**K-8 Promotion Ceremonies**

Due to the coronavirus pandemic and the importance of social distancing, Wilkes County Schools will not be hosting drive-through awards ceremonies or promotion activities at any elementary or middle schools to conclude the 2019-2020 school year. Wilkes County Schools Superintendent Mark Byrd stated that after discussion with the Board of Education and on the advice of the Board Attorney, this decision was made in the best interest of the safety and health of students and the community as a whole. “While our entire district is very proud of the accomplishments of the students in these grade levels, we feel this difficult decision is in the best interest of their safety. We look forward to having multiple opportunities to celebrate their accomplishments for many years to come.” Byrd specifically referenced the class of 2024 (Current 8th graders transitioning to high school), the class of 2027 (current 5th graders who will transition to middle school in 2020-2021) and the class of 2032 (current kindergarten students who will transition to 1st grade) and stated that great things are expected in the future from all of these students. Schools will still schedule days for students to collect their personal belongings and turn in textbooks and technology devices, as these events are easier to maintain social distancing. Both K-5 and middle schools will still have the opportunity to arrange virtual awards ceremonies or recognitions that do not require gatherings on school campuses. “While this was a difficult decision, as the numbers of positive cases of COVID-19 continue to rise throughout our county, we felt this decision was in everyone’s best interest,” Byrd said.

**Graduation Planning for the Class of 2020**

In terms of celebrating the Class of 2020, Byrd stated that the district is in the planning process, and that some of the decisions rest with the current seniors themselves. “We want to do everything we can to make this a special time for the 654 members of the Class of 2020 in Wilkes County, while ensuring their safety and well-being. Our hearts go out to these seniors for the way their last year of high school is ending, but I continue to hear stories of how they are dealing with adversity. I truly believe the Class of 2020 may be more resilient than many who graduated before them because of this pandemic,” Byrd stated.

Seniors at all five high schools are being contacted to complete a short survey about what they want their commencement ceremonies to look like. Governor Roy Cooper provided guidance on high school graduation ceremonies to Superintendents on May 1, 2020. Seniors are being asked whether they prefer 1) a virtual type of ceremony 2) a drive up or drive-through ceremony or 3) to delay graduation ceremonies to a later date when more people could attend. Social distancing guidelines in place at the time of ceremonies will have to be followed, as well as all guidance from Executive Orders. Local guidelines could be a factor as well. Byrd shared that once this data is gathered and decisions are made, all five high schools will plan similar ceremonies. While all of this may look different from what has been done before, Byrd shared that he thought the members of the Class of 2020 should be the ones to decide what their ceremonies should look like. “We are there to celebrate them, so why not let them tell us what they feel is best?”

If members of the Class of 2020 have not been contacted by their school, they will be shortly. Byrd encouraged all of them to provide feedback. Information on decisions and dates and times of ceremonies will be provided as soon as possible.

Byrd said he is appreciative of the community support for the Class of 2020 and hopes to see this continue throughout the summer months.