



# Illinois State Board of Education

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

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

May 8, 2020

Dear Colleagues:

Governor JB Pritzker capped off Teacher Appreciation Week with a salute to educators on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#), featuring photos, videos, and smiling faces from across the state. I genuinely believe this era of remote learning has increased everyone's gratitude for teachers.

As educators, you have been called upon to face unprecedented circumstances during this worldwide pandemic. You have been asked to care for Illinois' children while you have your own children at home, to support students' mental and social-emotional health while experiencing new levels of stress, to guide students' academic growth while simultaneously learning brand new methods of instruction. You have risen to these challenges with generosity, creativity, and skill. But we know it has not been easy.

The Illinois Education Association, Illinois Federation of Teachers, Illinois Principals Association, Illinois Association of School Administrators, and the Illinois State Board of Education would like your feedback to better understand your needs as educators and employees during remote learning and the anticipated transition back to in-person school. We would like your perspectives on what students need now and in the fall to be best set up for success. We know you have a lot on your plate. If you have a few minutes, please share your lessons learned with us and tell us how we can support you and your students — from technology, to PPE, to PD. Please use this link to access the survey: [Illinois Educator Survey](#). Responses are requested by May 31, and all responses will be anonymous.

We hope we never have to go through another difficult situation like the one we face today, but if we do — whether this fall, next year, or a decade from now — we want to be prepared. You have unique insight into the needs of Illinois' students and families. Your responses will help the State and our education system better serve you and your students now and in the future.

Speaking of the future, Illinois still ranks in [the top 10](#) among all states for our completion rate of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), which helps students secure funds to support their post-secondary endeavors. But we are behind our pace from last year, so we need to do everything in our power to help and remind students. Filling out the FAFSA can be stressful for families, especially if confronting the form for the first time. I can imagine that it's tough to replicate your traditional FAFSA assistance events while maintaining social distancing. Please feel free to share your best solutions with us, so that we can share them with other districts. While we're on the subject of graduation, I applaud the sensitivity and creativity districts are using to find new ways to celebrate the Class of 2020 while keeping communities safe.

Luckily, we're getting some help with that effort through a new nationwide initiative called [Graduate Together](#), anchored by education advocate and NBA legend LeBron James. This one-hour primetime event will be broadcast live and commercial-free Saturday, May 16, at 7 p.m., on all three major television networks plus FOX, YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat, TikTok, PeopleTV, and Complex Networks. The lineup, curated by high school students, includes a broad array of leaders, icons, and entertainers, like Bad Bunny, Barack Obama, the Jonas Brothers, Lena Waithe, Malala Yousafzai, Maren Morris, Megan Rapinoe, Pharrell Williams, Yara Shahidi, and YBN Cordae.

We all have an incredible opportunity to recognize the Illinois Class of 2020 in this event, by sharing videos and essays with the production team. They're seeking submissions from [high school seniors](#), their [families](#), and their [educators](#), and they prefer landscape (horizontal) format. Even if your entry doesn't make it into the show, it may be distributed through social media or follow-up stories.

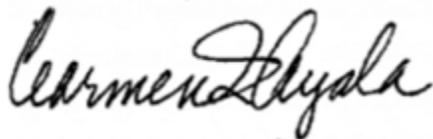
We would also be thrilled if you shared some of your photos with us showing how you've implemented [social distancing guidelines](#) into your schools' graduation ceremonies. Please send us your pictures at [socialmedia@isbe.net](mailto:socialmedia@isbe.net).

As always, remember to visit our [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) page](#) for the latest updates on guidance. Today's updates include new information in our [comprehensive Frequently Asked Questions](#) and our [special education FAQ](#).

I want to close with a couple of special shout-outs today. The first is to Teri Wilson, who teaches Family and Consumer Science in McLean County Unit 5. She created a short video demonstrating [three different no-sew methods](#) for making face masks out of bandanas or T-shirts. The other shout-out goes to four Waubonsie Valley sophomores who have launched a free 1-to-1 tutoring service for K-8 students whose parents are essential workers. The four sophomores have recruited 20 students from Indian Prairie District 204's three high schools to serve as volunteer tutors, and are already tutoring four younger students. You can check out the website they created to explain their service [here](#).

I share stories like Ms. Wilson's and the Relief Cloud Tutors' with the hope of reminding you that, in the midst of the tragedy and loss all round us, we also see every segment of our school communities stepping up to offer their talents to help total strangers. You continue to inspire and amaze me.

Sincerely,



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