



August 17, 2020

Superintendent Carmen Ayala  
Illinois State Board of Education  
100 W. Randolph St.  
Chicago, IL 60601

Re: ISBE Reopening Plan and 21st CCLC Guidance

Dear Dr. Ayala:

Thank you for your leadership during this difficult time. As we look ahead, we must ensure Illinois youth have the support they need to re-engage in school and community life. In that vein, our coalition offers the following comments regarding ISBE's reopening plan and 21st Century Community Learning Center (21st CCLC) guidance. Afterschool for Children and Teens Now (ACT Now) is a statewide coalition with over 1,800 members that works to ensure that young people in Illinois have access to quality, affordable afterschool, community school, and youth development programs.

During this crisis, afterschool programs and community schools are connecting families to essential items and services, conducting remote programming, and, in some cases, in-person programming for the most vulnerable youth or youth of essential workers. Moving forward, afterschool programs and community schools will be crucial in supporting Illinois families as we rebuild following this crisis.

If the state's education system, economy, and future workforce is to rebound quickly, using federal and state support to keep afterschool and summer programs running and serving additional students will be essential. Our comments on ISBE's reopening plan and 21st CCLC guidance are described below.

*ISBE Reopening Plan Comments*

1. **Collaborate with Out-of-School Time (OST) and Parent Groups:** We ask that future workgroups and statewide plans involving reopening and COVID-19 response include OST providers and parent groups. Working families face a myriad of obstacles with remote learning that will require the assistance of OST programs to stay employed. OST is a critical component of the learning process where students receive support for school day learning, learn essential social emotional skills, discover their passions, and become more invested in school day learning. OST will also help students cope with the trauma caused by the pandemic and the recent civil unrest due to the tragic murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor.

2. **Discouraging External Partners:** The ISBE reopening plan stated, "Visitors and the use of school facilities by external parties should be discouraged as much as possible, but some programs, such as child care, are critical to the communities they serve... School districts may consider limiting or suspending non-critical in-person before- or after-school programs (e.g., leisure-based programs, social clubs, etc.) or offer remote opportunities for engagement." Enrichment programs help to supplement the school day and invest students in school day learning. Some students come to school and work hard to maintain good grades just so they can go to their afterschool programs. Many afterschool programs, and in particular, community schools work with a variety of in order to meet the whole needs of students. This includes mental health supports, physical health care workers, nutrition programs, and resources to support families. Families need these services now more than ever, and ISBE



should encourage schools to accommodate these partners and enrichment programs in their reopening plans in order to ensure students and families have the tools they need to be successful.

#### Child Care Needs during Remote Learning

1. **Future Federal Funds:** ISBE must encourage school districts to allocate any additional federal Education Stabilization fund dollars to OST partnerships to ensure families receive essential services. We commend ISBE on using its previous CARES Act funding to help close the digital divide. Although afterschool and summer programming were allowable uses for CARES Act funds, few districts used their funding for these purposes. Seventeen states have already specifically designated CARES funding for OST. Community-based organizations and afterschool programs can help to supplement learning lost at the end of the last school year and to provide necessary child care on days where students cannot be in the school building. However, without funding, many programs are forced to charge families for these services, which exacerbates opportunity gaps for low income families. ISBE and school districts should use future federal funding to support these partnerships.
2. **Collaborate with DCFS and IDHS on Child Care:** ISBE must collaborate with DCFS and IDHS to ensure we are meeting the child care needs for school-age remote learners under 12 years old. This includes licensing and licensing exemption support from DCFS.
3. **Grant Flexibility:** During this time, IDHS has provided considerable flexibility for their community-based afterschool programs. This flexibility has allowed those programs to put youth and families first. We recommend ISBE collaborate with IDHS to determine how to provide similar program flexibility in their OST programming.
4. **Release After School Program Funding:** ISBE's "After School Program" funding for school districts and community-based organizations could provide much needed relief and help fund child care on remote learning days. We urge ISBE to put this funding on the agenda at the August board meeting.

#### 21st Century Community Learning Centers

ACT Now has valued that the ISBE 21st CCLC team has stayed in contact with our organization during this time. We are also grateful for the formal guidance recently issued. We recommend the following changes to any upcoming guidance.

1. **Funding Flexibility:** We appreciate the flexibility in the guidance issued stating that when 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC programs can use funding is based on local plans. We recommend that ISBE strength this language by allowing for the spending of grant funds any time when direct instruction from a teacher is not available and to consider this part of "non-school hours" and as a supplement to the school day.
2. **Reporting Flexibility:** The rise in COVID-19 and interruptions in afterschool programming have made 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC reporting and attendance requirements incredibly difficult for providers to meet. We recommend that ISBE amend its 21st CCLC guidance to offer specific flexibility in grant reporting requirements.



We welcome further collaboration and discussion with ISBE in order to ensure a successful and safe school year for all Illinois students and their families.

Sincerely,

ACT Now Coalition

Co-signers

Organization	Location
After School Matters	Chicago
Alternative Schools Network/Dr. Pedro Albizu Campos High School	Chicago
America SCORES Chicago	Chicago
Angel of God Resource Center, Inc.	Chicago
Brighton Park Neighborhood Council	Chicago
Brown Bear Daycare	Harvard
Brunson Boys and Girls Club of Chicago	Chicago (Austin Community)
BUILD, Inc	Chicago
Central States SER	Chicago
Chicago Arts Partnerships in Education	Chicago
Chicago Run	Chicago
Chicago Youth Programs	Chicago
Chinese Mutual Aid Association	Chicago
CommUnity Makery	Chicago
Community Organizing and Family Issues (COFI)	Statewide
COFI POWER-PAC IL	Statewide
DREAAM Opportunity Center	Champaign, Urbana, and Rantoul
Edison Junior High School	Rock Island, IL
Enlace Chicago	Chicago
Family Legacy Foundation	Chicago
Good Shepherd Center	Hazel Crest, Chicago Heights, Calumet City, Harvey, Oak Forest, Oak Lawn
Illinois AfterSchool Network	Statewide
Mary's House	Centralia
Matteson Elementary School District #162	Richton Park
Northeastern Illinois University	Cicero-Berwyn
Project Success of Vermilion County, Inc.	Danville

# ACTNOW!

## Afterschool for Children and Teens

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School District U-46	Elgin
Snuggle Bunnies Home	Kankakee
Teddy Bear Christian Child Development Center	Riverton
Union League Boys and Girls Club	Chicago
Village of Lake in the Hills	Lake in the Hills
Voices for Illinois Children	Statewide
WeGo Together for Kids	West Chicago
West Chicago Elementary School District 33	West Chicago
YMCA of Metropolitan Chicago	Chicago and suburbs
Youth Guidance	Chicago, Proviso (Maywood)
YWCA Metropolitan Chicago	Addison