



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 13, 2020

Dear Colleagues:

I hope some of your students had a chance to submit questions to Governor JB Pritzker's [Youth Town Hall](#) via Facebook Live this past Saturday. We appreciate the Governor dedicating his time to engage with the state's younger generation. Of course, one of the big questions he faced was about when school can return to normal. The Governor said he will re-open schools as soon as he's confident that it's safe and healthy to do so. The Governor encouraged everyone to find creative ways to celebrate important milestones that students usually look forward to around this time of year.

From hosting Zoom proms and virtual ceremonies to downloading schoolwork and emailing with teachers, our students depend on the internet to enrich their remote learning experience. However, we know access to broadband varies widely across Illinois, and we do not want anyone to be left behind. ISBE has partnered with several state agencies to develop an [interactive map](#) to provide detailed information on available drive-up WiFi hotspots at schools, colleges, extension sites, and libraries.

We have seen ingenuity and generosity of spirit throughout this COVID-19 crisis. If your school has a publicly available WiFi hotspot, please submit the hotspot to the interactive map by filling out this survey: <https://arcg.is/1LufGK>. The survey asks you to provide the location of each available hotspot, a link to the log-in instructions, as well as any helpful hints for accessing a given drive-up WI-FI hotspot. Please complete the survey as soon as possible to expand access to families without sufficient broadband at home. If you have any questions, contact Samantha Leav at ISBE via email at sleav@isbe.net.

Students have opportunities during remote learning to strengthen not just their math and reading skills, but also their self-awareness and self-regulation, storytelling, collaboration, and relationship skills. If you're interested in learning more about using technology to support your K-3 students' social-emotional development, I encourage you to join a free webinar from the Erikson Institute 3-4 p.m. this Thursday, April 16. The Erikson Institute promises you'll also acquire resources for adult self-care and compassion. Register at <https://bit.ly/34xeyy0>.

Even before the COVID-19 health crisis, schools have served more than just their students. The Illinois Education Association, Illinois Federation of Teachers, Illinois Association of School Administrators, and the Illinois Principals Association are now asking school districts to step up and help Illinois' senior citizens in this time of need.

The Illinois Department on Aging runs two programs that help ensure our older residents across the state receive proper nutrition. One is a meal delivery program, and the other is a day program through which senior citizens visit a center for activities and receive a meal. Because of the COVID-19

outbreak, the 399 day programs across the state have ceased operation. At the same time, the number of volunteers who provide the meal delivery program has dwindled because many of those volunteers are senior citizens themselves and are now homebound. The Department on Aging now needs volunteers to deliver meals to our senior citizens who depend on this food for proper nutrition, especially now, when going to the grocery store can endanger their health.

School employees are uniquely qualified for this task, because they have already passed the background checks, thereby saving the Department on Aging from having to complete this additional step. And don't worry: these meals can be delivered safely and without face-to-face contact. We urge you to consider providing volunteers in your area to fulfill this need. For a list of area volunteer coordinators, [look here](#). For a map of service areas for the Department on Aging's area offices and its directors, [look here](#).

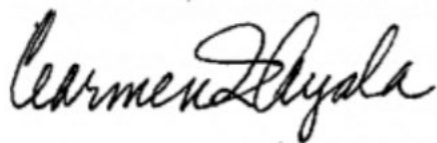
Everyone here at ISBE has enjoyed Illinois Association of School Administrators' [inspiring video](#), documenting some of the amazing efforts of educators across the state to facilitate remote learning, provide nutrition, and keep students and families engaged during the month of March. Seeing scenes in the video showing teachers sitting together at a conference table and bus drivers posing for a group photo also reminded us of how reality shifted again in April, after Governor Pritzker reinforced his physical distancing message and encouraged everyone to wear masks.

Illinois educators continue to rise to the challenge. For example, in Elgin, U-46 orchestra teacher Jennifer Brown-James is [replacing broken strings](#) on her students' instruments, by taking their violins, violas, cellos and basses out to her car, where she wears latex gloves while making the repairs. In Chicago, Bernard Zell Anshe Emet Day School teacher Benje Casper missed seeing his students in person, so he [rode his bicycle](#) by their homes to wave at them from a safe distance. And in the Northwest Suburban Special Education Organization, a classroom assistant named Mrs. Klein has pre-recorded videos using American Sign Language to [read and sign](#) stories to her students.

Lastly, just a quick note that schools that serve as SAT Weekend Test Centers should have received a survey from the College Board recently regarding any interest or availability to host the SAT when public health conditions permit. If you received the survey, ISBE encourages you to respond. The information is being gathered to help College Board with its analysis and planning process only.

Every week, you continue to amaze and motivate me. As much as this crisis has tested us, I have full confidence that we will emerge on the other side with new skills, new strategies, and a new palette of creativity to help all our students achieve their highest potential.

Sincerely,

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

Dr. Carmen I. Ayala
State Superintendent of Education
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