



Illinois State Board of Education

100 North First Street • Springfield, Illinois 62777-0001
www.isbe.net

Darren Reisberg
Chair of the Board

Dr. Carmen I. Ayala
State Superintendent of Education

May 1, 2020

Dear Colleagues:

ISBE and the Illinois Department of Public Health will release updated joint guidance for graduation ceremonies. We thank you for your thoughtful feedback over the past few days and understand the milestone that graduation ceremonies represent in students' lives. While the safety and wellbeing of students, families, and educators must continue to be our number one priority, we appreciate that schools and districts across the state are eager to find safe ways to celebrate this important event together. We thank you for your ongoing dialogue and patience as we navigate this uncharted landscape together and look forward to sharing updated joint guidance with you as soon as possible.

ISBE and the Governor's Office recently took emergency action to institute flexibility for graduation requirements affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Please keep in mind that the State establishes only the minimum requirements for graduation. Each school district has discretion to decide whether to maintain stricter standards. However, we encourage any district that does implement additional requirements to ensure that no student is penalized for lack of access or supports at home.

Today is Friday, and I know we all like to head into the weekend with some good news to put smiles on our faces. Beginning today, Illinois families with school-age children can apply for extra money for food through the Pandemic EBT (P-EBT). Families currently receiving SNAP do not need to apply for P-EBT benefits, because these additional P-EBT benefits will be automatically loaded into Illinois LINK EBT accounts. Families who do not currently receive SNAP benefits but have children who receive free or reduced-priced meals will need to apply directly with the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS).

IDHS [created a flyer](#) to help families with the application process. We are asking you to share this flyer with ALL of your families and any community partners who may also be in touch with eligible families. COVID-19 has turned many families' lives upside down, and we want to spread the message far and wide that the application for this extra money is now available! If families need technical assistance with the application, please direct them to email IDHS at DHS.FCS.PEBT@illinois.gov.

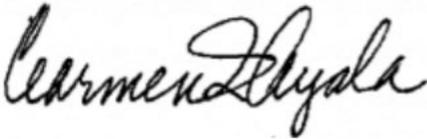
IDHS has made the application available in both English and Spanish at <https://abe.illinois.gov/abe/access>. The fastest way for families to receive benefits is to complete the [application for P-EBT available online](#). (Click "Apply for Benefits" at the link.) However, for schools where technology access may still pose a challenge, a PDF of the application can be

printed out in both [English](#) and [Spanish](#) and distributed to families. Families can use their mobile devices to scan or photograph their completed applications and email them to DHS.FCS.PEBT@illinois.gov or send them via regular mail to Central Scan Unit, PO Box 19138, Springfield, IL, 62763. Alternatively, schools can collect the completed paper applications and submit them (as a group) directly to IDHS for processing.

Schools struggling to meet students' mental health needs may want to check out the Illinois Children's Healthcare Foundation. ICHF has made grants across the state to a variety of children's mental health providers, many of which have done a very impressive job of moving their mental health services to virtual platforms. Any district seeking resources to support students (and staff!) should check ICHF's [list of grantees](#) for opportunities to form good partnerships that would enable provision of services virtually until schools reconvene in person. ICHF grantees may even be able to help provide some IEP services for students whose disabilities are related to behavioral health. Whether you reach out to ICHF or another organization, we encourage you to explore community partnerships to support students' social-emotional and mental health.

And last but certainly not least, the National Day Calendar indicates that today is Principals Day. Here in Illinois, we celebrate principals for a whole month in October, but we can never pass up a chance to say thank you to our incredible school leaders. Check out this awesome video from the Illinois Principals Association on [remembering your "why."](#) Thank you, Illinois principals!

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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