

## Submitted by the Georgia Department of Education

Georgia's class of 2020 had planned, of course, to celebrate their graduation in the usual way: to walk across the stage, turn the tassel, pose in prom finery, and etch well-wishes onto yearbook pages. They expected to participate in all the rituals, large and small, that mark the end of one season of life and the beginning of another.

When life shifted due to COVID-19, and those traditions were halted – at least temporarily – for Georgia's high school seniors, they didn't react with anger or discouragement, though those reactions would've been understandable.

Instead, they joined together to honor the years of growth and learning behind them and the new experiences ahead. Faced with the derailing of long-held plans, the resilience, creativity, and wisdom of Georgia's class of 2020 has been on full display.

In Covington, Newton High School senior Ma'at Smith created an "Adopt a 2020 Senior" Facebook group to help her classmates feel connected – then scaled up with a group for seniors across the state.

"I don't want my classmates to feel stuck," Ma'at [told the Atlanta Journal-Constitution](#). "This program hopefully will be a reminder to them that we can still move forward into our futures."

Across the state, communities came together to honor their seniors and remind them that while graduation ceremonies were on hold, their futures were still ahead and still worthy of hope.

[Dalton Public Schools](#) and [Lowndes County Schools](#) held "reverse parades" for their seniors with signs, balloons, and cap-and-gown distribution through car doors.

[Fayette County Schools](#) distributed yard signs to seniors. [Heard County Schools](#) created a photo display of their seniors, displayed prominently on

campus. [Dougherty County Schools](#) posted every senior's photo, future plans, and high school accomplishments on social media.

In [Dawson County](#), a school resource officer designed, bought, and placed yard signs for every senior at Dawson County High School because he didn't get the chance to tell them congratulations in person.

Some schools, including those in [Effingham County](#), lit up their stadium lights to honor their seniors. Others, like Marietta High School, [held virtual proms](#). Columbia County Schools [secured a shoutout](#) from Charles Kelley, a graduate of the district and member of the country group Lady Antebellum, for its seniors.

Other districts, like [Bibb County Schools](#) and [Atlanta Public Schools](#), asked their seniors to record videos sharing advice and words of wisdom.

It's in those videos that the heart of the class of 2020 becomes clear.

"I have faith," Nia James, the salutatorian at Northeast High School in Bibb County, told her classmates, "that we will persevere through these challenging times just as we persevered through the four years of high school we shared together. We have our whole lives ahead of us, and we are the ones who choose what we wish to do with that. From the bottom of my heart, I hope that each and every one of you finds the strength to live lives full of growth and meaning."

While together we face difficult times, we are filled with optimism because of Georgia's class of 2020.

We have every confidence they will make our world a better, kinder, stronger place. In fact, they already have.