

POWERED BY XQ



# #GRADUATE TOGETHER

VIRTUAL HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION TOOLKIT

A GUIDE FOR CELEBRATING HIGH SCHOOL SENIORS LOCALLY

#GRADUATETOGETHER



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# A Message From Your Friends at XQ

These past few months haven't been easy for any of us. Seniors have missed many of the milestones that traditionally mark the end of their high school experience. But that doesn't mean they have to miss graduation, too.

Of course it won't be the same—but you can celebrate them and their accomplishments with a virtual ceremony and community events. And just because you're doing this remotely doesn't mean you have to do it alone.

We hope this toolkit allows you to celebrate the Class of 2020. More importantly, we hope it brings joy to you and your school community.



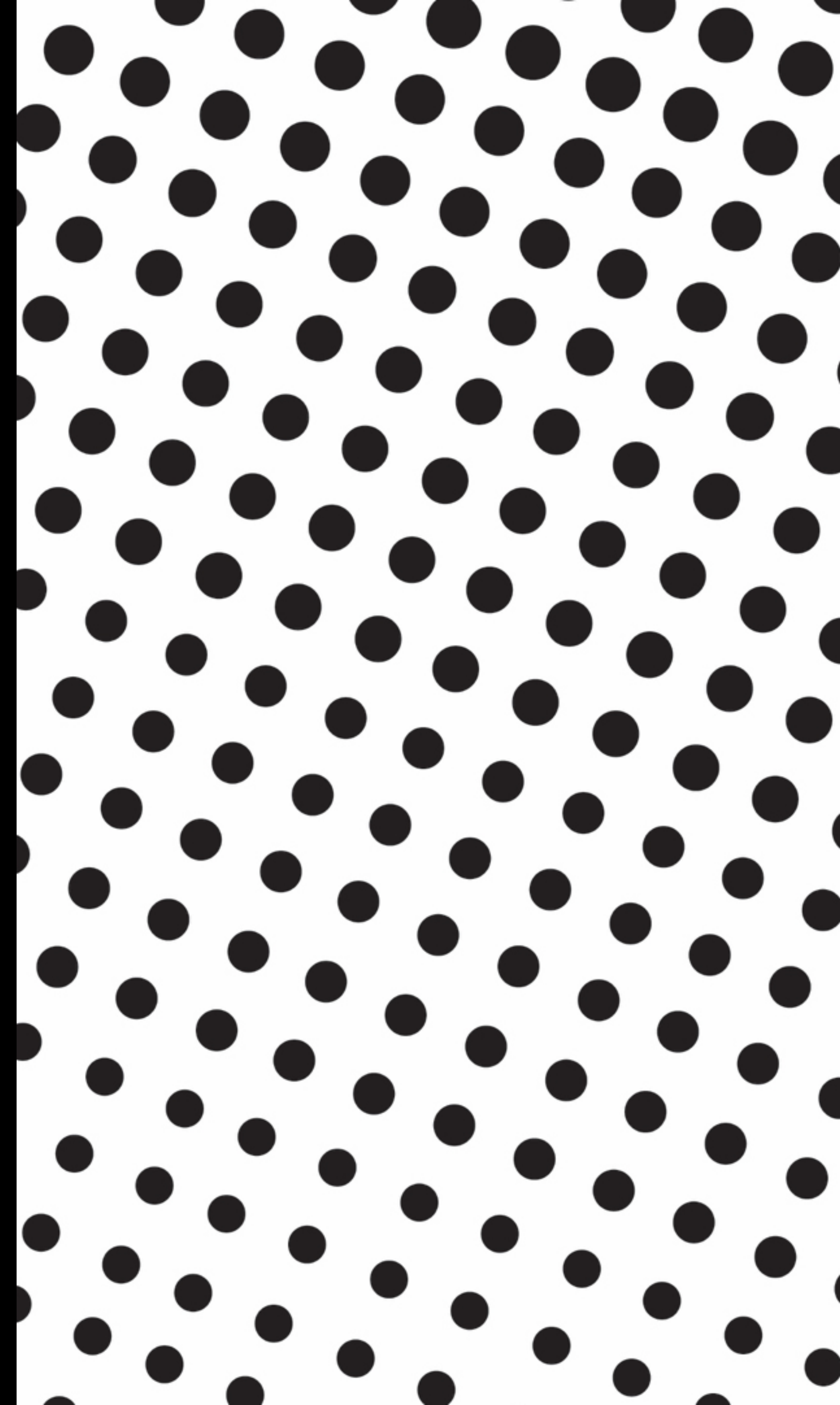
1.

# Get Organized

Planning a virtual ceremony and remote wrap-around celebrations isn't an easy task. You'll need help to bring all the pieces together. So reach out, form committees, and get organized! At XQ, we truly believe that teamwork makes the dream work.

Here are some ideas:

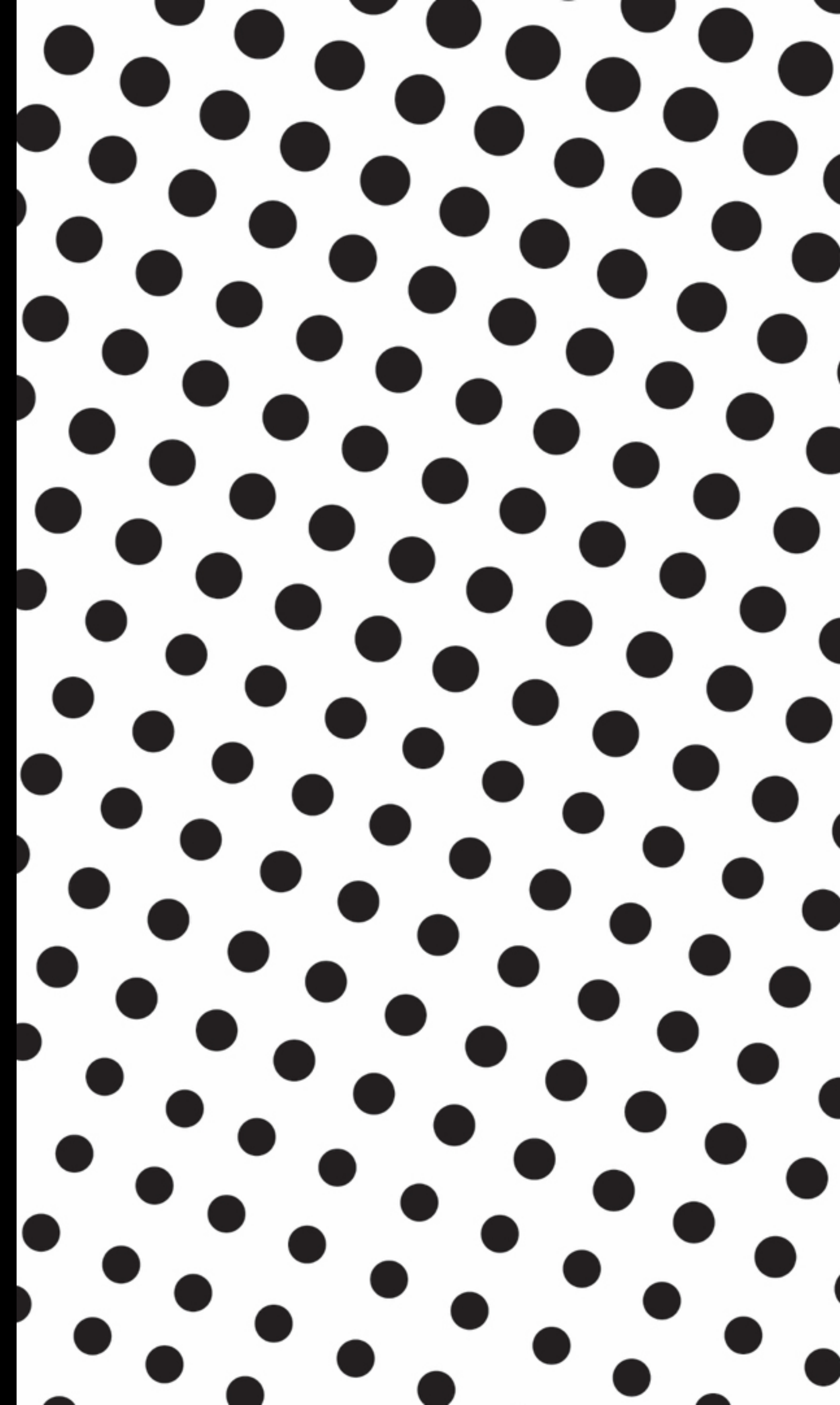
- Invite a committee of teachers to manage invitations to family members, community leaders, and other friends of your school.
- Ask a group of music students to create a playlist attendees can listen to while waiting for the virtual ceremony to begin.
- Recruit a team of family members to coordinate the logistics of distributing regalia —following [CDC safety guidelines](#), of course.
- Lean on community partners to create photo or video montages with the content you collect from students, teachers, and families.



2.

# Plan Your Own Virtual Graduation Ceremony

High school graduation is a rite of passage—a moment of celebration and recognition. While school buildings are closed, your school community has an opportunity to add to the tradition in fresh and innovative ways. Our advice? Be creative!



# Commencement Speakers



## **PRINCIPAL'S SPEECH:**

Students and families always look to the school leader to set the tone for the graduation ceremony. This year is no different—except that the speech will need to strike a balance between celebrating the Class of 2020's achievements and acknowledging the challenges they've overcome in the last few months.

The principal's speech can be pre-recorded or read live during the virtual ceremony. Here are a few tips for principals to keep in mind:

- Include photos and videos to play during the speech
- Practice the speech, including visual references
- Do multiple test-runs with the tech tools you'll use during the event

**STUDENT SPEAKERS:** Your school's selection process can stay the same for student speeches, too. Just like the other speeches and performances, you'll need to decide if the message will be pre-recorded or read live. With a remote ceremony, you also have an opportunity to include more than one student speech. More than that, the tech tools will let you do this in a powerful way by asking students to submit videos and create a montage of the highlights. Scroll to "CREATE AN INTERACTIVE GRADUATION EXPERIENCE" on page 8 for example prompts you can send students to help collect this content.

**ADDITIONAL SPEAKERS:** Consider asking members of local sports teams, news stations, or your school's alumni association to contribute a pre-recorded or live commencement speech. Another option is using a publicly available speech from [iHeartMedia](#) or [NPR](#).

# Musical Pieces and Performances



## **OPENING MUSIC:**

One of the most recognized components of graduation is the opening processional, *Pomp and Circumstance*. [Access and download](#) a digital recording or tap into the creativity of your band, orchestra, and/or choir directors. School musicians can put together a recording through virtual or socially distant collaboration. You can even display images of students on the screen while the music plays.

## **PERFORMANCES:**

Graduation offers an opportunity to celebrate talented members of the senior class by inviting them to perform for their school one last time.

- What musical acts or performances can you add to make your graduation feel true and personal to your school?
- Does your school have an official school song?

Ask senior musicians, dancers, and any other performers to submit a recording that can be featured before or during the virtual ceremony. And if a student uses background music, make sure to obtain the proper permission to feature songs used.

For suggestions on more ways to invite students, families, and educators to contribute to the ceremony, see "CREATE AN INTERACTIVE GRADUATION EXPERIENCE" on page 8.

# Recognize and Present the Graduates



Recognizing each graduate is the highlight of any graduation ceremony. For many families, seeing their students walk across stage and hearing their child's name read aloud is a treasured experience. Here are a few ideas to celebrate each and every graduate during your virtual ceremony:

**Ask students to submit a photo to be shown when their name is read.**

Whether students submit an image of their senior quote or a photo of themselves, this is a great way to reinvent a traditional in-person ceremony.

**Pre-record students walking across a stage.**

This sounds tricky to do, but it can be accomplished with planning and careful attention to state and local social distancing guidelines and current graduation policies. At Elizabethton High School in Tennessee, students were assigned 15-minute slots to walk across the auditorium stage, where a family member handed them their diploma. Each walk was recorded, and the video will be edited and played during the remote ceremony.

# Celebrate the Graduates



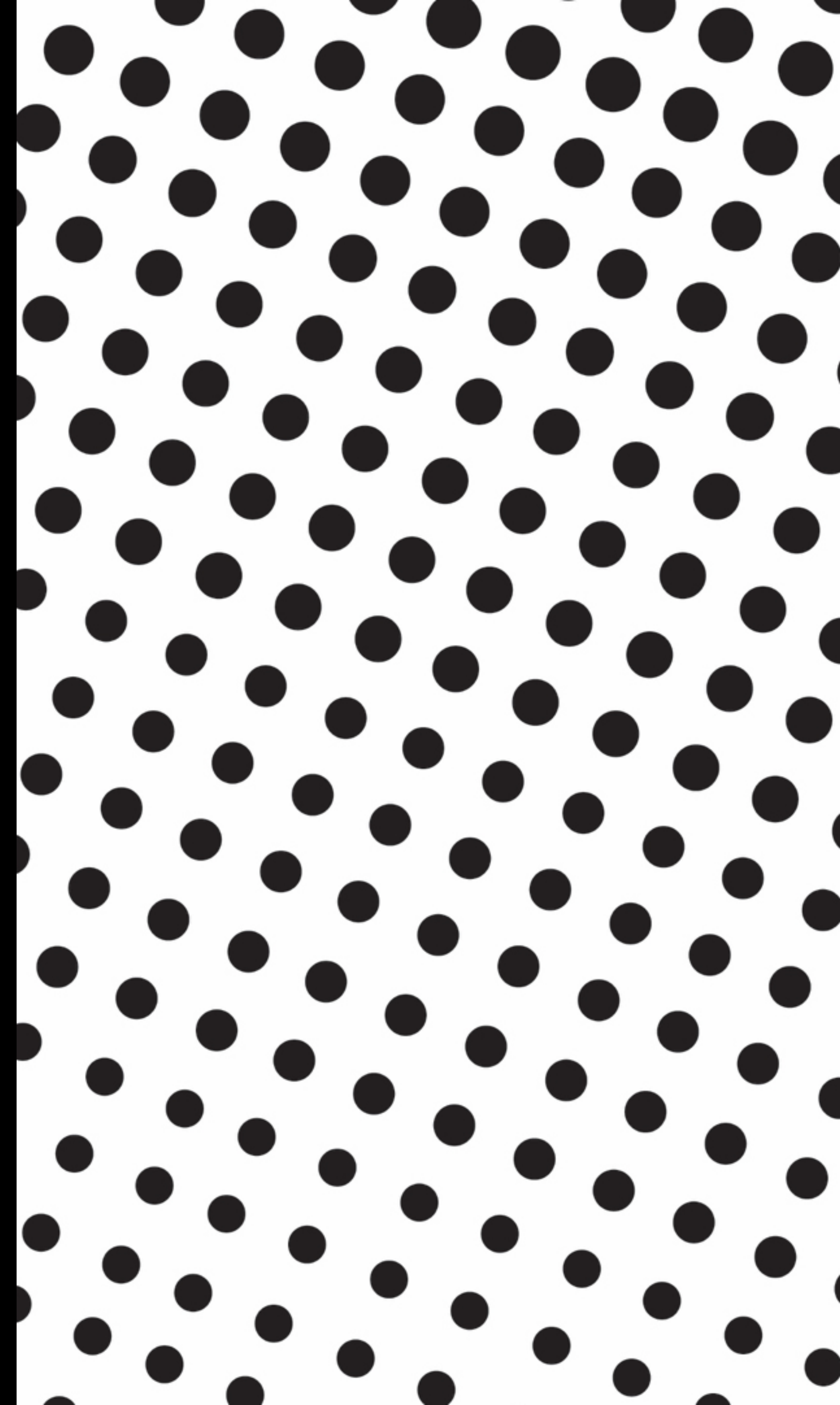
Even though schools can't gather in auditoriums or on sports fields for the ceremony, you can still celebrate a few time-honored graduation traditions in different ways:

- **Teach students** to move their tassels from right to left before the big day.
- **Livestream graduation cap throws** from students' homes, or ask them to designate a time that other seniors in their neighborhood can perform cap throws together while remaining socially distant.
- **Encourage students to decorate** the top of their caps to celebrate personal accomplishments—then share photos of their creations during the ceremony or on social media.
- **Incorporate creative social media features.** TikTok has created a filter that allows students to take a selfie holding a "diploma." Renowned artist JR also created a Snapchat Lens students can use to be included in [the largest yearbook, ever](#) (more info on page 18).
- **Use online software and programs** to create a virtual ceremony experience. Some students are using popular games like [Minecraft](#) and [Animal Crossing](#) to recreate their campus. Others are using it to create a virtual stage students can "walk" on during the ceremony.

3.

# Create an Interactive Graduation Experience

Although you're planning a virtual event, you can still make it interactive and dynamic. Ask students, educators, and families to send you videos and pictures via email or create your own submission website using web platforms like [Wix](#) or [Squarespace](#). Use the content submissions to create slideshows and video montages, which you can show prior to the ceremony (while attendees get settled) or during segments of the ceremony program. And while you may not have time to show off everything that's been submitted, you can keep the celebration going by posting the content to your school's or district's website, or to your school's social networks. See the following pages for prompts designed to inspire people to contribute.





# Prompts for Students

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## WORDS OF WISDOM

Your students will be entering the next phase of their life, sooner rather than later. This prompt gives them an opportunity to be the experts and share advice with adults and students who'll come after them.

**PROMPT:** *You did it. You made it to your senior year. And we know you've learned a lot along the way. You've gotten advice from adults for your entire life. Now it's your turn to give advice to them, and to the students who will come after you. What have you learned about making the world a better place that adults need to hear? What advice would you give to younger students to inspire them to change the world? Submit a 2- to 3-minute video.*

## STUDENT COMMENCEMENT SPEECH

Ask students to submit a mini version of a commencement speech they'd like to give their graduating class. Choose one or several to present during the ceremony.

**PROMPT:** *What's the lasting message you'd want to tell the Class of 2020? Be the voice of your graduating class. Submit a 2- to 3-minute video of a commencement speech you'd give the Class of 2020.*

## #2020GRADLIFE

The Class of 2020 has experienced a spring semester like no other. It's unlikely that another group of graduates will experience anything like that of the Class of 2020's. But that's what makes this graduating class so awesome. Ask students to share the fun quirks of remote learning that make it all worthwhile.

**PROMPT:** *You're experiencing a senior year unlike any other. You're expected to do things many of us never have. Share the funniest moments of your one-of-a-kind experience. Then, post it on social media using the hashtag #2020GradLife. Show us the fun and goofy "you know you're a 2020 senior when..." moments that make it all worth it with a photo or 10- to 15-second video.*

## SCHOOL SPIRIT

Give students an opportunity to showcase the great work many of their student groups, clubs, and organizations have done during this school year.

**PROMPT:** *Are you in a student group, club, or organization? Showcase the awesome work you've done this year. Submit a photo or 10- to 15-second video highlighting an aspect of your school's best performances, competitions, shows, artwork, capstone work, etc.*

## #THANKSFORTEACHINGME

Encourage students to share a message of appreciation for all the teachers who have helped them reach this momentous point in their life.

**PROMPT:** *You've worked so hard to get where you are. Who are the people who have supported you along the way? Your teachers, school leaders, coaches, and mentors are all part of your story. Give the people who have made the biggest impacts in your life a shoutout. Submit a 2- to 3-minute video. Then, share it on social media using #ThanksForTeachingMe.*

# Prompts for Families

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## **WHAT THE CLASS OF 2020 TAUGHT ME**

Students have learned so much from their families. Use this opportunity to tell students what your family has learned from them.

**PROMPT:** *As adults, you are your child's first teacher, so it's easy to see students as just that—kids. But you know, more than anyone else, that teaching your child is as much about learning from them as it is about them learning from you. Share a 2- to 3-minute video about what you've learned from your student and the Class of 2020.*

## **A LETTER OF THANKS**

Being an educator isn't easy. And many families are beginning to truly understand how hard that job is as they support students who are learning remotely. Ask families to share how much they appreciate your school's educators.

**PROMPT:** *Families like yours are getting a taste of what it's like to be a teacher. We know; it's hard! That's why it's so important to show teachers how much we appreciate the work they've done and continue to do. Share a 2- to 3-minute video to give them a shoutout.*

## **SCHOOL SPIRIT**

Many families have active students in school groups, clubs, and organizations. Ask families to showcase their students' hard work over the last school year by sending you a clip of their child in action.

**PROMPT:** *Nothing says school spirit like student groups, clubs, and organizations. Showcase the awesome work your student(s) did this year. Submit a photo or 10- to 15-second video highlighting an aspect of their best performance, competition, show, artwork, capstone work, etc.*

# Prompts for Educators



## **WHAT THE CLASS OF 2020 TAUGHT ME**

Students have learned a lot from educators, and graduation is a great time to tell students what educators learned from them.

**PROMPT:** *As adults, it's easy to see students as "kids." But you know more than anyone else, that teaching is as much about learning from your students as it is about them learning from you. Share a 2- to 3-minute video about what you've learned from the Class of 2020.*

## **SCHOOL SPIRIT**

There are so many great student groups, clubs, and organizations. Ask the teachers and staff members involved in them to showcase their students' hard work over the school year.

**PROMPT:** *Nothing says school spirit like student groups, clubs, and organizations. Showcase the awesome work your students did this year. Submit a photo or 10- to 15-second video highlighting an aspect of their best performance, competition, artwork, capstone work, etc.*

## **ABOVE AND BEYOND**

Ask teachers and staff to share stories about educators at your school who have gone above and beyond to ensure students succeed whether your building is open or closed.

**PROMPT:** *Do you know a fellow educator who's gone above and beyond to ensure students succeed whether school buildings are open or closed? Is that someone you? Submit a video 2- to 3-minute video sharing these stories.*

## **EVERYDAY HERO**

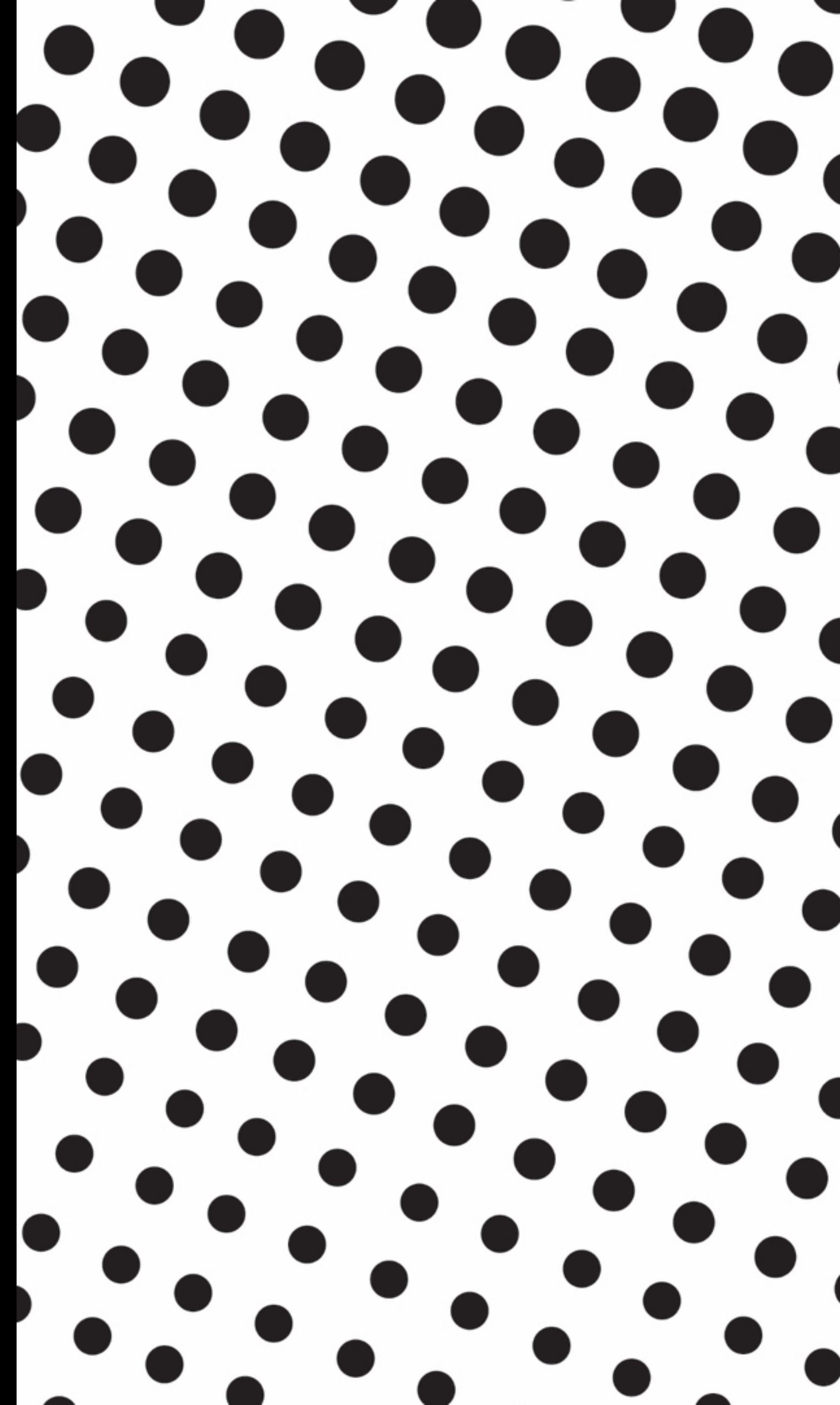
From teachers who go the extra mile for students to cafeteria team members working overtime to provide meals to hungry families, your school community is filled with everyday heroes. Ask educators to share uplifting stories from your school.

**PROMPT:** *From teachers and school leaders to janitors and families, there are so many people who work outside the constructs of their job title to ensure students succeed. Do you know an everyday hero in your school community whose story deserves to be told? Or is that someone you? Submit a 2- to 3-minute video telling the everyday hero's story.*

4.

# Manage Ceremony Logistics

Planning the logistics of a virtual graduation ceremony is very similar to planning an in-person one, but with different tools. Keep reading for a step-by-step guide that integrates the technological aspect of your event.



## STEP 1

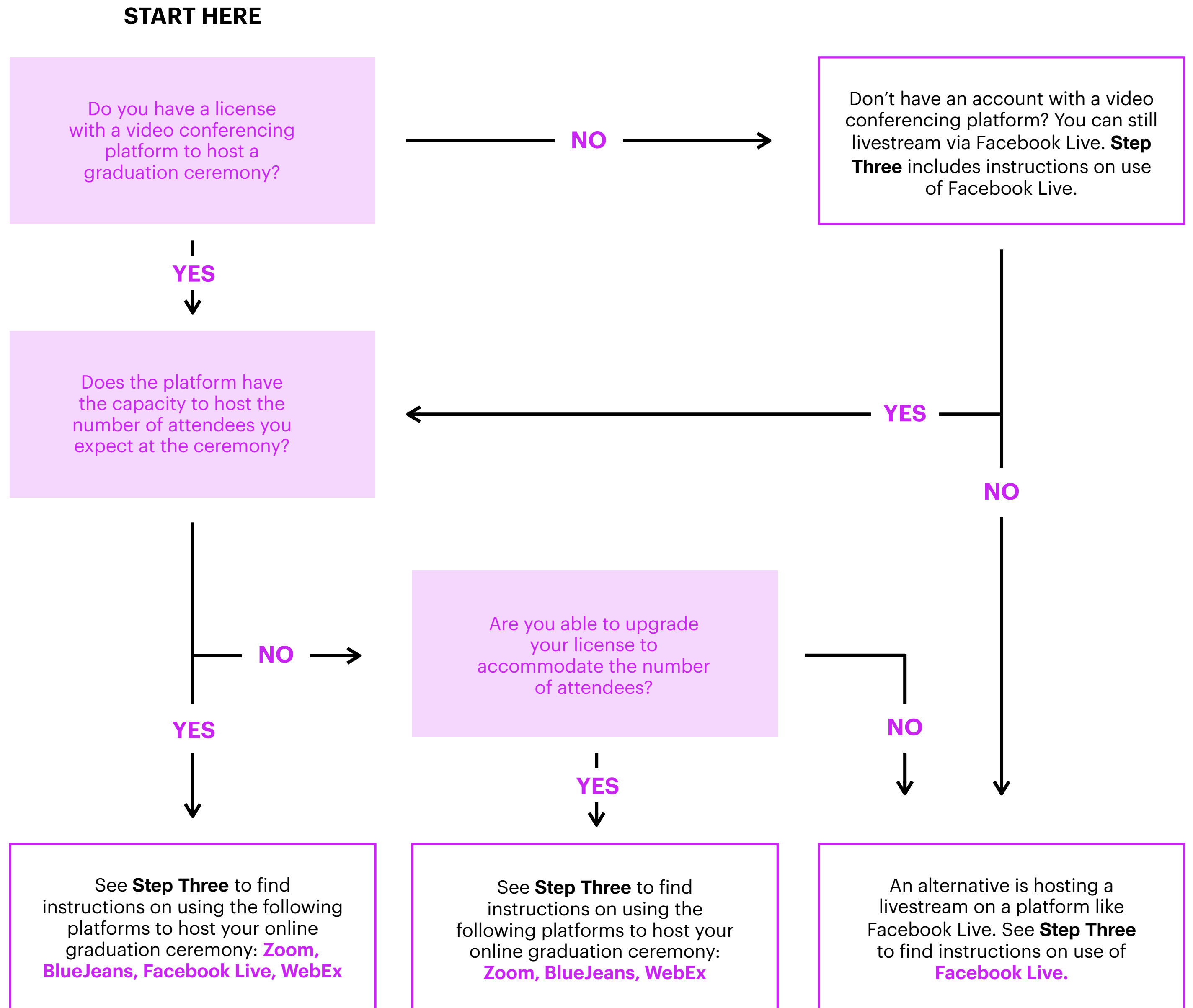
# Set a Date

Set a date for the big day and remember to coordinate within your district, CMO, and/or community. Decide whether you want to host your own ceremony or a larger joint ceremony with other schools in your district.

## STEP 2

# Decide on a Platform

If you have an existing video conferencing license, check to see that it meets your ceremony's attendance needs. If it doesn't, you may be able to share the ceremony through a livestream. View the decision tree to the right to help you through the thought process.



## STEP 3

# Review Available Tech Platforms

### ZOOM

- Schedule a [webinar](#) with your existing license. Make sure your license meets [the requirements](#) to livestream the webinar to Facebook or Youtube.
- Consider asking speakers to record in advance, then [share the content with your attendees via screen share](#). Be sure to [optimize your screen share for video clips](#) and to [share your computer sound during screen sharing](#).
- If your Zoom license doesn't meet your graduation attendance needs, click [here](#) for more on how to broadcast a livestream of your Zoom webinar to Facebook or Youtube.

### BLUEJEANS

- Schedule a [meeting](#) with your existing license.
- Consider asking your student and staff speakers to record their content in advance, then [upload and share it with your attendees](#) via screen share.
- If your BlueJeans license doesn't meet your graduation attendance needs, [here](#) is how you can broadcast a livestream of your meeting to Facebook.

### WEBEX

- Schedule a [meeting](#) or [event](#) with your existing license.
- Ask speakers to record their content in advance, then [share it with your attendees](#).
- If your WebEx license doesn't meet your graduation attendance needs, [here's](#) more information on how to broadcast a livestream of your meeting to platforms like Facebook.

### FACEBOOK LIVE

- Get started with Facebook Live [here](#).
- You will have the option to go live instantly, or schedule a livestream in advance. You will also have the option to screen share.
- Decide where and how to promote your livestream.
- Consider asking your speakers to record their content in advance, then share it with your attendees during your Facebook Live broadcast

Be sure to explore other options, too. No matter which platform you choose, consider putting together a committee to help manage the production of your graduation event. **Then, do a test run of the full ceremony several times before the big day to ensure that everything goes off without a hitch. And if you plan to record it, get the appropriate permissions.**

## STEP 4

# Determine Guests and Create Invitations



It's important to get a good estimate of how many people will be attending your online ceremony. Depending on the platform and accompanying license you choose, there may be limitations regarding how many viewers you have the capacity to host. Send out invitations and RSVPs to students, their families, and any relevant community members like school board members, district or network leadership, and other community leaders.

## STEP 5


# Gather Content from Students, Educators, and Families



Once you have a good idea of your tech needs, it's a good time to revisit the "CREATE AN INTERACTIVE GRADUATION EXPERIENCE" section on page 8 of this toolkit. Determine where you want students, educators, and families to send videos and photos (i.e. a specific email address or submission website). Then, send out a call for submissions through email, on your school or submission website, and on social media channels.

## STEP 6

# Create a Commemorative Program

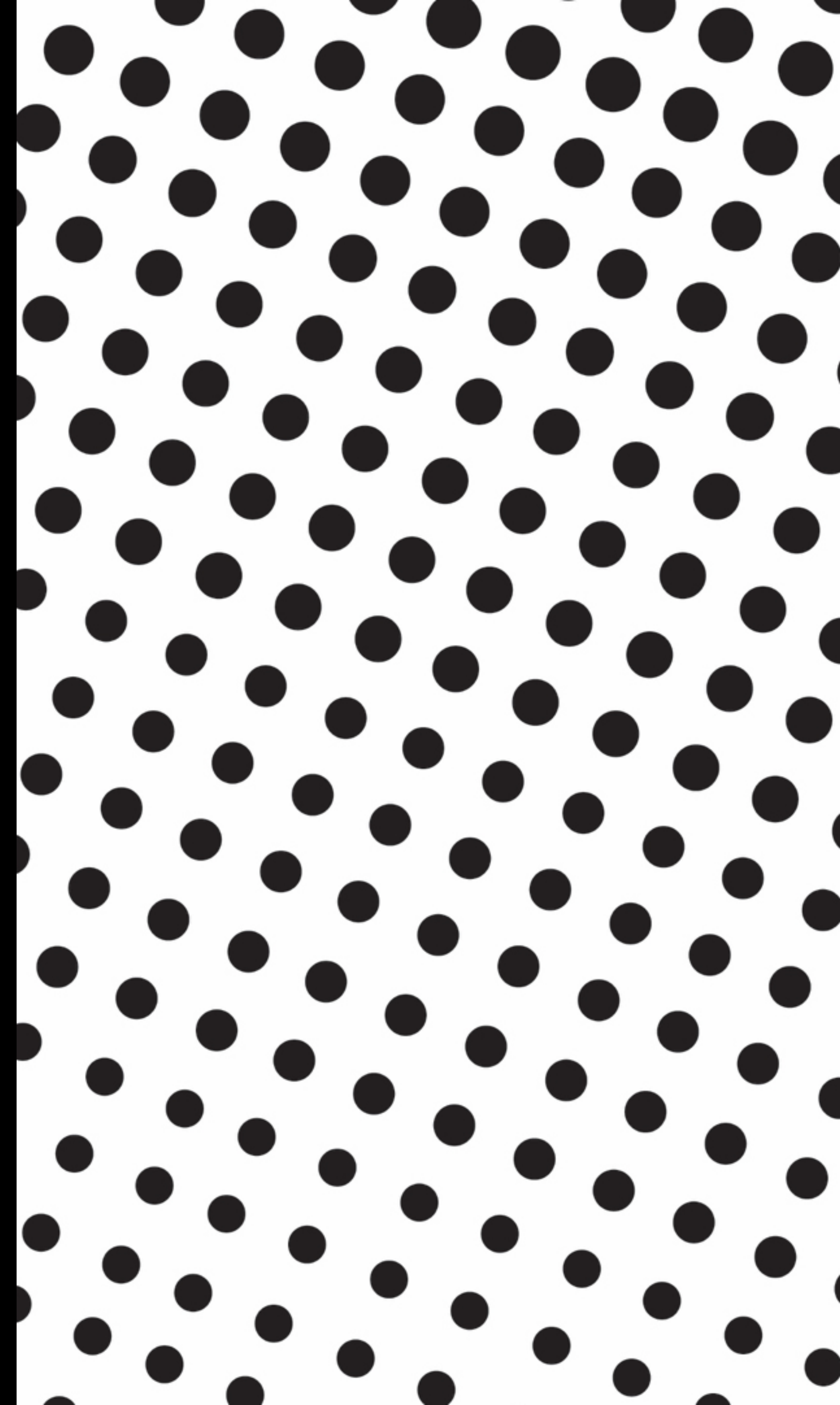


Send attendees a digital link or attachment of your graduation program. Be sure it lists every graduate's name and includes the agenda, as well as any other special recognitions.

5.

# Organize Wrap-Around Experiences

High school graduation is a time when entire communities come together. And although social distancing orders are in place, there's no reason you can't continue to engage with students, teachers, families, community organizations—your whole community—in celebrating the Class of 2020 from a distance.





# Rethink Together on the XQ Forum

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The [XQ Forum](#) is a place where high school students, teachers, leaders, and families can stay connected, especially during a time when we all need a sense of community. It's a source for engaging content, eye-opening learning experiences, and honest dialogue.

- On-demand events
- Moderated conversations with experts
- Forum & roundtable discussions
- Interactive learning experiences
- Exclusive live programming

**Visit the Forum:**  
[rethinktogether.com](https://rethinktogether.com)



## Already Celebrating Your High School Seniors Locally?

Share what you're doing with high school students, educators, and families on the [XQ Forum](#). And hopefully, it will bring joy to a high school community and inspire them to follow your lead.

# Encourage Students to Add Their Portraits to the Graduate Together Yearbook

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Renowned artist JR and his global participatory art project, Inside Out, are inviting high school seniors everywhere to share their own portraits to be included in the largest yearbook, ever. The [Graduate Together Yearbook](#) allows seniors to express themselves in a one-of-a-kind way, together with every high school senior in America. There's even a cool Snapchat filter for students to use during submission and on social media.



# Create a Facebook Group

This is a great way for educators, students, and families to stay connected about graduation-related activities. Here are instructions on [how to create a Facebook Group](#):

- Click Create in the top right of Facebook and select Group.
- Enter your group name, add group members and then choose the [privacy option](#) for your group.
- Click Create.

Once you create your group, you can personalize it by [uploading a cover photo](#) and adding a description.

The screenshot shows the Facebook interface for a group named "Teach For The Future". The top navigation bar includes the Facebook logo, a search bar, and links for Home, Create, and notifications. The group cover photo features a top-down view of hands working with wooden sticks and small white blocks on a dark surface, with the text "TEACH FOR THE FUTURE" overlaid in large white letters. Below the cover is a blue "Join Group" button and a "More" button with the text "Join this group to post and comment." The "RECENT ACTIVITY" section shows a post from "XQ America" from yesterday at 6:04 AM. The post content is: "Question of the Day: What are some creative ideas that you've used to increase student engagement during video calls?". The post has 4 likes, 8 comments, and 2 shares. On the right side, the "GROUP BY" section identifies the group as "XQ America" with 248,342 likes and a "Learn More" button. Below that is the "DESCRIPTION" section, which states: "Teach for the Future is an online community facilitated by XQ In... See More". The "GROUP TYPE" is listed as "General". The "RECENT GROUP PHOTOS" section shows three thumbnails: "16 Everyday Activities That Count as Learning", "7 TIPS for Remote Learning", and "AND CONNECTED. CONFIDENT. CREATIVE.". The "Suggested Groups" section at the bottom shows a group titled "TEACHERS!".

# Host an Online Graduation Party

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Follow the same steps from the “CEREMONY LOGISTICS” section on page 12 to host an online graduation party. Make it family-friendly or encourage students to plan their own. Use the chat function of your video conferencing platform for students to send each other well-wishes and share memories from the school year. You can even work with a local or student DJ to create a playlist for the event.



# Create a Senior Photo Driveway

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To celebrate graduates, a Florida principal enlarged the senior portrait of each graduating student and lined both sides of the street leading to the school with those photos. [See the story here.](#)

*Disclaimer: Get permission from guardians to use photos of students who are under the age of 18; ask students who are 18 and older directly for permission to use their photos.*

*Photo Credit:  
Farica West, Principal, Poplar Springs High School*



# Encourage Families to Decorate Their Front Doors

Families everywhere are celebrating their graduates by decorating their front doors for the entire neighborhood to see. [See more examples here.](#)

Photo Credit:  
Warren Hills Regional High School, Twitter  
Matthew Scanlon, Principal, Phillisburg High School



# Have a School Bus Parade

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Decorate school buses and drive them around your community at a specific time and date. Students, families, and community members can stand in their driveways or look outside their windows to enjoy the parade from a distance.

*Photo Credit:  
Deb Barrett, Parent, Mason City Schools*



# Ask the Community to Join the Fun

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Firefighters in Ohio honored the class of 2020 by flashing their lights for 20 minutes and 20 seconds. High schools around the country did something similar by keeping stadium lights on for the same amount of time.

*Photo Credit:  
Milford Community Fire Department, Facebook Page*



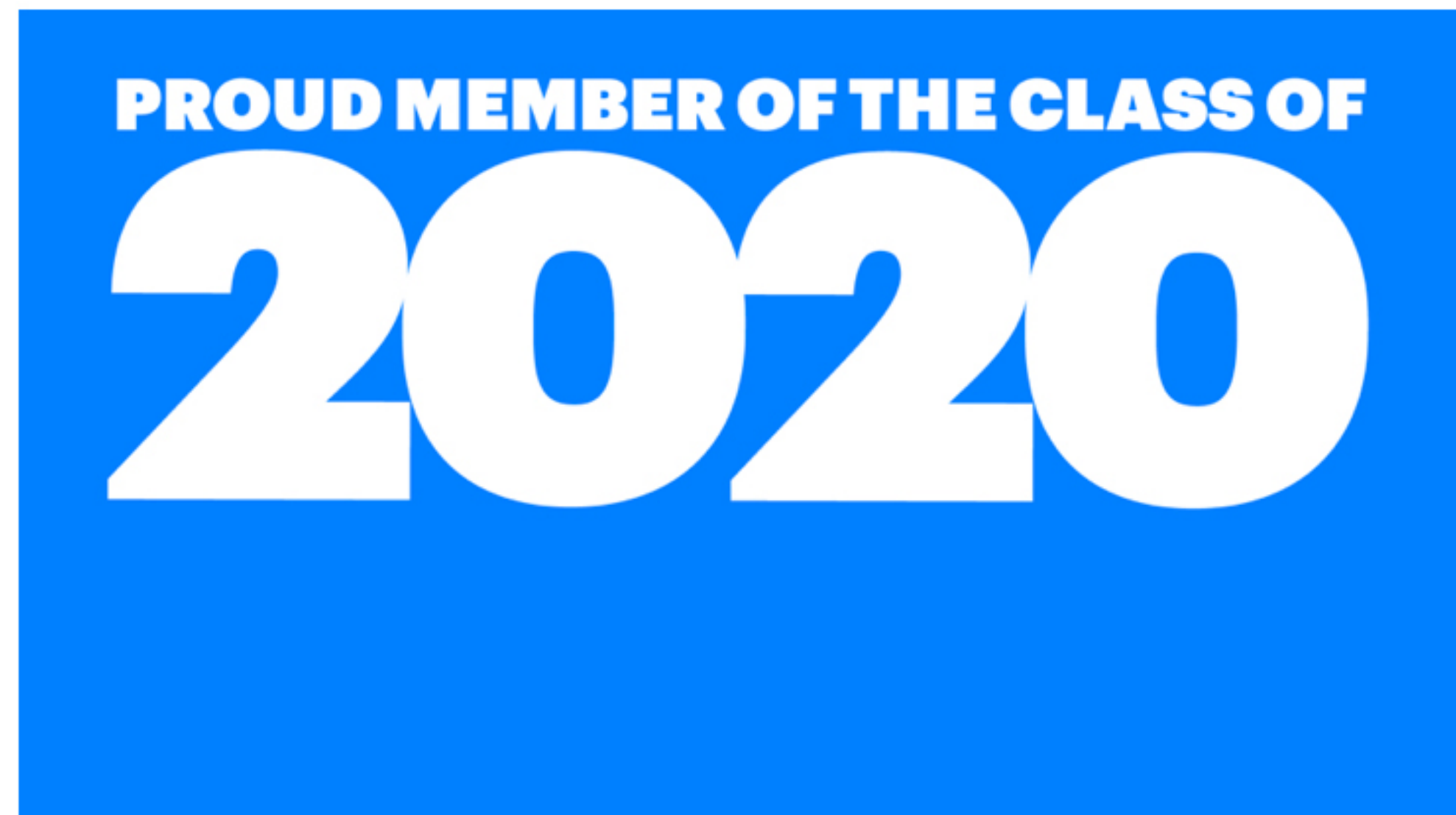
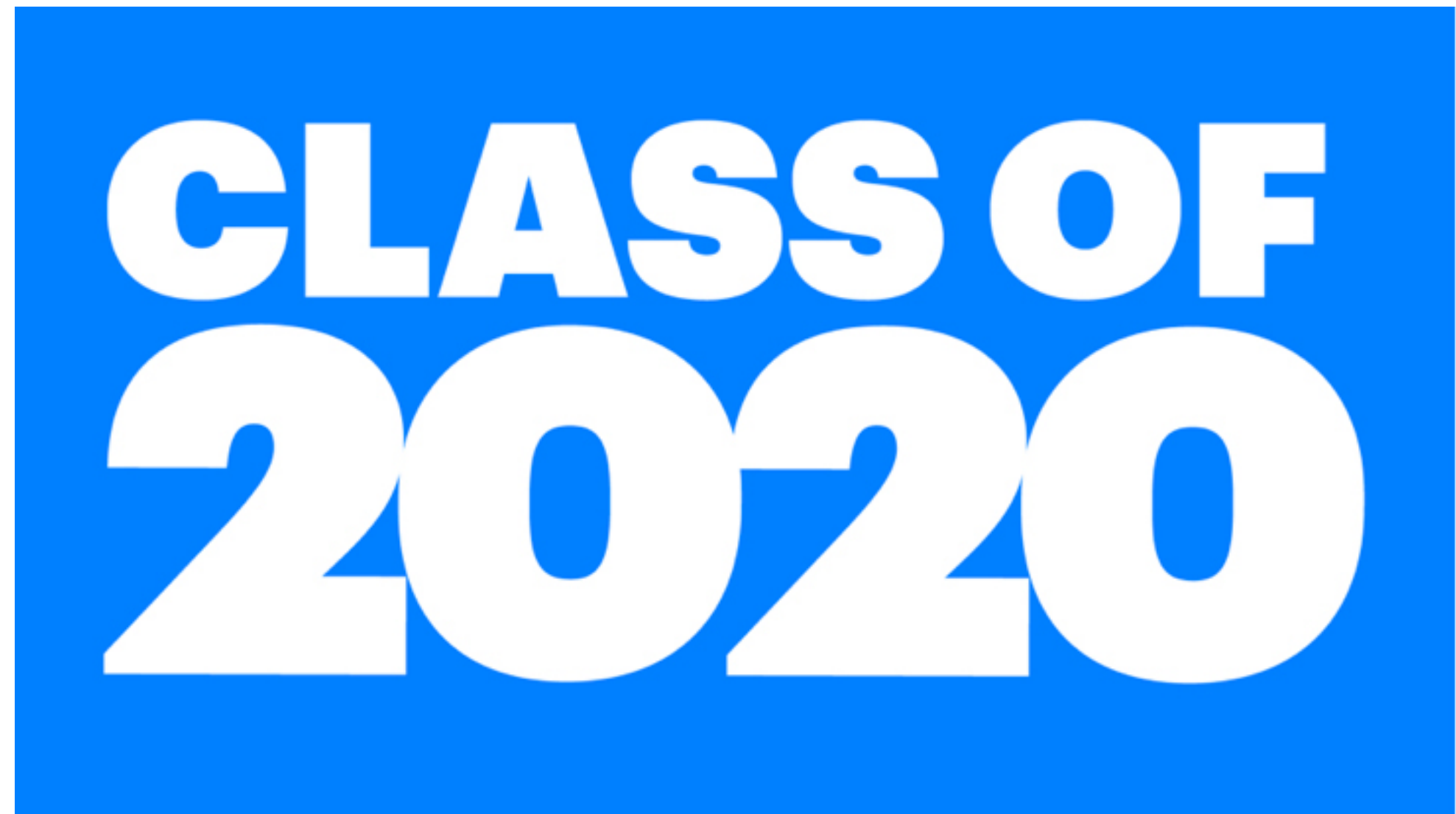
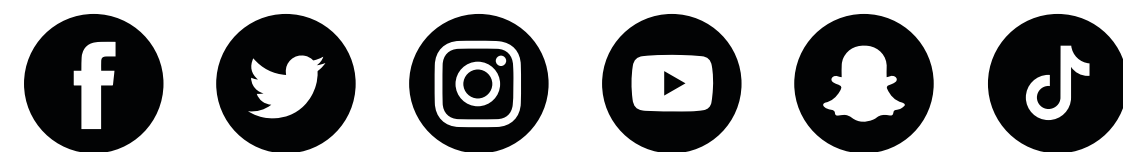


# Make Templates to Use during the Ceremony or on Social Media

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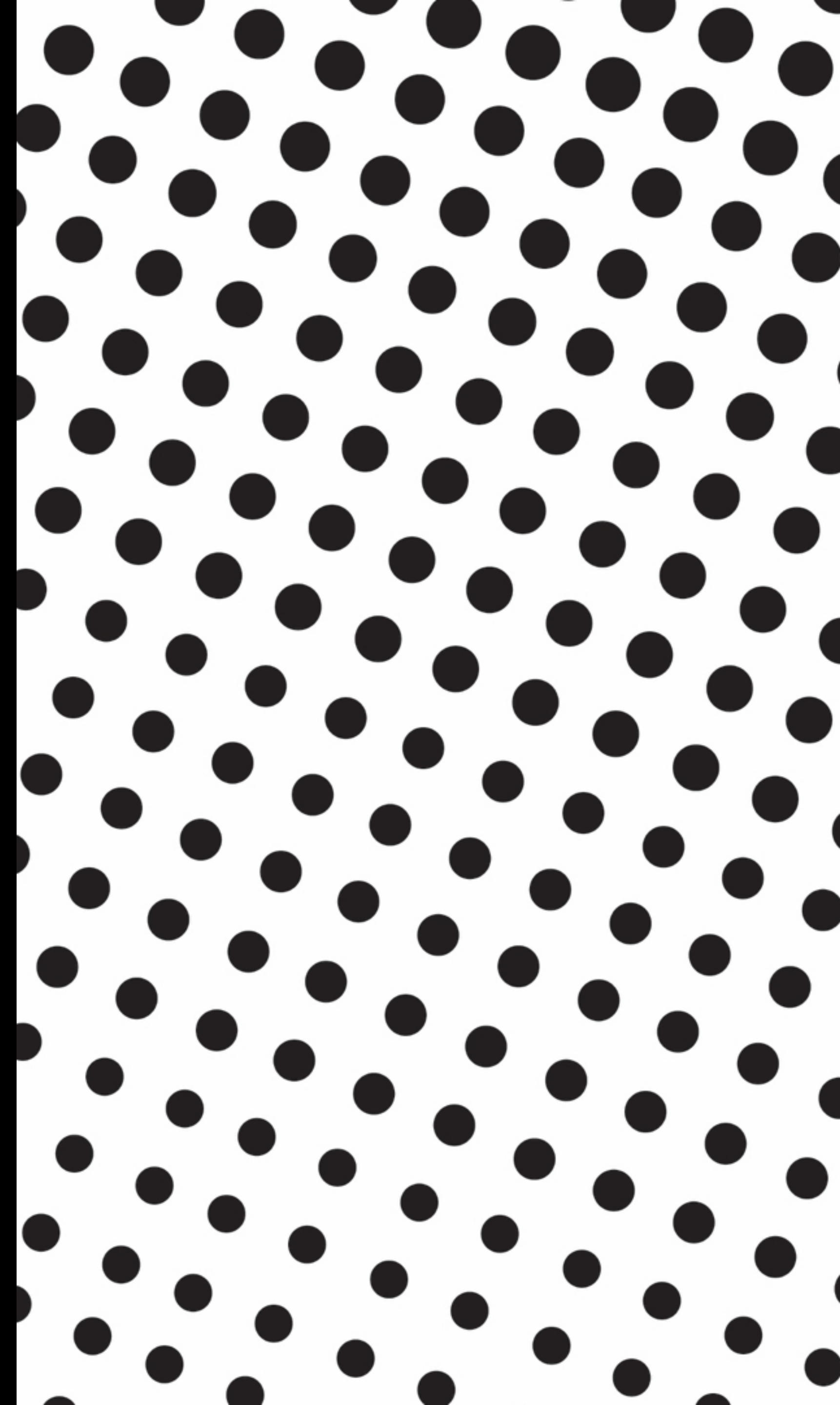
Provide attendees [these ready-made Class of 2020 ZOOM background and printable posters](#) to show off during your virtual ceremony or on social media posts. You can also design your own using your school colors.

And remember to share Class of 2020 memories with us on social media by using the hashtag #GraduateTogether.



**6.**

# **Important Reminders**



# Technology



While planning your school's online graduation ceremony, it's important to acknowledge that not all students will have internet access or the required technology to view it. Maybe your school has already figured out how to ensure that all students have the devices and internet access they need for remote learning; those tools will help with your online graduation, too.

If your school hasn't taken those steps, now's the time to make sure every single graduate and their families have the internet access and technology necessary to celebrate this important milestone with the entire school community.

- Check the internet providers in your area to see if they can help with low-cost or free access for graduating seniors and their families. Comcast, for example, is offering free services for qualified applicants through its [Internet Essentials](#) program. There are similar programs from [AT&T](#) and [Sprint](#).
- In some areas, families can connect through publicly available WiFi hotspots at places like public libraries.
- [EveryoneON](#) is a resource you can use to help families in your area find low-cost internet service and devices.

# Accessibility



It's crucial to take steps that include students with disabilities during your remote graduation ceremony. For example, you can incorporate assistive or adaptive technology listed in the student's IEP or 504 plan (i.e., voice to text, text to voice, closed captioning, etc.) to make your graduation accessible to all students. You can also brainstorm with families on the best solutions to include students with disabilities.

Here are some additional resources to support students with disabilities:

- [Innovate Public Schools](#)
- [Center on Online Learning and Students With Disabilities](#)
- [National Center for Special Education in Charter Schools](#)

**Congratulations, Class of  
2020! Very best of luck to  
each and every one of you.**

**— *Your friends at XQ***

*Special thanks to the partners who advised on the creation of this toolkit:  
Elizabethton High School, Furr High School, Vista High School, and The Council of  
Chief State School Officers (CCSSO).*

# About XQ™

XQ Institute is the nation's leading organization dedicated to rethinking the high school experience so that every student graduates ready to succeed in life. We work in communities throughout the country, with individual schools and entire school systems, to help them dream big about what high school could be, turn their innovative ideas into action, and create more rigorous and equitable schools. We share what's working with other schools and districts, so they can tailor new models to the needs of their own students and communities. We know that seeing is believing, so we meet people where they are to share the importance and possibility of change through listening, learning, and storytelling. And our open-source tools, based on research and design thinking, empower people to take up the challenge of transforming their high schools with a unifying goal: unlocking the American promise of a high-quality education for everyone.

XQ was co-founded by board chair Laurene Powell Jobs, founder and president of Emerson Collective, and Russlynn Ali, XQ's CEO and former U.S. assistant secretary of education for civil rights. XQ's board of directors also includes Geoffrey Canada, Marc Eckō, Jimmy Iovine, Michael Klein, and Yo-Yo Ma. To learn more, visit <http://www.xqsuperschool.org>.

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