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Excellence in Education

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Dear 8th Grade Families,

Two weeks left! That's all there is. For most families, your child has spent the majority of his or her life so far in the corridors of Rockaway Valley School, and for everyone, finishing 8th grade means stepping into the future as high school students on their way to young adulthood. It's a momentous time in their lives.

We never could have predicted such an unusual finish to this year but we're striving to create moments that will add up to a total commencement experience for the Class of 2020. We've had a couple of those moments so far with the placing of congratulatory signs on the lawns of the students and photo signs in the front of the RVS campus. I know the HSA and 8th grade room mothers have some special plans that they will be revealing as the next two weeks unfold. I'm writing today to tell you about **Commencement Day - June 18**.

In the Morning

Formal Photo Op! We have a cool new backdrop celebrating #falconpride and it will be set up in front of the school on June 18 between the hours of 9 AM and 12 PM. A real photographer (not a staff member!) will be on hand to take each student's picture in cap and gown with their diploma (cover only at that point). Park in the lot and walk to the photo location, maintaining social distancing from other family groups (wear your masks while you wait). Take your diploma cover from the table when it's your turn. The photographer will take the photo in front of the backdrop and another one with family (2 family members per student, please). We're going to try and keep this process moving so when your turn is over, please return to your vehicle and depart. We can have no more than 20-25 people outside of vehicles in front of the school at any one time. We hope these photos will be a good memento of commencement. (We have a rain plan which we'll send out if we have to move the photo shoot indoors.)

The new "step and repeat" repeat backdrop is the class gift of the Class of 2020 and we're thrilled they will be the first to use it! Thank you so much for your gift!

In the Evening

Drive In Commencement, 6:30 PM Our Drive In Commencement will begin at 6:30 PM. We believe that even though we are constrained by social distancing rules, we have constructed a ceremony that closely mirrors as much as possible the ceremony we would have had under normal circumstances. Here's how it's going to work:

Entrance to the campus for the ceremony will be via the "Glenbourne driveway" only beginning at 5:45 PM. You will have received an invitation and parking permit (numbered) via regular mail and only those cars with this permit will be permitted to enter. A staff member will be stopping and checking each car for the permit which you should display on the dashboard of your vehicle. They will point you to the next checkpoint (that one is a surprise) and then on to parking attendants who will usher you to your parking place facing the ballfield. The spaces will be socially distanced so that you will be able to open your windows. We may not be following the lines on the blacktop so pay attention to where you're being asked to park; *that* is your spot. All attendees, including graduates, will stay inside their vehicles. These guidelines will keep us in compliance with the

executive orders issued by the Governor. We'll be closing the gates around the driveway at 6:30 PM when the ceremony gets underway to control the traffic and prevent uninvited guests from "crashing our party."

The ceremony begins at 6:30. We have Gemini Productions coming to give us a great sound system and provide festive music where it's needed. Our photographer/videographer will be back to record the event. There will be remarks from me and the presentation of academic, citizenship and participation awards by me, Dr. Lendis and perhaps a couple of teachers. Speeches from the Salutatorian and Valedictorian will be taped and played through the sound system. Dr. Lendis will read the names of the graduates as she always does; we're sorry they cannot walk for their diplomas but we believe this is the next best thing. I will provide some closing thoughts and then the parking attendants will assist you in leaving campus via the Valley Road driveway. Please don't move your vehicle until you are motioned to do so (we don't want any fender benders to complicate the night).

Wait, there's more!

- Livestreaming! The ceremony will be livestreamed so friends and relatives can see and hear what you see and hear! We'll get back to you with the exact livestreaming information.
- Pick up graduation caps and gowns on your assigned "pick up your stuff day" next week.
- You'll be receiving a car decorating kit from the HSA. Feel free to show your #falconpride.
- You'll receive a digital copy of the livestream to watch again (and again).
- You'll receive a 5 x 7 and digital files of your photos in front of the "step and repeat" backdrop to share with all.
- Diplomas and awards will be mailed to your home address.

We have gone through several iterations of this plan as the Governor and the State Department of Education struggled to come up with final guidance on the subject of graduations. We are happy to be able to provide a drive in ceremony when most other middle schools are doing virtual graduations. This is mostly due to our small size and our ability to accommodate 50-55 socially distanced cars on campus.

I'm so proud of this group of young people. Right now they are the "pandemic class" but as time goes on, I hope that these last three months will be just a small part of their memories of their time at RVS. Some have been under our roof since PreK and few have only just recently arrived but all have learned and grown from their experiences here, from the teachers who have cared about them, the administrators and other staff who have helped them on their journeys and from their friendships with one another. Ultimately, our socially distanced commencement is another stepping stone in growing and understanding that life sometimes throws you a curveball but it is how you deal with that curveball that makes the difference.

I'm looking forward to making this as memorable as possible for the Class of 2020. We'll continue to communicate details or changes (although none are anticipated at this point) as the day draws close. We have a rain date plan should it be needed. Your invitations and parking permits will be mailed early next week.

Enjoy these last two weeks as RVS Falcons!

Christian Angelillo
Superintendent/Principal