



# Illinois State Board of Education

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

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

April 10, 2020

Dear Colleagues:

Has a community group or local business helped you, your school, or your school district? You can now share your gratitude by nominating that group or business to the #WeAreIllinois campaign – an initiative from Lieutenant Governor Juliana Stratton, who wants to promote a message of solidarity, perseverance, and resilience in the midst of the COVID-19 crisis. Lt. Governor Stratton will feature nominees on Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram twice weekly through May with the hashtag #WeAreIllinois. [Click here to nominate](#) a local business or organization that has gone above and beyond to provide services or assistance to their employees or your school community.

If your students have questions about COVID-19, we're excited to share that Governor JB Pritzker will answer them in a youth town hall tomorrow, April 11 at 5 p.m. in a [Facebook Live](#) event with Lurie Children's Hospital of Chicago. Students can submit questions until 10 a.m. tomorrow via email to [KidsQuestions@LurieChildrens.org](mailto:KidsQuestions@LurieChildrens.org).

One question that we received during our own town halls last week was about the U.S. Constitution exam. For current high school seniors, the exam has been waived. For students who are not seniors but would have taken the exam this year as part of their course work, school districts have flexibility on the type of "examination" administered and may certify students based on satisfactory completion. For example, consider a teacher-created assessment, a project, or a presentation that requires the student to demonstrate understanding of the U.S. Constitution as part of the current course the student is enrolled in. Completion of this type of assignment can qualify as "passing a satisfactory examination upon such subjects" and can meet the requirement in statute for graduation.

Today is Friday, so let's celebrate with a mini film festival of inspirational videos that encapsulate what it's like to teach in the age of COVID-19.

If you're [Eric Combs](#), Richland County Middle School band director and 2020 Illinois Teacher of the Year, you spend your spare time using every instrument in the score to play the Star Wars theme — [all by yourself!](#) You can also spot Mr. Combs in [this motivational video](#) from the 2020 Class of State Teachers of the Year, expressing solidarity with educators everywhere.

If you're Sarah Rafalowicz, a language arts and social studies teacher at Carl Sandburg Middle School in Mundelein District 75, you might be wondering how to give a grade higher than an A+ for the student who responded to your prompt in such a creative way, she ended up on National Public Radio.

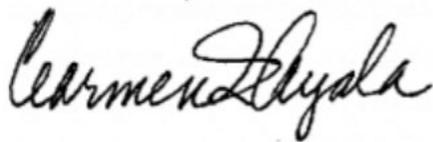
Rafalowitz asked her students to document what they've been doing during the past two weeks and gave them the options of responding with a paragraph, narrative, poem, picture, blog post, or song. Student Chloe Langford chose the song option and made [a video that's gone viral](#). Rafalowitz [told the Daily Herald](#) that Chloe's homework "far exceeded my expectations."

Of course, the most encouragement any educator can receive comes not from fame or even colleagues, but rather from the students themselves. We see a lot of videos from teachers about how much they miss their students, and here's proof they miss you too! Students from Springfield High School created [this video](#) telling their teachers how much and why they miss their school.

Lastly, I want to give a shout-out to Lake Zurich District Community Unit School District 95, where teachers and staff at all levels are going the extra mile to connect with and support their students. For example, Lake Zurich Middle School North science teacher Marcia Day drove around to all her students' homes and left distance learning Rock Cycle Labs in their mailboxes. The nutrition staff have continued to deliver meals to students via bus, and the district has distributed about 1,400 technology devices for students in grades K-5. To keep everyone connected, the district's [e-learning webpage](#) engages families by sharing examples of student work, inspirational messages, and a virtual version of the local Starbucks' rotating gallery of student art.

I know many districts are making similarly heroic efforts to sustain cherished relationships with students and families! Thank you.

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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