

ISBE – School Closure Webinar Recap
March 17, 2020

Dear Colleagues:

Today was the first day of the mandated statewide school closure – and we made it through together. ISBE hosted two webinars for administrators today with more than 1,500 total participants. Thank you for the opportunity to connect and for your thoughtful questions. The presentation from the webinar is available at www.isbe.net/Documents/Statewide-School-Closure-Guidance-Webinar.pdf.

One question we received many times today was regarding reimbursement for school bus transportation during the closure, when school buses may not be running regular routes. The answer is that:

ISBE will base transportation reimbursement on expenditures. All allowable transportation expenditures incurred during the closure will be claimable for Transportation Reimbursement. School districts should work with their bus contractors to make payments to ensure that all personnel, including bus monitors and bus drivers, can continue to be paid during the closure. If school districts choose to negotiate and execute a contract amendment with their bus contractors to make payments during the closure to ensure transportation personnel will be paid in full, those expenditures will be reimbursed for state Transportation Reimbursement. Consultation with the district's legal representation is advised.

Earlier today, we released a joint statement with the Office of Governor JB Pritzker, Illinois Education Association, Illinois Federation of Teachers, Illinois Association of School Administrators, and Illinois Principals Association about the rights and expectations of school district employees. I would like to thank our partners for their collaboration, and I encourage you to consult this guidance on issues of pay and work during the closure: <https://www.isbe.net/Documents/Joint-Statement-20200317.pdf>

Another question we received frequently today was about grading student work during the closure. We wish to clarify that:

Student work completed during the mandated statewide school closure must not negatively impact a student's grades or otherwise impact a student's academic standing. As we do not yet know the full extent of the closure and want to minimize any negative effects on students, schools may allow student work to count during the closure only to increase a student's academic standing.

Our students may be experiencing varying mental and physical health challenges at this time and may have very different access to supports and technology at home. Our goal is that no student is negatively impacted by the closure and that no school district's policies or procedures should widen the equity gap.

Our friends at the Illinois Association of School Administrators started the hashtag #ILSchoolsStepUp to share inspirational stories of how schools are providing nutrition, using creative educational strategies, and ensuring continuity for our children in the midst of what feels like a chaotic time.

We know there are countless stories to be told, because across the state, we have seen cooperation, generosity of spirit, and a laser focus on our true priority – doing what’s best for students. People often show their true colors in a crisis, and our true colors make me proud.

Sincerely,

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

