE

Making it personal elevates the respect of every Senior's journey. Every person needs to feel validated.



- **Highlighting Each Student**
- **Parent Participation**
- **A Picture Tells a Thousand Words**
- **Videos**
- **Honoring the Graduate and Their Calling**
- **Helping Graduates Identify Strengths**



Highlighting Each Student

- Gathering Information - Biographies
- Ideas: What they studied, are pursuing in life, and who influenced them.
- 3 Examples: Interests, values, strengths, 3 things they hope to accomplish.
- Include 1-10 sentences highlighting what's important to the student.

Parent Participation

- Parents may choose to talk about their student as part of the ceremony.
- Sharing a story.
- Style should be simple and sincere.
- Length of speeches should be 5-7 minutes according to Ted Talks.

A Picture Tells a Thousand Words

- Photos can be as simple as a current photo in the ceremony program.
- Photo Board - 5 or more photos of each student to give a birds eye view.

Videos

- Videos are a great way to communicate
- Combine multiple photos, add captions and music.
- The entire senior class can be highlighted.
- Playing the video as people enter the event sets a personal tone.
- Enjoy a replay of the video during the reception.

Phrases That Honor the Graduate and Their Calling . . .

“For I know the plans I have for you” declares the Lord, “Plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future” **Jeremiah 29:11**

“To accomplish great things, we must not only act, but also dream, not only plan, but also believe” **Anatole France**

“I can’t think of any better representation of beauty than someone who is unafraid to be herself” **Emma Stone**

“You start to live when you commit to a cause higher than yourself. You must learn to depend on divine power for the fulfillment of a higher calling.” **Lailah Gifty Akita**

“Darkness cannot drive out darkness. Only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate. Only love can do that” **Martin Luther King Jr**



Helping Graduates Identify Strengths

6 Questions from Avenue Five Institute . . .

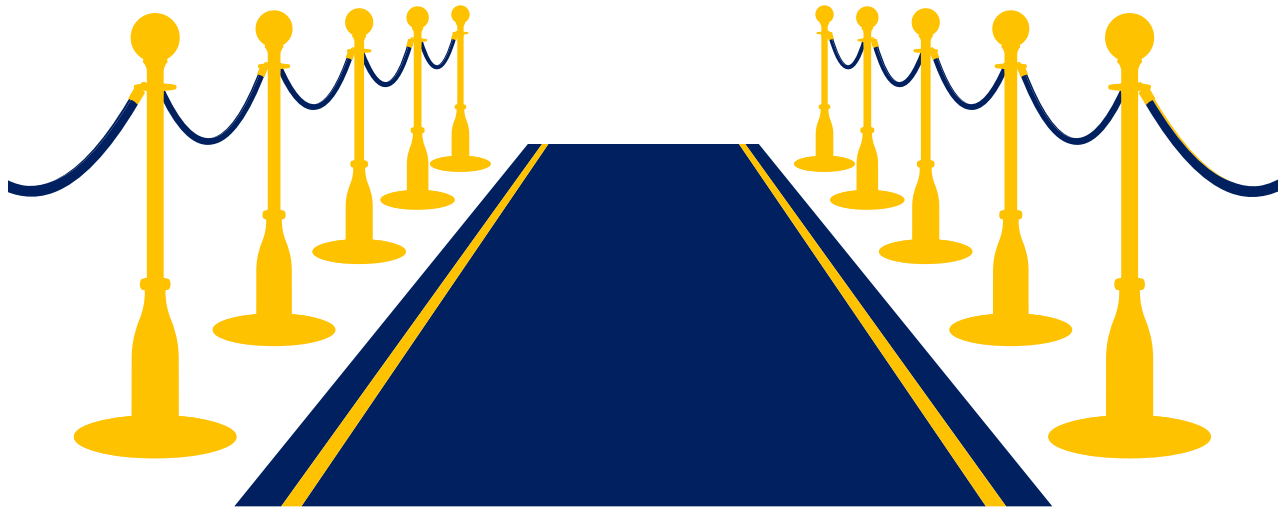
1. What are you naturally good at?
2. What activities make you the happiest when you are doing them?
3. If you could do anything in the world every day of the week, what would it be?
4. If you won the lottery tomorrow, what are some things you still wouldn't stop doing?
5. What keeps showing up in your mind?
6. Is there anything you feel strongly in your heart?





THE CEREMONY

A ritual to honor, celebrate, and connect.



- **Setting the Stage**
- **Ceremony Order**
- **Graduating Class Size**



Setting the Stage

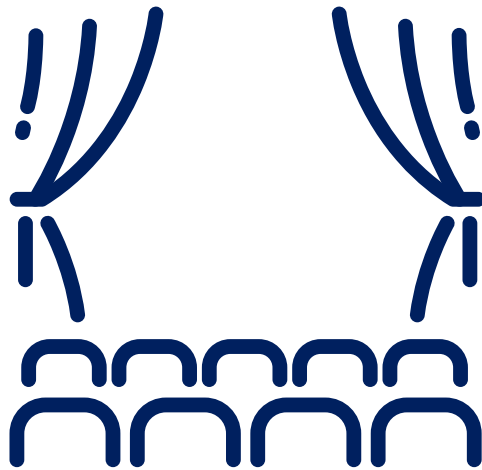
The physical setup of the stage and seating is the first step to a successful ceremony.

Visually Pleasing and Student-Focused

- Clearly designate where the ceremony will take place.
- Lighting always makes a difference, highlight the ceremony area.
- Frame the ceremony area with cloth, plants, or signs.
- Show spirit with school colors or choose an academic pallet of a light and dark.
- Place a logo or motto in front of podium or behind ceremony area.

Tested Technology

- Have a great sound system at a minimum, plus video capabilities.





Ceremony Order

The Order of the Ceremony is an opportunity to emphasize what's most important to you! A basic ceremony generally includes:

- **The Beginning** - It creates a ceremony atmosphere, setting the tone with a welcome and introducing the graduates.
- **The Middle** - It includes inspiring messages from speakers or parents, and the presenting of diplomas.
- **The End** - It includes the pronouncement, where graduates move their tassels from left to right, a recessional and a transition to the reception.

An Example Order of Ceremony

- Student Video Slideshow with music while guests are seated
- Academic Procession - Graduating Class
- Welcome and Prayer - Master of Ceremony
- Keynote Address - Keynote Speaker
- Diploma Presentation
- Pronouncement and Prayer - Master of Ceremony
- Recessional - Graduating Class
- Invitation to Reception - Master of Ceremony

The Class Size Provides Unique Opportunities

With a class of **1-10 Graduates**, you have more freedom to encompass more individual talents and rituals.

- Each family can be given a few minutes on stage to honor their graduate and present the diploma.
- Graduate talents can be celebrated with performances, art, etc.
- A celebration this size is perfect in a personal setting or your local church.
- An intimate reception can be held at a favorite restaurant.

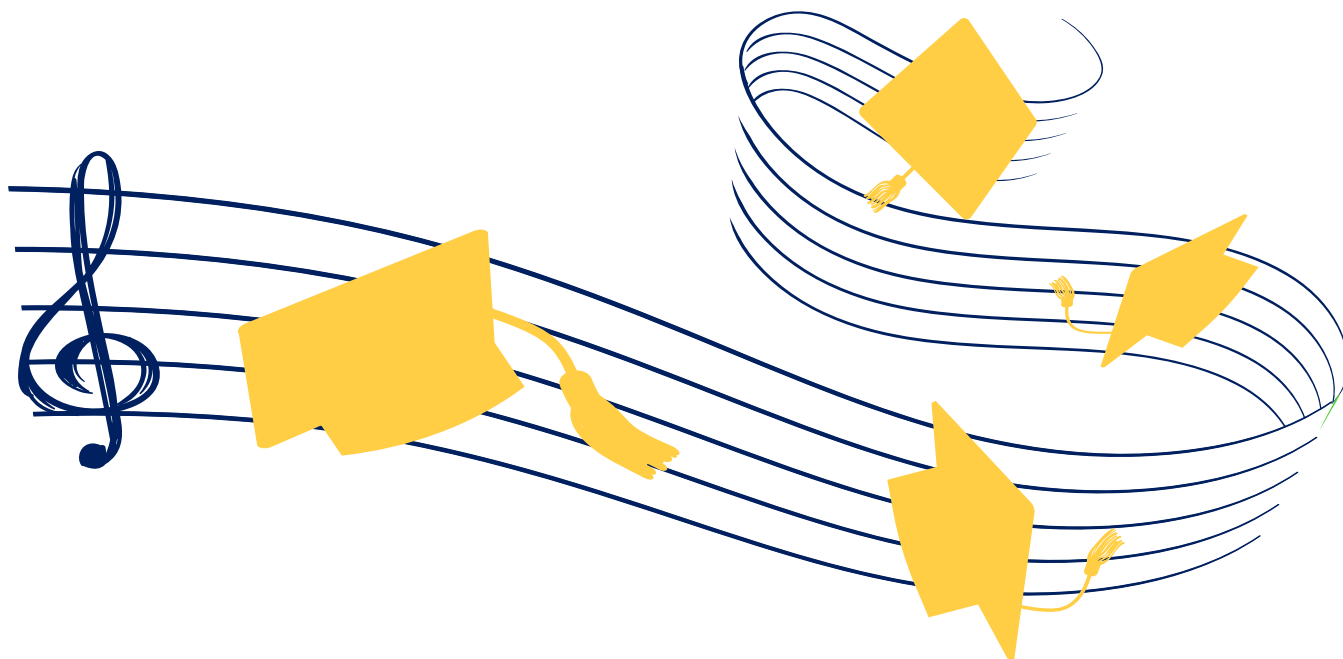
For **10-25 Graduates**, it will automatically become a community event.

- A larger local church will be big enough for the ceremony.
- Your speaker, emcee, and photographer may be volunteers from the community.
- Increased budget for the celebration, decorations, and reception.
- You'll need sound equipment and video technology.

A class of **25+ Graduates** requires more advanced planning and a team of volunteers.

- The venue should be large, and should be secured a year in advance.
- Professionals should be considered: keynote speaker, photographer, tech crew.
- Consider professional catering for the reception.
- Clear communication with graduates/families will be key to coordinate the sizable number of people involved.





A Word About Music

If you are lucky enough to have musicians among your students, community, or church, use them. There is nothing more magical than live music to send the soul soaring and elevate the experience. If not, no worries! We have made a list of the top musical choices for the big day.

If you want the classics that work as instrumentals . . . here are some suggestions:

Pomp and Circumstance	2:10
With a Little Help from My Friends	2:39
Here Comes the Sun.....	3:23
Friends	2:19
Your Song	4:22
Be True to Your School	1:54
Shining Star.....	3:00
Let It Be.....	2:53





THE SPEECH

**A Mixture of Emotions Swirl Around this Iconic Moment.
We Truly Believe our Future Leaders are Among
Homeschooled Graduates!**



- **The Guidelines**
- **The Graduation Message**
- **Keynote Speaker**
- **Speech Styles**
- **Top Tips for Graduates**

The Guidelines

- **Short and Sweet** - Key note speeches 18 minutes and 5-7 minutes for all others.
- **Message** - Geared to the audience you are addressing.
- **Clarity** - Use simple language that is easy to understand.
- **Manner** - Speak slowly and in a normal tone.
- **Sincerity** - Speak from a place of authenticity and genuine demeanor.

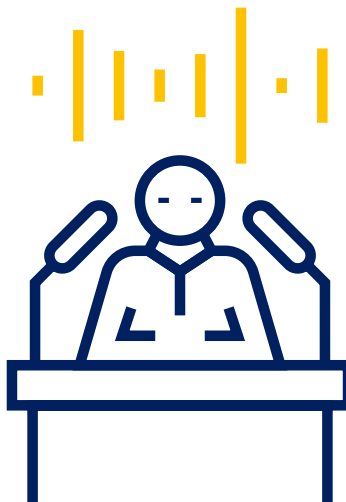


The Graduation Message

- Geared to the audience - happy students and concerned parents.
- Transitions - good-byes and hellos all at once.
- On the brink of adulthood and venturing into uncharted waters.
- A bit of wisdom - stories, examples, and quotes make a speech interesting.

Where to Find a Keynote Speaker

- Your immediate circle - great instructor, teacher or pastor.
- Coach or athlete with a strong work ethic.
- Local celebrity - business leader, radio or TV personality.
- A person who has overcome a huge obstacle.





Speech Styles

Advice

- Good advice is true and concrete.
- Knowing who you are allows you to live with purpose and meaning.
- Focus on the present - small wins give us the most significant success.

Humor

- Homeschooling is an unconventional choice in a conventional world
- The questions from strangers and relatives over the years
- Examples of unconventional choices or the cost of an adventure

Inspiration

- Let our students know you believe in their path and their future.
- The search for deeper learning and meaning.
- Navigating hurdles - what you overcome is more important than what you accomplish.

Top Tips for Graduates

- Get clear on your unique value and strength.
- Never fear aiming high and don't be afraid to fail.
- Escape the media bubble and seek people with diverse viewpoints.
- Learn from masters, find mentors, and read biographies.

Best Graduation Speeches According to INC

Joyce Di Donato.....	Juilliard School	2014
Ellen DeGeneres.....	Tulane University.....	2009
Steve Jobs	Stanford University	2005
Admiral William McRaven	University of Texas at Austin	2014
J.K.Rowling	Harvard University.....	2008
Shonda Rhimes	Dartmouth College	2014
David Foster Wallace	Kenyon College.....	2005
President Barack Obama.....	Barnard	2012
Robert Krulwich.....	UC Berkeley School of Journalism...	2011
Stephen Colbert	Northwestern University	2011
Toni Morrison	Wellesley College.....	2004
Bono.....	University of Pennsylvania	2004
Jeff Bezos	Princeton	2010
Michelle Obama	Dillard University	2014
Meryl Streep.....	Barnard	2010

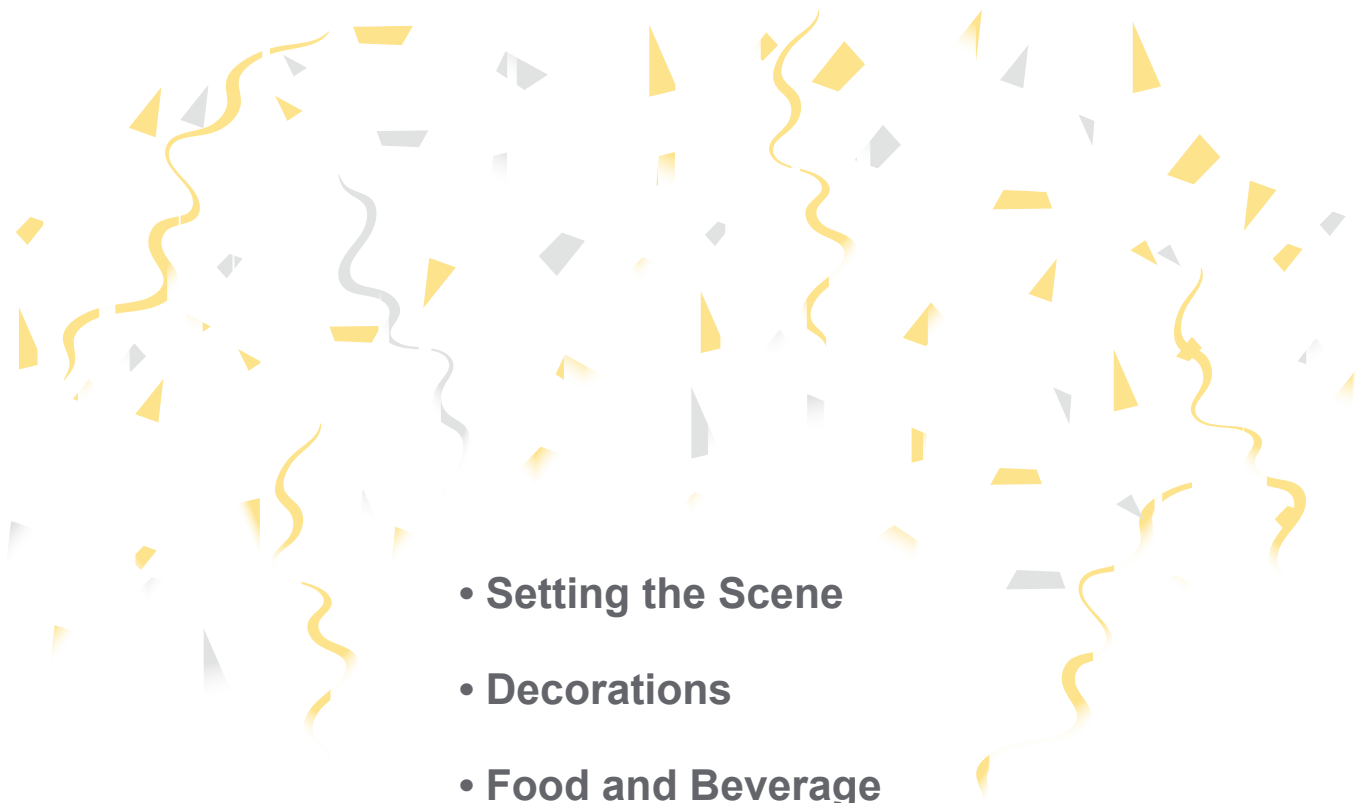




8

THE RECEPTION

**A Meaningful Celebration for the Homeschooled Graduates
Honor the Moment of Joy**



- **Setting the Scene**
- **Decorations**
- **Food and Beverage**
- **Clean-up**

Setting the Scene

- Keep the focus on the graduates.
- Survey your graduates for favorites in music, atmosphere, and food.
- Could be as simple as a single flower in a clear vase with a graduate photo.
- Highlight student interests with posters, photos or slide show.
- Signage to direct your guests for food, wash-up, and garbage.



Decorations

- Continue the color scheme used for the ceremony.
- The basics: plates, napkins, cups, and plastic ware - buy extra.
- Place colorful decorations at the entrance, food area and tables.
- Choose a theme, decorations can be fun and less formal.
- Start with table coverings and add beads, confetti, or mints.



Food and Beverage

- Simple selections - a stand up affair with beverages and cake.
- Seating - be sure to provide for elders and people with disabilities.
- Serving a larger crowd - a buffet style hot meal or a lunch bag.

Clean-up

- Leave the space better than you found it!
- Fresh Junior family recruits at this time will really make a difference.
- Make sure you bring your own cleaning supplies.
- Remember to lock up when you leave.





GRADUATION GUIDEBOOK SOURCES

Ceremonies

<https://www.thsc.org/steps-homeschool-graduation/>

3 Simple Steps to Homeschool Graduation for Your Student

How Educator.com

Donna Schillinger and Kay Orr 2018

<https://www.acenet.edu/news-room/Pages/Academic-Ceremony-Guide.aspx>

American Council on Education

Academic Ceremony Guide

Eugene Sullivan 01/2020

Communicating

<https://liveboldandbloom.com/08/self-improvement/good-communication-skills>

10 Good Communication Skills You Absolutely Must Know

Barrie Davenport

<https://thebalancecareers.com/communication-skills-list2063779>

Communication Skills for Workplace Success

<https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/resumes-cover-letters/communication-skills>

Communication Skills: Definitions and Examples

Graduations

<https://www.thehomeschoolmom.com/high-school-graduation-checklist>

High School Graduation

The Homeschool Mom M.A. Kelley and Company, Inc 2000-2018

https://hsllda.org/content/highschool/Newsletters/2018/April_Graduation.asp

HSLDA Celebrate Graduation 04/02/2018

Procrastination

<https://mcgraw.princeton.edu/understanding-and-overcoming-procrastination>

Understanding and Overcoming Procrastination

McGraw Center for Teaching and Learning

Source: Research and Teaching in Developmental Education

Dominic J. Voge Spring 2007

<https://lifelhacker.com/top-10-motivation-boosters-and-procrastination-killers-5533897>

Top 10 Motivation Boosters and Procrastination Killers

Kevin Purdy

<https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20190805-eight-ways-to-curb-your-procrastination>

Eight ways to curb your procrastination

BBC Future

Claudia Hammond 8/7/2019

<https://www.collegeexpress.com/articles-and-advice/majors-and-academics/blog/top-10-ways-avoid-procrastination>

Top 10 Ways to Avoid Procrastination

College Express

Regan Collins 3/24/2017

<https://www.developgoodhabits.com/stop-being-lazy/>

How to Stop Being Lazy and Unmotivated: 10 Quick Strategies

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