



Illinois State Board of Education

100 North First Street • Springfield, Illinois 62777-0001
www.isbe.net

Darren Reisberg
Chair of the Board

Dr. Carmen I. Ayala
State Superintendent of Education

April 16, 2020

Dear Colleagues:

Just another quick reminder -- tomorrow is the deadline for all public school districts and nonpublic schools to verify that every student currently eligible for free and reduced-price meals is included in your count. If your school participates in the National School Lunch Program, please verify that count, so that all families who are eligible can access the additional financial support provided by the Pandemic EBT. Instructions for this crucial verification can be found [here](#).

This time of year would normally be consumed with final projects, capstone exams, and the activities students anticipate the most -- concerts, plays, awards banquets, prom, and of course graduation ceremonies.

With this disappointment in mind, Plainfield East High School administrators hand-wrote postcards to each of the school's 540 seniors. Principal Joseph O'Brien explained they wanted to send a message of encouragement and let the seniors know how much they mean to the culture of the school. He emphasized that no one will understand what our seniors are feeling, but he wanted the Class of 2020 to know they will work through this together.

In Oakwood CUSD 76, Superintendent Larry Maynard has been writing to staff and families every night. He [started writing](#) these messages the day the Governor announced that school buildings soon would be off-limits.

"We're grieving. We're missing school, and we're missing our kids," he said. "I'm trying to be the best cheerleader for the district and our community." And although he's sending the messages as an effort to encourage the school community, he admits he's found that writing is cathartic for him as well.

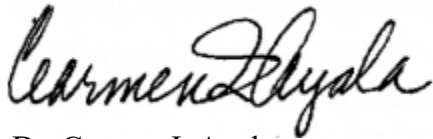
More than a dozen music teachers from Homewood School District 153 and Flossmoor School District 161 got together and [found a way](#) to send a message to their students through song. It can be tough to sound like an ensemble while observing social distancing, but they used Zoom to perform their own version of the Bob Marley classic "Three Little Birds" — with the refrain telling students not to worry, because every little thing is going to be all right.

These open lines of communication let students know it's okay to feel sad, upset, worried, or even heartbroken and lay the groundwork for seeking help if students need it. By demonstrating empathy and understanding, we let students know we haven't forgotten them, and we will get past the rough spots together.

Another lesson we teach best through demonstration is the value of social or physical distancing. As educators, we are role models and leaders in our communities and for our students, families, and friends. So as tempting as group photos and embraces are when we're together, let's be mindful of the example we set and use whatever influence we have to promote practices that help flatten the curve.

Thank you for doing your part in this challenging time. If no one has told you this yet today, you are a hero.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Carmen Ayala". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

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