

AUSTIN BEUTNER UPDATE TO THE SCHOOL COMMUNITY

AS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY – AUGUST 10, 2020

Good morning. I'm Austin Beutner, Superintendent of Los Angeles Unified.

Today our focus will be on the new school year which starts next week.

But first, I want to provide a quick update on the community health factors we're monitoring which will give us a sense of when it may be appropriate for students to return to school facilities.

The case rate for the virus looks to be heading in the right direction and the portion of those testing positive is also headed down. Recent news reports, however, have identified problems in the state test reporting system which may lead to a revision of these figures but the overall trend is encouraging.

While the virus has spread around the world, its impact is felt locally. Improving community health conditions may make it possible for schools to open as scheduled after Labor Day in New York, and San Francisco or San Diego may be in a position to have students return to schools before Los Angeles. New York may prove to be an interesting case study. Governor Cuomo set a statewide standard of 5% on the test rate, consistent with the World Health Organization guidance, and a more stringent level of 3% for New York City. Both are more conservative than the recent California state guidelines.

We'll monitor closely any developments in cities where schools do open and see what we can learn. The health and safety of all in the school community is not something we can compromise on. Any decision about the return of students to school is still some time away based on local health conditions.

We've learned a good deal about online education since March and it's clear there is a need for more one-on-one support for students. The individual attention a teacher can provide to a student in a classroom at a school is not easily replicated in a Zoom class with 20 or 30 students.

When the new school year starts, we'll be providing one-on-one tutoring, both in person and online, for students who need it most. Both efforts will be voluntary, and classroom teachers and principals will help identify students for this program.

Los Angeles Unified is working with a new non-profit, Step Up Tutoring, which will provide online tutoring services to students for free. Carefully screened college students and volunteers from across the country will provide K-8 students with supplemental,

individualized assistance outside of the regular school day. This is one way we are able to take advantage of the online, one-to-one connection schools now have with each student. In the past, this would have required the tutor to be at a particular school at a particular time. Now we can connect more people with flexible scheduling and no travel time. The connection with the child's teacher will help make sure the individual support is tied to the student's work in the classroom.

An initial pilot effort serving 500 students in three Communities of Schools (Huntington Park, Fremont and Taft) will begin shortly after the start of the new school year and the program will be expanded to more students during the semester. Those who are watching might be interested in volunteering to become a tutor as part of this program. Please visit their website, stepuptutoring.org.

Schools will also be offering additional learning opportunities for all students as they did during the summer. Our efforts with Fender this summer provided more than 1,000 middle school students with guitar, bass and ukulele classes. This will expand to 2,000 students for the fall semester. These and other opportunities may fill up quickly so please check in regularly with your school principal. I would also encourage you to visit a YouTube channel we created, Los Angeles Unified A World of Learning, with your child to find other enrichment opportunities.

The first week of school will be focused on training and providing teachers with the time they need to plan together, as well as orientation for students.

Monday, August 17th is the first day back for teachers and they'll be training and planning all day. On Tuesday morning, teachers will continue that work. In the afternoon on Tuesday, every school principal will hold an online meeting for students and families to review the upcoming year and answer questions. On Wednesday morning, teachers will continue training and planning and in the afternoon students and families will meet with their teachers.

On all three of these days, schools will be providing students with devices and internet access as well as school materials and textbooks.

Please try and attend the meeting with your school principal. You can also visit the website for your child's school where more detailed information can be found.

In addition, we put together a Family and Student Handbook which has information on student enrollment and sample schedules and help to navigate online learning. Printed copies will be available at all schools and an electronic version will be sent to all families.

You can also visit a YouTube channel we created to help families, called Help for Families, or call the Family Helpdesk with any questions.

While students may not be in school facilities, we are doing all we can to keep any staff and visitors to a school as safe as possible. Everyone at a school will be provided with the appropriate personal protective equipment including masks. Facilities are being kept clean and sanitized. Classrooms are being cleaned top to bottom every day with electrostatic cleaners and MERV 13 filters (the equivalent of an N-95 mask) are being used in air conditioning systems. As additional practices are shown to be effective and appropriate for schools, we'll incorporate these as well. Even if there is only one person at a school, we will make sure all health practices are maintained at the highest standard.

I recently took a tour of several schools to review the preparations. Please watch and you'll get a sense of what is being done before school starts and all the work to prepare for the eventual return of students to campuses.

During one of my visits at an elementary school, the topic of school libraries came up. We know how important reading is in a student's education. But there's no easy way to have students wander through a library and sample books without incurring the risk of spreading the virus.

A teacher and an assistant principal on the tour were brainstorming and came up with the idea of taking portions of the library to classrooms. Sort of a mini-bookmobile inside the school. Students can indicate the subject they might be interested in and teacher librarians or library aides can bring selections on that topic to the classroom.

Once we have the baseline of appropriate health practices in place, we'll add the perspective of the school community to the mix to help make it better. In the coming weeks, we'll be taking small numbers of teachers, students and families to school sites throughout the school district to get their feedback on how we might improve the preparations.

We all wish students could be headed back to classrooms on August 18th as a new school year officially starts. Unfortunately, it's not safe and appropriate at this time. As we start the new school year online, each and every one of us in Los Angeles Unified will do our best to help students continue to learn.

Thank you for your continued patience and support.