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KCS announces graduation schedule

Congratulations to the Class of 2020! Despite the challenges presented by COVID-19, Knox County Schools is committed to honoring this year's graduates and to celebrating their achievements.

With that in mind, Superintendent Bob Thomas recently announced a plan to hold graduation ceremonies between June 8 and June 20. These events will be held at each school's football field, except for Career Magnet Academy, Paul Valley Academy and L&N STEM Academy, which will hold graduation ceremonies at Central High School. Ridgedale and K.A.E.C. will host graduation ceremonies at their respective schools.

A full schedule is included below. Each graduate will be provided tickets to bring up to four guests. Attendees will be expected to follow precautionary guidelines such as physical distancing among guests, wearing a mask or cloth face covering and staying home if experiencing fever, cough or other symptoms.

Graduation Schedule

MONDAY, JUNE 8

9 a.m. - Halls High School
7 p.m. - Powell High School

TUESDAY, JUNE 9

9 a.m. - Karna High School
7 p.m. - South-Doyle High School

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 10

Rain Date
THURSDAY, JUNE 11
9 a.m. - Carter High School
Noon - Ridgedale School
7 p.m. - Fulton High School

FRIDAY, JUNE 12

9 a.m. - Austin-East High School
Noon - K.A.E.C.
7 p.m. - Gibbs High School

SATURDAY, JUNE 13

9 a.m. - Central High School
7 p.m. - Bearden High School

MONDAY, JUNE 15

9 a.m. - Paul Valley Academy (at Central High)
7 p.m. - Hardin Valley Academy

TUESDAY, JUNE 16

9 a.m. - L&N STEM Academy (at Central High)
7 p.m. - Career Magnet Academy (at Central High)

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 17

Rain Date
THURSDAY, JUNE 18
7 p.m. - West High School

FRIDAY, JUNE 19

7 p.m. - Farragut High School

SATURDAY, JUNE 20

Rain Date

* In the event of inclement weather, the school's graduation ceremony will be rescheduled to the next available rain date.



PHOTO BY KEN LAY

Several Central High School seniors are saluted and cheered at a recent parade on the school's campus.

COVID-19 won't stop the Class of 2020

By Ken Lay

Since March, Knoxville's schools have been closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Classes, school activities, sports and some proms have been canceled and many schools have postponed graduation ceremonies until mid-June.

That left parents and administrators to take things into their own hands to honor the Class of 2020. Carter, Hardin Valley Academy, Christian Academy of Knoxville have had parades honoring their senior classes.

On Friday, May 15, Central High School had a drive-by parade to honor its 2020 senior class, which has 225 students. The parade went in a circle around the front of the school

and so much of the Fountain City Community wanted to send the students off with a bang that traffic was backed up past Essary Road.

The seniors were positioned in the school's main parking lot, observing social distancing guidelines, while vehicles circled the perimeter of the school with horns honking and congratulatory signs waving. Many of the 2020 graduates were dressed in their caps and gowns while they accepted praise from the passing vehicles.

The event was organized by a group of senior parents who wanted to salute their children one final time.

One parent was Alison Ackerman, whose daughter, Taylor, is a cheerleader for the Bobcats.

"This all kind of started when the school board announced how they were going to handle graduation and we were not happy," Ackerman said. "It was done with the blessing of the administration and (Central principal) Dr. (Andrew) Brown. It was done with the approval of the administration and Dr. Brown got the message out."

"We just wanted to do something for these seniors in this class and we knew that we were going to get support from our community in Fountain City."

Prior to the event, Ackerman said she was hoping for a big turnout and she obviously got it.

Kevin DeBusk, another parent who had a hand in organizing the parade, said he was pleased to have the chance to

honor Central's seniors.

"With the county starting to open things up, we wanted to give people the opportunity to acknowledge and cheer on their seniors," said DeBusk.

The senior students were grateful to the community but one graduate, Trevor Holbert, said he expected community to show up in force.

"Fountain City has always been a really big, really good family and we were expecting something like this," Holbert said.

Taylor Ackerman shared Holbert's sentiments.

"I (thought) people would show up because they knew how hard we worked for the last 13 years to get here," she said. "This shows that people here really still care about us."

Absentee ballot requests up in Knox County

By Mike Steely

Senior Writer
steelym@knoxfocus.com

Cliff Rodgers is leaving his post as administrator of elections for Knox County on May 29 and is finding his closing days busier than he thought he might be. The COVID-19 pandemic has caused an upsurge in people requesting an absentee ballot.

Rodgers told The Focus that in the last election only 800 people requested absentee ballots but the office had already received about 1,300 requests as of last Monday. The first day to request an absentee ballot was May 8.

"We're overrun with requests," Rodgers said. He added that most older voters usually choose to vote in person and that many see it as a social outing.

"Now it seems they are paying attention," he said of the growing number of absentee ballot requests.

Knox County will see paper ballots the first time in recent history in the August 6 election. The election commission is to begin training election workers in staggered classes in June.

He also said that the Tennessee Secretary of State is sending letters to every registered senior citizen in June reminding them

they can request an absentee ballot, July 30 is the final day to ask for that ballot.

Early voting begins the July 17 and runs through August 1.

Chris Davis will be replacing Rodgers and has announced the election commission will meet June 18 to continue to prepare for the August 6 election. That election is the general election for county commissioners, property assessor, law director, school board members, and Farragut aldermen.

August 6 is also the primary election for U.S. President, Senate, House of Representatives, and the Tennessee Senate and House.

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