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**Best Practices for Graduation Ceremonies and Sample Invitations**

The Students:

* Consider having a minimum number of students who will participate in the ceremony.  Three or more is ideal but this is at the library’s discretion.
* Invite students and their families.
* Buy or rent caps and gowns for the ceremony.
* Have students arrive early to understand their role in the ceremony.
* Invite all currently enrolled Excel students so they can celebrate with grads. This can help motivate them to remain committed to finishing the program.
* Ask one or more of the students to speak to the press and share their stories.

Event promotion/media relations:

* Invite local press to the event.
* Use the graduation press release template and media alert from the PR Toolkit on the support site.
* Keep Gale in the loop. We like to send a representative from Gale to attend and if the library would like, potentially speak at the graduation.
* Have designated trained library staff and students available to talk about the program.
* Many libraries have live-streamed the graduation on their Facebook page.  Be sure to post about the event on all your social media platforms. A great way to recruit potential students.

The Ceremony:

* Timeline
  + Procession – graduates
  + Greetings – from the library director or library staff member hosting the event
  + Speakers – inspirational speech from a student and special guest (gov official, president of local community college, or a business leader)
  + Presentation – each student receives their high school diploma
  + Finalities – students may receive a few more words of support, and the event ends with yet more music. Once the event ends, students can mix with their fellow students, family, and friends.
* Have space/stage for the ceremony
* Invite local stakeholders to the library
  + Mayors, city officials, library board members, members of the friend’s group, business community leaders, program funders, etc.
  + Many times, these attendees would like to give speeches
* Consider a career/college next step event as part of the ceremony (possibly have some booths run by local companies to answer questions for the graduates before/after the ceremony, like a career/college fair, and those stationing the booth could attend the ceremony too)
  + For example, invite local police chiefs if one of your students would like to become a police officer, help your students make job connections, and get the community involved.
* Invite the local community college deans – they can make a speech but also answer questions for interested students.
* Provide light refreshments if it is going to be a long ceremony.
* Have music for students walking in and out of the ceremony.
* Excel High School provides students with their diploma and diploma covers. Consider connecting with the school to ensure the student receives their high school credentials in time for the ceremony.
* Have a videographer and/or professional photographer there so you can have images from the event.
* As students walk across the stage say some words about their future career/education plans. Have them walk off stage to get a picture with their family.

Sample Invitations:

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