



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 8, 2020

Dear Colleagues:

I did an interview with the education-focused news outlet Chalkbeat last week, and one of the questions the reporter asked me was, “What gives you hope in this moment?”

I told her that I have seen goodness and ingenuity shine brightly from every corner of Illinois. I have seen school nurses and career and technical education programs answer the call to donate – and in some cases, even 3D print – personal protective equipment for our health care heroes and first responders. I have seen teachers read bedtime stories to students via video chat. I have seen our principals and superintendents lead their communities with agility and generosity.

It’s those stories that make me feel hopeful about the days, weeks, and months ahead.

As we all know, social distancing is our best hope for flattening the curve and reaching the other side of this COVID-19 crisis. Where possible, children should be kept at home. However, essential workers may seek child care. ISBE’s new joint guidance with the Illinois Department of Human Services, Illinois Department of Children and Family Services, and Governor’s Office of Early Childhood Development provides information for schools or service facilities repurposed as Emergency Child Care Centers at www.isbe.net/Documents/COVID-19-Guidance-Child-Care-Providers-Following-Extended-Stay-at-Home-Order.pdf.

An April 6 webinar also provides helpful information; check out the [Final Webinar Slides](#), [Toolkit of Child Care Provider Resources](#), and [Webinar Recording](#).

Please note that ISBE’s emergency rules regarding Remote Learning Days and Remote Learning Day Plans also apply to prekindergarten programs operated by public school districts or non-public schools. Any community-based Preschool for All or Preschool for All Expansion provider also may create and implement a Remote Learning Day Plan for its students.

ISBE has published the next version of our [comprehensive FAQ](#) with information about returning SAT, PSAT 10, and PSAT 8/9 materials; the Constitution exam; CARES Act funding; ISBE data collections; and addressing remote learning concerns, including Transitional Math, GPA calculations, final quarters/trimesters, transitioning to sequential courses, and administration of final exams.

I hope ISBE’s regular updates to the FAQ, my daily messages, and our town hall webinars show how important open lines of communication are to me. I see examples every day of how

principals and teachers are facilitating open lines of communication with each other and with students. Intentional opportunities for dialogue not only support the flow of helpful information but also remind us that we're not alone in tackling the challenges of learning and working remotely.

For example, Elmwood Elementary School Principal Dimitri Almasi hosted virtual staff meetings and shared positive energy with items like "[favorite kitchen utensil](#)" and "[favorite Easter candy](#)" on the agenda. Barrington Middle School – Station Campus Principal Dr. Kristen Paul hosted a virtual staff meeting and teachers all showed their spirit by wearing gear from their [favorite baseball teams](#).

A school administrator in Decatur recently [turned himself into a chicken](#). It was Nick Blackburn, principal of St. Patrick's School, and he chose to put the poultry filter on for his morning video announcements. And you know what? That's great. Using fun photo filters is just one of the ways Mr. Blackburn keeps his students engaged.

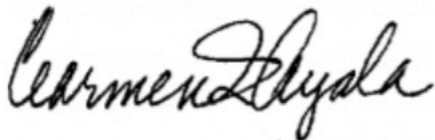
The bottom line, as always, is finding ways to connect. Dr. Rachael Mahmood, a fifth grade teacher at Georgetown Elementary School in Indian Prairie School District 204, wrote an inspiring piece on Teaching Tolerance, describing how [online learning can create even deeper relationships](#) among students and teachers. She points out that interactive platforms provide classmates with a peek into each others' lives.

For every class meeting, she changes her location inside her home, revealing new aspects of her life. She has her students do scavenger hunts and "show and tell" to share items from their homes, to nurture the social and emotional connection among them.

"The fact that they were seeing me in my home helped show them I was willing to share and trust them, too," Mahmood wrote.

Thank you for all of these awesome ways of connecting and communicating. Feeling disconnected or "out of the loop" can add stress to an already challenging situation. So please keep informing and uplifting your teachers, staff, students, and families on a regular basis, and we will all overcome this challenge together.

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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