



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

March 31, 2020

Dear Colleagues:

Today, Governor JB Pritzker announced that Illinois will continue its suspension of in-person instruction for another 30 days, through April 30. Governor Pritzker addressed students directly today, saying:

“I won't try and tell you that texting and calling each other is the same as hanging out in the hallways or in the lunchroom. And I won't try and tell you that a Zoom prom is the same as a real prom. I won't try and tell you not to be sad about the lost goals and plans that you may have had for March and April. It's okay to be sad. And if you do feel sad or frustrated or angry, whatever you feel, please let yourself feel that way. Don't beat yourself up over being human. And if you're experiencing overwhelming anxiety or you have a friend who is, and you need someone to talk to, there are resources available to you by phone and online through both ISBE and our Department of Human Services, as well as the city of Chicago.”

The Governor went on to encourage students to find ways to be of service in this crisis, as so many of our educators and administrators are modeling for them. I second the Governor in saying that while we are in the midst of a scary and uncertain time, we are also experiencing “a lesson in the fundamental goodness of people.”

As the Governor announced today, schools are now transitioning from Act of God Days to Remote Learning Days. All these days count toward the school year, and absolutely no days need to be made up. Each district is required to create and implement a Remote Learning Day Plan to ensure all students, including students with disabilities and English Learners, receive instruction and can communicate with their teachers. Remote learning will look different for every district and every school. You can use up to five Remote Learning Planning Days at any time to prepare and refine your approaches to remote learning.

We expect your plans to be tailored to your own districts, but please include a check-in or some method of accurately tracking “attendance.” This data will help teachers gauge which students may need additional outreach or support to engage in learning. Building in flexibility and inclusivity (rather than hard and fast times and deadlines) could encourage student participation

and result in more engagement and more accurate records. We will provide further guidance on how to submit this data to ISBE.

I am also very happy to share with you that the President signed the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act into law this past Friday. The purpose of the CARES Act is to provide states with funding to prevent, prepare for, and respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. Local Education Agencies (LEAs), including charter schools that are LEAs, that received an allocation under Title I, Part A of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 in fiscal year 2020 are eligible for CARES Act funds. The amount of funds Illinois LEAs will be eligible for is based on the percentage of Title I, Part A allocated to the LEA in FY 2020.

ISBE has developed estimates for LEAs to help you begin to plan at [www.isbe.net/ layouts/Download.aspx?SourceUrl=https://www.isbe.net/Documents/Est-Prelim-CARES-Act-Emergency-Relief-LEA-Allocations-3-31-20.xlsx](https://www.isbe.net/Document.aspx?SourceUrl=https://www.isbe.net/Documents/Est-Prelim-CARES-Act-Emergency-Relief-LEA-Allocations-3-31-20.xlsx). We strongly encourage LEAs to explore using the additional funding to strengthen your infrastructure for remote learning. ISBE also will receive a funding amount as the State Education Agency, which we intend to make available to the LEAs in the greatest need to support students' access to technology and the internet.

The start date of the program has not yet been determined. The U.S. Department of Education (ED) must release an application within the next 27 days that will allow ISBE to have access to the funds. ISBE will complete the application as soon as it is made available and then submit it for approval by ED. Please find more information about the CARES Act at www.isbe.net/Documents/CARES-Act-District-Info-3-31-20.pdf. Please submit any questions about the CARES Act to IllinoisCARES@isbe.net.

Illinois schools have stepped up and faced the many challenges of COVID-19 with generosity, creativity, and a resolute focus on caring for students and communities. You have shown remarkable agility in providing learning opportunities and meals throughout this crisis, giving students much needed connection and stability.

I want to leave you with one example, from Marquardt School District 15, an elementary district in Glendale Heights. Last week, a social worker called one of their families and connected with a mom who had only half a loaf of bread left to feed five children. This mom had no transportation and no way to get to the grocery store. But thanks to the flexibility from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the Marquardt district was able to deliver five days' worth of food and milk to this family.

Sandy Voss, the district's director of food and nutrition services, who was also ISBE's 2018 School Nutrition Champion, relayed the story to ISBE in an email. "This is a family that is trying to hold it together without an income, and while trying to continue to educate five children with limited resources and minimal food," Sandy wrote. "I know this story sadly is not uncommon from what is happening around the state."

We know it too, and we are committed to doing everything we can so that none of Illinois' families fall through the cracks. Please stay connected with your students and what's going on with them at home, so that we can work together to stay in tune with their needs and find the best ways to address them.

Sincerely,

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

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