



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

August 10, 2021

Dear Leader Durkin:

Thank you for reaching out to share these concerns. As a former local superintendent, I recognize the need to make the in-person learning experience as comfortable as possible for students and staff and understand the pressure administrators are facing from members of their communities.

Health and safety – protecting the lives and wellbeing of every person in Illinois schools – remains the priority of the Illinois State Board of Education. Over the last several weeks we have been inundated with support from parents and educators for face coverings in schools, given where we find ourselves again with the surge in cases and hospitalizations now due to the Delta variant, and the fact that a vaccine is still not available for children under 12.

As we've done from the beginning of the pandemic, we are being guided by the expertise of public health officials and expect school districts to continue to do the same. At this time, the use of face coverings while in a school setting has been deemed necessary by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) to keep students and teachers safe, as well as the community around them.

The Illinois State Board of Education has regulatory authority, pursuant to [23 Ill Admin. Code 1.20](#), to ensure school districts do not fail to protect students and staff and in turn risk the benefits of State recognition. There are multiple steps before a school district would become unrecognized. A district would first have their recognition status changed to "On Probation," and a corrective action plan would be put in place to address the deficiencies that present a health hazard or a danger to students or staff.

To be clear, these are not steps anyone at ISBE wishes to take nor should these steps be necessary. School districts should follow public health requirements and guidance to keep their students and staff safe. Our focus right now is on supporting school district leaders and school boards in understanding and complying with the current guidance and requirements. As you note, the State of Illinois will make face coverings available to school districts, including private schools, based upon demand and need. Districts should be reaching out to their county emergency manager to communicate any requests for personal protective equipment (PPE) or other emergency supplies. If the county emergency manager is unable to address a district's need, they will communicate it to the Illinois Emergency Management Agency (IEMA) to ensure the need is met. For reference, a list of county emergency managers in the State of Illinois can be found at <https://www2.illinois.gov/iema/Contacts/Documents/LocalEMADirectory.pdf>

School leaders have seen students struggle remotely – with mental health, with childhood obesity, with childcare, with academics. We all agree that our collective goal is to do everything we can to keep school in-

person this fall, and wearing a face covering is the simplest, most effective way to do that – for our students, for our parents, for our teachers, and for communities across the state. I look forward to continue working in partnership with school leaders, as well as the legislature to ensure this.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Carmen Ayala". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "C" and "A".

Dr. Carmen I. Ayala
State Superintendent of Education