

June 13, 2020

Governor J.B. Pritzker:

The Illinois Association of School Boards (IASB) appreciates and thanks you for your leadership in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Illinois' school board members also understand and are grateful for your concern for the safety and well being of students, staff, and families who interact with public schools.

We are proud of the amazing effort that took place in Illinois' public schools last spring as our schools quickly pivoted to online and then remote learning. We are also deeply appreciative of the extraordinary work by school staff who continued to serve our students, families, and communities during an unprecedented time. The pandemic illustrated that our schools are often the hub of economic and social activities in communities across Illinois.

The shift to remote learning underscored underlying inequities across this diverse state. The lack of access to quality online learning experiences and direct contact with school staff widened the achievement gaps involving our children of color, those living in poverty in urban and rural areas, and children with disabilities. This weighs heavily on our minds as we think about the reopening of schools in the fall.

We recognize the harsh realities that our communities face as we shift our thinking to the reopening of schools in the fall. Our children and families are experiencing a once in a generation health crisis that disproportionately impacts our black and brown communities. Historic unemployment and the subsequent economic fallout of the recession disproportionately impact black communities and will stretch social services to the breaking point. Recent acts of hatred and racism resulting in civil unrest represent historic challenges facing our country and its schools.

During a national crisis, schools are often the institutions best positioned to address the academic and social-emotional needs of children and the basic needs of families. Current conditions require that boards of education, the governing bodies elected to represent our communities, take a thoughtful approach to planning for an unprecedented reopening of school. In May, IASB provided to all of its members the enclosed *Guidance for Boards Regarding Reopening of Schools* to support this important work of Illinois' school boards.

As we approach the 2020-2021 school year, Illinois school boards know that the challenges schools face may be greater than those faced last spring. We believe that providing a safe and supportive environment for every student and staff member is the foundation upon which learning occurs. School boards will need flexibility to respond to the sometimes rapidly evolving needs of the school communities. A one-size-fits-all approach to these challenges will be ineffective. Local boards of education, working in concert with public health officials and

PLEASE REPLY TO:

□ 2921 Baker Drive
Springfield, Illinois
62703-5929
217/528-9688
Fax: 217/528-2831

□ One Imperial Place
1 East 22nd Street
Suite 20
Lombard, Illinois
60148-6120
630/629-3776
Fax: 630/629-3940

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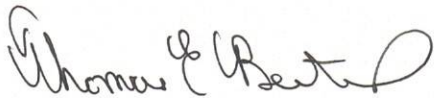
Thomas E. Bertrand, Ph.D.
Executive Director

armed with scientific data, are best positioned to guide communities through these challenging times and to make decisions regarding whether in-person learning should occur.

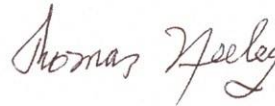
Illinois' school boards remain committed to ensuring that all students have a healthy and supportive environment in which each student can learn and thrive.

Thank you again for your leadership during this challenging time for our state and country. IASB stands ready to advise and assist you in this endeavor. Please contact me if IASB can be of any further assistance.

Sincerely,



Thomas E. Bertrand, Executive Director
Illinois Association of School Boards



Tom Neeley, President
Board of Directors

Cc: Jessie Ruiz, Deputy Governor