

# **Schools Closed: Gov. Pritzker Announces Illinois In-School Learning Off Through Spring, Remote Learning Continues**

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CHICAGO – Illinois Gov. JB Pritzker announced Friday afternoon that in-person learning will not resume during the 2019-2020 school year. Pritzker said he followed careful consideration of the science and close consultation with public health leaders and experts in Illinois and across the nation for the decision in regard to the decision because of the raging coronavirus throughout the state.

Pritzker said remote learning days will continue for all pre-k through 12th grade students through the remainder of this school year.

“I’ve said time and time again, our decisions must follow the science and the science says our students can’t go back to their normal routine this school year,” said Governor JB Pritzker. “Over the last month, Illinois’ schools have stepped up and faced the many challenges of COVID-19 with generosity, creativity, and a resolute focus on caring for students, parents and communities. I am confident that our schools will manage and expand the learning opportunities for all our children who will be working from home over the coming weeks.”

Governor Pritzker has continued to work with the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) to identify and provide the flexibility that school districts need to address the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. Illinois will receive approximately \$569 million in federal funding for pre-k-12 schools, as part of the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act. The funding can help equip students with technology and internet access to enhance remote learning, support teachers in developing their remote instruction skills, and assist schools in continuing to provide meals to children and communities.

Each public school district will receive CARES Act funding proportional to the number of low-income students they serve. ISBE also will receive CARES Act dollars as the state education agency. State Superintendent of Education Dr. Carmen I. Ayala has committed to directing CARES Act resources toward tackling the digital divide in Illinois’ least-resourced districts, as part of a strategic effort that will continue beyond the COVID-19 pandemic.

Illinois has taken advantage of other federal waivers and opportunities to help schools meet the need of Illinois’ families. ISBE secured the waiver early on to allow schools to serve meals in creative ways outside of school. ISBE has worked with the Illinois Department of Human Services to prepare for the implementation of the Pandemic-EBT, which will supply families with additional funds for purchasing food during the crisis. ISBE also secured waivers to allow schools to carryover federal funds for low-income students to support their transition back to classroom this fall.

“Our school buildings may be closed, but the hearts and minds of our teachers and students are wide open,” said State Superintendent of Education Dr. Carmen I. Ayala. “This pandemic has altered the fabric of how we teach, learn, and connect, but it has not shaken the core of what our schools do, which is take care of Illinois’ children and prepare them for what’s next. Our schools focus on social and emotional skills, like resilience and empathy, for this very reason: so that when the unpredictable events in life knock us down, we get right back up. The Illinois State Board of Education is

addressing the digital divide head on and planning for the transition back to school in the fall to help our students and educators face and overcome the challenges ahead.”

“Students and families are experiencing loss and grief right now. Their lives have been completely upended, and schools are a valuable resource to help students and their families cope with this sudden transition into the unknown,” said Dr. Donna Leak, Vice Chairperson of the Illinois State Board of Education and Superintendent of Community Consolidated Schools District 168. “Throughout this process, I have spent time collaborating with fellow superintendents to share thoughts, ideas, and provide support to one another as we navigate uncharted waters. We will all be prepared to meet the demands of our communities with today’s announcement and continue to find creative and innovative solutions to support our families into the future.”

Each public school district in Illinois has developed and implemented a plan to ensure all students have access to instruction and to their teachers during Remote Learning Days. ISBE convened an advisory group of teachers, superintendents, and students to develop comprehensive Remote Learning Recommendations for all grade levels, including suggestions on grading, content selection and delivery, social-emotional development, and communication with families. The recommendations are available in English, Spanish, Polish, and Arabic at [www.isbe.net/covid19](http://www.isbe.net/covid19).

ISBE has encouraged each school to determine a local method of taking attendance or checking student engagement. Daily virtual contact with students helps teachers understand when students may need additional support with assignments, meals, mental health, or other needs. ISBE also will release recommendations to schools to address learning loss and students’ social-emotional needs when students transition back to in-person instruction.

The governor also waived the edTPA and student teaching requirement for educator candidates who have completed all other requirements for licensure. These and other emergency changes to educator licensure will ensure that the COVID-19 does not impact local school district’s ability to hire qualified educators they need to support students.

Lastly, the governor and his administration amended graduation requirements for high school seniors, in recognition of the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on their final semester. For example, current high school seniors may graduate without the normally required participation in consumer education and physical fitness assessment.