



Illinois State Board of Education

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www.isbe.net

Darren Reisberg
Chair of the Board

Dr. Carmen I. Ayala
State Superintendent of Education

April 20, 2020

Dear Colleagues:

At this time of year, the only pandemic we should have to worry about is spring fever, and the challenge of keeping students focused while it's sunny and beautiful outside. As DeKalb High School senior Hailey Burnett recently told the [Daily Chronicle](#), "I should be at school right now complaining about being at school."

We hear you, Hailey! Protecting the health and safety of our communities means, for now, sacrificing or postponing some of our cherished traditions and adapting to a school year that looks different from any year we've had before.

Thankfully, in this time of uncertainty, state and federal agencies have joined forces to collaborate and harness resources to support schools in addressing new needs and challenges. My message below contains new information for special education, instructions on accessing Public Assistance funding from the Federal Emergency Management Agency, an update on Illinois' approval to administer the Pandemic Electronic Benefit Transfer, a notice about the extension of all state grants, and a note about communications going forward.

Special Education

ISBE has posted an updated FAQ focused on special education during remote learning. It's an in-depth document in which we have tried to address most of the concerns that have been brought to ISBE. You can find it at www.isbe.net/Documents/SPED-FAQ-04-20-20.pdf.

The [Council of Chief State School Officers](#) has also shared a special effort for educators, by educators, focused on students with disabilities. CCSSO joined nearly 30 education advocacy and disability rights organizations to form the Educating All Learners Alliance. That coalition has assembled a platform for ensuring equity for all learners and the continuity of special education services during remote instruction, in the form of a website full of curated, searchable resources, complete with access to experts and examples from the field. You can explore it by visiting www.educatingalllearners.org.

FEMA Public Assistance

The President issued a major disaster declaration for Illinois on March 26, 2020, as a result of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. The disaster declaration (FEMA-4489-DR-IL) makes all Illinois public school districts and not-for-profit nonpublic schools eligible for funding under the Public

Assistance (PA) Program, Category B – Emergency Protective Measures. These funds will be administered by the Illinois Emergency Management Agency (IEMA), which will distribute them directly to applicant organizations.

Please note that if you receive funds from another federal agency for the same purpose as PA funding, it is a duplication of benefits. FEMA is legally prohibited from duplicating benefits from other sources. For example, if you want to use this aid to pay for cleaning your school buildings, which is an allowable expense under both CARES Act and FEMA PA, you must choose one funding source to pay for the work.

ISBE encourages applicants to use PA funds to support purchasing personal protective equipment and disinfecting/deep cleaning school buildings for when in-person instruction resumes. Among costs that are NOT eligible for PA funding:

- Food (funded by the USDA, food is only eligible under CARES Act)
- Anything related to remote learning (considered an increased operating expense and therefore not allowed under PA)

Any work and costs that may be eligible must be documented with invoices, receipts, labor and equipment records, procurement records, etc. Indirect costs are not allowed. The [IEMA PA Applicant Project Documentation Checklist](#) provides more information.

FEMA has waived its 30-day deadline for submitting a Request for Public Assistance, but if you believe your organization is eligible, you should apply *as soon as possible*.

To provide guidance for applicants, FEMA is now hosting overview webinars. You can find the schedule and links to register [here](#). For further information please visit:

- [PA Applicant Handbook](#)
- [FEMA-4489-DR-IL PA Fact Sheet](#)

If you have any questions, please email FEMA-Recovery-PA-Grants@fema.dhs.gov or call the Grants Manager Hotline at (866) 337-8448. You can also reach IEMA for assistance by calling (217) 782-8719 or emailing PA.Grants@illinois.gov.

Pandemic EBT

The U.S. Department of Agriculture announced today that it has approved Illinois to operate the Pandemic EBT, a supplemental food purchasing benefit to current SNAP participants and as a new EBT benefit to other eligible households to offset the cost of meals that would have otherwise been consumed at school. Thank you to all school districts that updated their rosters of eligible families to include those who were not previously eligible, but whose personal finances have been negatively affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Please keep these lists up-to-date going forward so that every eligible family can receive these enhanced benefits. Instructions can be found [here](#).

Families with school aged children who are eligible for free or reduced-price meals should receive extra SNAP benefits through Pandemic EBT. This benefit is calculated using \$5.70 per

day, for 10 school days in March plus 22 school days in April, for a total of \$112 million. Families who have school aged children and are currently receiving SNAP do not have to take any action to receive these P-EBT benefits, which will become available by the end of this month. Households with school aged children who are eligible for free or reduced meals when school is in session, but who do not currently receive SNAP benefits, will be able to submit a simplified application for P-EBT benefits as early as next week, using the ABE.Illinois.gov online portal or by completing a paper application which will be available at the IDHS website at dhs.state.il.us.gov.

May benefits will be issued next month.

Extension of All State Grants

As we continue to navigate through the COVID-19 pandemic, we recognize that many of the activities that would have been performed in your fiscal year 2020 grants have been disrupted or canceled. While all grants are affected to some degree, state grants are uniquely impacted due to the combination of delayed payments and the prohibition to carry forward unexpended funds. In our continued efforts to relieve pressure for all local education agencies, ISBE has extended all fiscal year 2020 state grants to June 30, 2021. At this time, federal grants are not included in this directive, as federal funding is not delayed, and unexpended grant funds are permitted to be carried forward into next year.

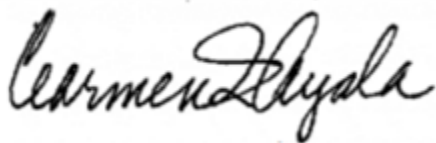
While extensions of state grants may be welcome news for many of you, statutory requirements, such as the submission of quarterly expenditure reports into next fiscal year, will continue. However, if any subsequent quarterly report equals your final 2020 budget, ISBE staff will consider the grant project final and remove any remaining expenditure reports.

Communications Going Forward

Finally, I want to ease your workload slightly by giving you fewer emails to read. This week, I will send COVID-19 update emails on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. Starting next week, we will reinstate the regular Weekly Message, sent on Tuesdays, plus a specific COVID-19 message, sent on Thursdays.

Thank you for all your incredible efforts.

Sincerely,



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