



# Illinois State Board of Education

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**Darren Reisberg**  
*Chair of the Board*

**Dr. Carmen I. Ayala**  
*State Superintendent of Education*

September 3, 2020

Dear Colleagues,

I appreciate the many district and regional superintendents who joined me in virtual meetings over the past two weeks to share feedback and ask questions and the many others who have emailed with inquiries and ideas. My message today provides updated information and addresses several pressing topics that we wanted to ensure you had the answers for as soon as possible, rather than in our regular weekly message on Tuesday.

We received a letter this afternoon from U.S. Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos and wanted to share the news with you immediately. The letter explains that schools should be prepared to administer federally required assessments in spring 2021. In a [letter to all Chief State School Officers](#), Secretary DeVos said, “it is now our expectation that states will, in the interest of students, administer summative assessments during the 2020-2021 school year, consistent with the requirements of the law and following the guidance of local health officials. As a result, you should not anticipate such waivers [that were granted for spring 2020 assessments] being granted again.”

This federal communication means that our [Illinois Priority Learning Standards](#) become even more important. The selected standards align to our state summative assessments. They promote interdisciplinary and/or project-based learning, which can help students learn more and go deeper.

As your school districts reopen for the school year, new issues arise. We are committed to helping you tackle each one, so I’m going to respond to a few questions here:

We have received questions about whether it’s possible to use health/life/safety funds to respond to COVID-19, and the answer to that question is no.

We’ve also received questions about conducting safety drills this fall, given most students are experiencing at least some remote learning. If a school district is using only remote learning, drills may be delayed until students return to in-person instruction. However, districts providing in-person instruction or a hybrid model of both in-person and remote learning must still follow the provisions of the School Safety Drill Act. According to the School Safety Drill Act, drills shall be conducted at each school building that houses school children. That means that schools must continue to meet statutory requirements for conducting safety drills, including evacuation, bus evacuation, law enforcement, and severe weather/shelter in place drills, and should implement these drills with COVID-19 safety measures in place. Multiple drills may need to occur and drills may take more time to allow for social distancing.

Districts have also requested guidance for communicating with students, staff, and families in the event that someone in the school contracts COVID-19. First and foremost, schools must provide relevant information to their local departments of public health to support their efforts in contact tracing and mitigating the spread of COVID-19. Secondly, school authorities are to handle contacts of infectious disease according to the Control of Communicable Disease Code, which includes informing contacts of infected individuals to prevent the spread of disease. ISBE and the Illinois Department of Public Health provided a [template](#) that schools can use as well as answers to related questions [in the FAQ issued on Aug. 20](#) (page 9).

We continue to encourage close partnerships between school districts and local departments of public health. IDPH is publishing [county metrics](#) that include numbers of youth cases. IDPH created this metrics webpage and the [adaptive pause and metrics](#) document to guide local departments of public health in advising local school districts about when additional mitigation measures may be necessary.

Finally, we realize that having reliable internet access is crucial for students during any form of learning. Every school should be aware that the Learning Technology Center of Illinois is available to support you through technology initiatives, services, and professional learning opportunities. Their website is [www.ltcillinois.org](http://www.ltcillinois.org) and their phone number is (217) 893-1431. The Center is headquartered out of Regional Office of Education #9 in Champaign, but its 20 staff members are stationed around the state. A list of the staff and what they do is available at <https://ltcillinois.org/about/team>.

Your questions and feedback continue to help me ensure that the agency is responsive to the immediate and long-term needs of our diverse schools across the state. Thank you to the Regional Offices of Education for setting up the virtual meetings over the past two weeks. It was a pleasure to see many of your faces and to have the opportunity to hear your candid perspectives.

Sincerely,

Dr. Carmen I. Ayala  
State Superintendent of Education  
Illinois State Board of Education