



Board Meeting Date: 7/8/2024

Title: 2024 Graduation Debrief Overview

Type: Discussion

Presenter(s): Dr. Stacie Stanley, Superintendent, and Principal Paul Paetzel

Description: School Board and administration received communications regarding concerns about the 2024 EHS graduation. To support feedback loops, the administration conducted an event debrief, garnered & reviewed feedback from the families of graduates for themes, conducted a SWOT analysis and provided follow-up communication. A summary of this information is provided to the School Board for review.

Recommendation: No recommendation required at this time.

Desired Outcomes from the Board: Read through information have prepared questions or comments.

Attachment(s): None

The School Board and administration received communications regarding concerns the 2024 EHS graduation. To support feedback loops, the administration conducted an event debrief, garnered & reviewed feedback from the families of graduates for themes, conducted a SWOT analysis and provided follow-up communications. This report is intended to provide the school board with information about the follow-up process.

Pre-graduation Planning: Edina Public Schools administration began holding pre-graduation planning meetings in April 2024. Given the school board protests that had occurred during the school year, the administration team desired to have a plan in place to mitigate a graduation disruption to the best of their ability. The pre-planning team used the district adopted Homerun Leadership - Information, Reactions, Options, Decision (IROD) decision making model process from Dave Webb, 2022. Each administrator has been trained in the model. Through the process an incident command outline was developed, and the decision was made to require tickets to attend the graduation.

- EHS administration toured Mariucci Arena and met with the U of M security to finalize how ticket admission would be implemented. At that time EHS administration were notified that U of M staff would conduct bag checks to remove noise maker paraphernalia; a protocol that was being used for all 2024 graduations.
- EHS Administration ordered watermarked tickets and communicated to the parents/guardians of 2024 graduates about the updated admissions protocol.

- Tickets were distributed to students when they picked up their graduation regalia.
- To ensure the guests of all graduates would be able to fully access/experience the graduation, interpreters and interpreter headsets were secured.

Final Graduation Check-in: Two final graduation preparation meetings were scheduled prior to graduation.

- On the morning of June 3, 2024, EPS cabinet members and EHS administration met to finalize incident command protocols. The head of U of M security joined the meeting. At that time EPS administration were assured that the ticketing process should run smoothly.
- Communication was crafted and sent to the parents/guardians of 2024 graduates that outlined the etiquette protocols for graduation.
- An onsite meeting was held at Mariucci immediately before the graduation ceremony to review incident command procedures and the run of graduation. Recently received information about inclement weather was also provided.

Post Graduation Feedback & event analysis: In the immediate days following graduation, EPS school board members (via Edina School Board email account) and EPS administration received many stakeholder email communications that expressed concerns about graduation.

- Email included concerns about extended cheering and resulting inability to hear their graduate's name called, inability to hear speeches due to ongoing talking and milling around of some ceremony attendees, tardiness of some ceremony attendees, and presence of noise makers.
- EPS administration analyzed the content of the email for themes. In addition, EPS administration sent a survey to the parents/guardians of 2024 graduates to ensure they had a chance to provide feedback.
- An event Debrief meeting was held on June 10, 2024. During this meeting the superintendent was advised that:
 - Five minutes before the ceremony started, the EHS ceremony project manager was notified that the U of M would not check tickets.
 - Due to the heavy rain, many ceremony attendees entered the lobby earlier than typical, which lead to significant congestion.
 - There is one elevator in the lobby and due to the congestion, the elevator was very difficult to access.
 - Families weren't able to access interpreter headsets, as they were blocked and inaccessible because many ceremony attendees filled the lobby earlier than typical due to inclement weather.
 - Several ceremony attendees lingered in the lobby after the graduation ceremony ended, causing a backup during the exit.

The following themes surfaced from the survey data:

Crowd Noise

A significant number of survey respondents complained about the excessive noise from the crowd. This included loud talking, cheering, and the use of noise makers. The noise was seen as disrespectful and disruptive, making it hard to hear the ceremony.

Behavioral Expectations

Many survey respondents were disappointed by what they perceived as disrespectful behavior from some ceremony attendees. This included talking during speeches, excessive cheering, and general disregard for the stated ceremony etiquette.

Ticketing System

There were complaints about the ticketing system, with some survey respondents noting that tickets were not checked upon entry. This led to questions about the necessity of the tickets and concerns about overcrowding.

Safety Concerns

A few survey respondents raised safety concerns, particularly regarding the exit from the venue. They described a dangerous situation with a crowd bottleneck at the exit, which was particularly difficult for older respondents.

Event Organization

There were some criticisms of the event organization, including the entry process and the lack of clear directions. Survey respondents suggested that better planning and communication could improve the overall experience.

Venue Acoustics

Many survey respondents mentioned the poor acoustics of the venue, which made it difficult to hear the speeches and names being called. This was a common complaint, with some suggesting a different venue with better acoustics for future events.

Event Duration

Some survey respondents felt that the ceremony was too long, particularly due to the excessive cheering and disruptions. They suggested that the event could be shortened by limiting the number of speeches and controlling the crowd noise.

Accessibility Issues

Several survey respondents raised concerns about the accessibility of the venue, particularly for individuals who could not use stairs. Some suggested that more accessible seating options should be provided in the future. Concerns were raised about the inaccessibility of interpreter headsets.

Positive Aspects

Despite the criticisms, some survey respondents did mention positive aspects of the ceremony. They appreciated the efforts of the staff, the decoration of the venue, and the opportunity to celebrate the graduates' achievements.

SWOT Analysis

The feedback provided by the survey respondents offers valuable insights into the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats related to the graduation ceremony.

Strength	Weakness
<p>Summary: Despite the criticisms, some survey respondents appreciated the efforts of the staff, the decoration of the venue, and the opportunity to celebrate the graduates' achievements.</p> <p>Key Takeaways: The staff's facilitation, the venue's decoration, and the celebration of achievements were appreciated.</p>	<p>Summary: Many survey respondents mentioned the poor acoustics of the venue, excessive crowd noise, accessibility issues, and the ineffective ticketing system.</p> <p>Key Takeaways: Improvements are needed in venue acoustics, with crowd engagement, accessibility, and ticketing system.</p>
Opportunities	Threats
<p>Summary: The feedback provides an opportunity to improve the event organization, address celebratory differences and expectations, and enhance the overall graduation experience.</p> <p>Key Takeaways: Better planning, communication, and understanding of and figuring out how to manage celebratory differences and expectations can enhance the event. Evaluate and make adjustments to the ticketing system to provide clarity about the necessity and ensure it doesn't cause overcrowding.</p>	<p>Summary: Safety concerns, particularly regarding the exit from the venue, and disrespectful behavior reported from some survey respondents pose threats to the success of future ceremonies.</p> <p>Key Takeaways: Addressing safety concerns and managing crowd behavior are crucial to prevent potential disruptions and ensure a successful event. Tickets should be scanned or no tickets should be used.</p>

Focus Areas and Next Steps:

Our administrative team has met several times to debrief each aspect of the graduation ceremony. We are considering a range of measures to address concerns and ensure that future graduation ceremonies will be enjoyed by everyone in attendance. The following focus areas and next steps were identified.

Focus Area One: Crowd Engagement & Improve Event Organization (Fall - Winter 2024)

Challenges: (1) Excessive noise from the crowd, including loud talking and cheering, was a common frustration. This disrupted the ceremony and made it difficult for others to hear and enjoy the ceremony. (2) Confusing entry and exit processes. Ticket processes not followed led to perception of overcrowding. Size of the departing crowd led to bottleneck and safety concerns particularly for older attendees.

Next Steps:

- Ensure all ceremony attendees have a clear understanding of expectations regarding acceptable noise levels and noise makers, to ensure a positive experience for all who attend.
- Review and revise ticketing structure to limit overcrowding and excessive cheering for graduates. Revise exit procedures to limit bottlenecks and foster safety for all attendees and particularly for those who are older.
- Ensure proactive translated communications are provided well in advance and verbal interpretation is provided during the ceremony that provides clear guidelines to attendees about expected etiquette for the ceremony.
- Consider having community volunteers and/or security personnel to monitor the crowd and address any disruptive behavior.

Focus Area Two: Improve Venue Acoustics & Accessibility (Fall - Winter 2024)

Challenges: (1) Many participants expressed frustration about the poor acoustics of the venue, which made it difficult to hear the speeches and names being called. This detracted from the overall experience of the graduation ceremony. (2) Several participants raised concerns about the accessibility of the venue, particularly for individuals who could not use stairs.

Next Steps:

- Meet with the Mariucci venue manager.
- Consider changing the venue to a smaller, more acoustically friendly location.
- Use technology such as closed captioning or individual listening devices to ensure everyone can hear the proceedings clearly.
- Choose a venue with better accessibility features, such as ramps and multiple elevators.
- Provide clear information about accessibility options at the venue in advance.
- Consider offering special seating arrangements for those with mobility needs.

Focus Area Three: Engaging 2025 Graduates and Families (Fall 2024 - Spring 2025)

Intended Outcomes: (1) Ensure the perspectives of 2025 graduates and families are garnered and used in planning. (2) Ensure that families and graduates are provided on-going updates on plans.

- Schedule and host gatherings to garner ideas and feedback.
- Develop and implement a communication schedule.

Final follow-up Communication: On June 27, 2024, the following communication was sent to the parents/guardians of our 2024 graduates.

Dear Parent/Guardian of 2024 Edina Public Schools Graduates,

We hope your summer is off to a good start. We are writing to share information regarding the work underway to assess this year's high school graduation ceremony and how we are approaching planning for future ceremonies. We have received numerous emails and nearly 300 responses to our graduation survey. Thank you to everyone who shared their feedback. We understand there were several factors that impacted your experience, and we sincerely apologize for the adverse impact.

We heard concerns regarding these topics:

- *Crowd noise and disruptive behaviors.*
- *Ticketing procedures.*
- *Interpretation devices being inaccessible.*
- *Bottlenecks entering and exiting the venue.*
- *Inadequate accessibility for some attendees.*
- *Venue acoustics.*

Our administrative team has met several times to debrief each aspect of the graduation ceremony. We are considering a range of measures to address your concerns and ensure that future graduation ceremonies will be enjoyed by everyone in attendance. We have outlined focus areas and the following next steps below:

Focus Area One: Improve Event Organization & Crowd Engagement (Fall - Winter 2024)

Challenges: (1) Excessive noise from the crowd, including loud talking and cheering, was a common frustration. This disrupted the ceremony and made it difficult for others to hear and enjoy the ceremony. (2) Confusing entry and exit processes. Ticket processes not followed led to perception of overcrowding. Size of the departing crowd led to bottleneck and safety concerns particularly for older attendees.

Next Steps:

- *Ensure all ceremony attendees have a clear understanding of expectations regarding acceptable noise levels and noise makers, to ensure a positive experience for all who attend.*
- *Review and revise ticketing structure to limit overcrowding and excessive cheering for graduates. Revise exit procedures to limit bottlenecks and foster safety for all attendees and those who are older in particular.*
- *Ensure proactive translated communications are provided well in advance and verbal interpretation is provided during the ceremony that provides clear guidelines to attendees about expected etiquette for the ceremony.*
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- *Schedule and host gatherings to garner ideas and feedback.*
- *Develop and implement a communication schedule.*

We are committed to hosting a graduation ceremony that truly honors our graduates and the community of parents, guardians, loved ones, and staff who have supported them. We are deeply proud of all of our graduates and believe that Edina High School has prepared them well to realize their full potential to thrive. We hope that our graduates and you enjoy the rest of your summer break.

Sincerely Yours,

Dr. Stacie Stanley
Superintendent

Mr. Paul Paetzel
Principal