



Illinois State Board of Education

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Darren Reisberg
Chair of the Board

Dr. Carmen I. Ayala
State Superintendent of Education

April 9, 2020

Dear Colleagues:

The only parent who doesn't seem the tiniest bit bothered by the ongoing COVID-19 crisis and remote learning is Mother Nature. She's producing flowers and spring showers right on schedule for this time of year. This reminds us that spring is a time for renewal, replenishment, and a fresh outlook.

The English department at Glenbard West High School shared some clever [social-distancing haikus on Twitter](#), and I think we can all relate to this one:

*Yes, this keeps us safe
Being apart, away
But, does it keep us sane?*

Five students from Glenbard West also shared [their experiences of the pandemic](#) in *The New York Times*. These high school students expressed a range of feelings -- from concern about the health of parents and grandparents, to disappointment about missing prom and graduation, to gratitude for "a really nice calm break from a life that seemed to never stop."

These short compositions show us how different the experience of the pandemic may be for each student, each teacher, and each parent – and the continued importance of checking in with one another to see who may need a boost.

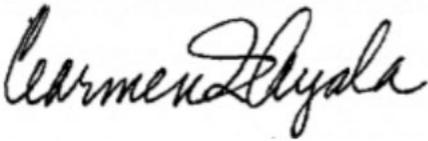
[Libertyville School District 70](#) has an answer to the quarantine blues. Students and teachers showed their spring spirit by wearing their favorite sports team attire for Virtual Spirit Jersey Day. Mrs. Crenshaw's [first graders](#) got together online to read Grumpy Bunnies, and she guided them in a lesson of drawing their own. Thank you for harnessing your creative energy to help buoy students through the final months of the school year!

We also know that a common experience for many families during this health crisis is the loss of jobs and income. Thankfully, the new Pandemic EBT will provide qualified families with additional funding for food. ISBE is asking that all National School Lunch Program participants verify that every student who **currently** qualifies for free or reduced-price meals – being mindful of the fact that many families' circumstances may have been negatively impacted by the pandemic – is included in the count. This information needs to be verified by April 17 at the latest. Instructions for both public school districts and nonpublic schools are available on our Nutrition Department's website at www.isbe.net/Documents/P-EBT-collection.pdf.

Kenilworth School District 38 also shared with us an awesome opportunity for Illinois communities to access some additional assistance. Dr. Stephanie Helfand, incoming principal of The Joseph Sears Schools, invites school districts around the state to submit needs (such as technology, supplies, or food) to “The Giving Back Project” – an effort representing the school's commitment to the cornerstones of Responsibility, Kindness, Honesty, and Respect. Any school official in Illinois can submit requests through the project’s [online form](#), or email Dr. Helfand at shelfand@kenilworth38.org.

Lastly, as I have mentioned previously, ISBE is working on emergency actions regarding graduation requirements and educator licensure. We hope to have updates on specific changes very soon. Please stay tuned.

Sincerely,

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

Dr. Carmen I. Ayala
State Superintendent of Education
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