



Illinois State Board of Education

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Darren Reisberg
Chair of the Board

Dr. Carmen I. Ayala
State Superintendent of Education

April 27, 2020

Dear Colleagues:

As Governor JB Pritzker announced last week, we have made provisions to prevent COVID-19 from disrupting the advancement of students anticipating graduation. Executive Order 2020-31 and new emergency rules allow eighth grade students and high school seniors the flexibility to graduate as planned.

For current high school seniors, that means the SAT and Constitution test requirements are waived. You can view additional details regarding the changes in this [presentation](#), as well as our responses to [frequently asked questions](#). I know these changes don't make up for the fact that so many students are having to miss beloved traditions, but we did not want to allow COVID-19 to deprive students of the diplomas they've worked so hard to earn. We ask that you make an extra effort to check in with your seniors to ensure they have the social and emotional supports they need during this heartbreaking time. Provide them with opportunities to connect with counselors, teachers, and their peers to help ease their disappointment and celebrate their achievements.

The executive order and emergency rules also address student teachers and educators who have been working toward an educator license or subsequent endorsements. They now have the flexibility necessary to advance to the next level in their careers. For student teachers, the edTPA and in-person instruction requirements have been suspended through the end of August 2020. You can find details on requirement changes in this [presentation](#), as well as answers to [frequently asked questions](#). The Illinois Board of Higher Education and ISBE have also compiled [guidance for institutions of higher education](#) regarding the licensure changes.

These adjustments weren't made overnight. Ultimately, what gives us confidence in this temporary departure from status quo is our deep engagement with our school districts, equity advocates, teacher unions, and higher ed. Ensuring that every child in Illinois has outstanding teachers in every classroom remains one of our top priorities. Still, we began this year with 1,985 unfilled positions for teachers, 1,370 unfilled positions for paraprofessionals, and 365 unfilled positions for school administrators.

When this pandemic hit, we had approximately 15,000 candidates in educator, school support personnel, or administrator preparation programs. Roughly half were completing student teaching and internships in the spring of 2020, and the other half were preparing to complete student teaching and internship requirements in the upcoming school year. We also have 62,000 educators whose licenses are up for renewal before the start of the next school year. These are all individuals who are answering the call to teach -- the last thing we want to do is derail their efforts. COVID-19 could have had a devastating effect on the already dire teacher pipeline issues if we had failed to take this action.

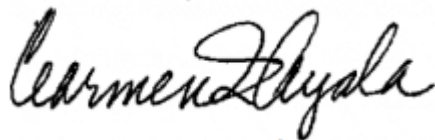
Along with these preparations for traditional in-person instruction, I want to encourage all of you to begin planning, just in case, for the possibility that Illinois may have to continue remote learning into the next school year. We are requesting that you adopt this task not only because the path of the COVID-19 pandemic remains unclear, but also because establishing a remote learning infrastructure for every student would give Illinois schools a valuable backstop for the future.

Over the past two months, we have seen that many schools lack this capability, which leaves them at a vast disadvantage compared to districts that already have well-rooted remote learning systems. No matter what happens, those preparations would not be in vain. We should consider remote learning as just another tool in our toolkit to help Illinois children achieve their highest potential.

Last Monday, I provided [information](#) regarding FEMA Public Assistance and the eligibility of Illinois public school districts and not-for-profit nonpublic schools 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. This week, FEMA is hosting [overview webinars](#) to provide guidance for applicants. For further information, view the [PA Applicant Handbook](#) and [FEMA-4489-DR-IL PA Fact Sheet](#).

Finally, I want to ask that you please make every effort to touch base with all students on a regular basis. I realize that some children may be difficult to reach, but it's entirely possible that those students are the ones who need us the most. Now is not the time to disconnect from our most vulnerable students. You possess unique abilities to protect the health and safety of the children you serve. As educators, when you see or suspect abuse or neglect, you can alert authorities immediately, because you are mandated reporters. With so many families dealing with the multi-layered stresses of this unprecedented pandemic, that duty is now more important than ever. I'm counting on you, and I know your students are too.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Carmen Ayala". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial 'C'.

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