

AUSTIN BEUTNER UPDATE TO THE SCHOOL COMMUNITY

AS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY – AUGUST 3, 2020

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

This morning we'll talk about our efforts to provide a safety net to the communities we serve, the need to continue to upgrade school facilities which the Board of Education will consider this week and we'll outline plans for the start of the new school year, which will begin the week of August 17th.

Today we'll pass another milestone in our food relief program – 50 million meals. The need continues and so will our efforts until students can return to schools. That'll take money and while we've raised more than \$20 million from businesses and individuals, there's still a gap. The entire month of August, Entercom, a radio powerhouse, will be helping raise money to support the program. \$20 buys a week's worth of lunches. You can text NEED to 76278 or visit our website for more information.

We have been advocating at the Federal, State and local levels for funds to support the meal program and have proposed a solution to Los Angeles County which would help secure the needed funding. In short, if the County formally notifies FEMA that Los Angeles Unified is managing food relief efforts, we'll qualify to receive reimbursement from the Federal Government. This would merely acknowledge what's actually happening – Los Angeles Unified has been providing food to children and adults since March. We hope the County will act quickly on this request to enable us to continue to provide the help which is so desperately needed.

At tomorrow's meeting, the School Board will formally consider putting on the November ballot a facilities bond which would allow Los Angeles Unified to continue its multi-year effort to upgrade school facilities. The existing program has built more than 100 new schools, repaired fire alarms, air conditioning systems and roofs at more than 500 schools and upgraded science labs and enabled technology use at schools. And much, much more. The program has also created over 350,000 local construction jobs. Much more work remains to be done as 70% of school buildings are over 50 years old. The proposed bond would extend the program another seven years and would not require any tax increases. I hope the Board elects to proceed and, if so, voters in November will support the effort to make sure students have the world-class schools they deserve.

When the new school year starts the week of August 17th, it will start without students at school. The threat from the virus is currently too great. The health and safety of all in the school community is not something we can compromise on. Our goal is to have students back in schools as soon as it is safe and appropriate to do so.

We need to continue to balance three sometimes conflicting objectives – the learning needs of students, the impact the virus is having on working families and protecting the health and safety of all in the school community. Our commitment is to provide the best possible education, whether online or at school.

Before we get to the details about what the start of the school year will look like, I'll provide a quick recap of the community health factors which are keeping students out of school facilities.

The state of California recently issued coronavirus guidelines. These guidelines about the overall level of the virus and the capacity of the health system determine whether it's possible for students to return to schools that have an appropriate safety plan to be open.

Our focus is on the occurrence and testing related to the virus as we assume the necessary investments have been made in the healthcare system.

In the Los Angeles area, there are considerably more cases of the virus than the standard set by the state. At the same time, the positive testing rate is much closer to the 8% guideline set by the state, though the state standard is less stringent than the World Health Organization standard of 5%.

The virus has spread around the world but its impact on schools is felt locally. Based on current conditions, it may be possible for students to return to schools in New York or Chicago before they can in Miami or Houston.

We'll continue to provide weekly updates on these two community health factors – cases and testing rates – as those will be the best leading indicators of when we can consider bringing students back to schools.

The work to create a plan for the 2020-21 school year started in April by bringing together representatives of all stakeholders – students and families, teachers and staff, school leaders, labor partners and community organizations. The working group spent long days evaluating different scenarios and finding solutions to the many issues which the virus presents. They also met with health experts, reviewed ideas from other school districts and coordinated with state and local health and education authorities. More recently, an operational team was created to focus on all that needs to be done to get ready to welcome students back.

An important part of this work was incorporating what has been learned since March, finding specific ways to solve some of the problems and share good practices. I'll highlight just a few of the learnings and start with the most important, instruction.

The goal is to have as much teacher-led interaction with students as possible. This is the core of public education, the learning that happens when students and teachers are connected. It's worth noting this is a fundamentally different approach to online

instruction. Until this crisis, most efforts in online education had significant selection bias -- a small number of students from schools and families with lots of resources at school and at home. And most students who pursued online learning had a demonstrated ability to learn independently. Public schools have a broader mission, which is to provide every student, irrespective of their current ability or family circumstance, with the opportunity to learn.

Online instruction in the new school year will have more structure and standards and increased interaction between teachers and students. Schools will also provide one-on-one support both in person and online, for students who need it most. This includes our commitment to a Primary Promise -- making sure every student in elementary school builds a foundation in literacy, math and critical thinking skills. Learning is cumulative and it's imperative we focus on our young learners. The virus has made the need even more acute as we know those learning to read, students learning English, students with differences or disabilities are most impacted by the absence from schools and the challenges online learning present. All of this instruction will be supported by better connected tools and technologies to help teachers and their students.

The operational pieces to support this teacher-student interaction will continue to be improved -- whether it's the ability to conduct an IEP online so a student's needs can be identified and met or redeploying bus drivers to support online instruction, it's all hands on deck at schools to support students.

We know the shift from teaching a student in a classroom to online learning increases the demands on families. A young student needs a family member to help them connect to their teacher, older students may need one-on-one support if they're struggling and all students need a quiet place to work and encouragement to focus on their studies. These are trying times for families who have to juggle the impact the virus is having on their lives with the school needs of their children. We want to help as much as possible.

We'll continue to make sure every student has a device and internet connection and we've added more training including a YouTube channel, Los Angeles Unified Help for Families, to help answer questions.

A great amount of work continues at school facilities to increase safety. All schools are stocked with supplies and have been cleaned top to bottom. Each night electrostatic machines clean every surface, the air filters in air conditioning systems have been replaced with the same material used in an N-95 mask, and facilities are well-marked to keep all in the school an appropriate distance. Whether it's one principal alone in her office, a teacher working alone in his classroom or sometime in the future, students at schools, we'll continue to listen to health experts and put in place their recommendations on how to reduce the risk at schools.

Since March, we've made a concerted effort to strengthen the ties between schools and the community they serve and it's paying dividends. Whether it's businesses and individuals supporting teachers in their work or making donations to support the safety

net schools provide to students and families, it's been gratifying to see so many in the community become part of this effort. The students in our schools represent the future of Los Angeles and we hope many, many more in the community will be inspired by this progress and offer to help.

The first few days of school will be spent continuing to train teachers and giving them time to plan together for the start of instruction. We'll also use that time to make sure students are connected with their school, have a chance to meet their teachers and have the devices and internet access and the appropriate textbooks and instructional materials.

At each level, there will be consistent schedules for students. Whether it's a new kindergarten student, a student who's learning English or a student with learning differences or disabilities, the goal is to provide a clear set of expectations for teachers, as well as for students and families.

As you might imagine, this is an enormous operational undertaking. To help we've created resource guides for principals and families as well as a set of instructional materials and supports for teachers.

Each of these provides a complete checklist, much like the pilot on a plane might use, to make sure schools can do their best to meet the unique needs of each student.

In order to support all who work in schools, we will be providing childcare at schools for those who are working at school sites. Teachers and staff in schools are essential workers under state guidelines. Los Angeles Unified can provide the support due to those rules. We'll expand the effort to include all children once guidelines allow for students to be back in schools.

When community health factors allow, we want to get students back into the classroom. The challenge will be to do so while protecting the health and safety of all in the school community. I continue to believe health practices are only one piece of the solution. There should be testing for the virus and contact tracing at schools. A recent study from the University of Texas puts this in human terms. At a school of about 3,000 students, like the one I have shared with you before, about 25 to 30 people with the virus would be expected to be at the school during the week. Testing and tracing at the school will help isolate those 25 to 30 people and protect the 100,000 people connected to that school.

Health practices at schools will include a series of measures to mitigate the spread of the virus and other communities will soon have students at their schools and we can learn from their experiences.

One of the important tenants of health practices will be the need to keep all in schools farther apart. This has one big implication for schools – there will be fewer students at a

school at any one time so students will need to be on what is referred to as a hybrid schedule, which combines in-school and at-home, online instruction.

Our goal is to maximize the time in schools for students, every day for elementary school students and 2 or 3 days a week for secondary school students. Students will also be able to participate in school on Saturday mornings. And one-on-one tutoring, both online and in person, will be provided to students who need it the most.

Much like the approach to online, we will provide detailed guides for school leaders, teachers and students and families to help with hybrid learning schedules.

We understand many of the families we serve need to make sure their children are safe and cared for all day, every day to allow family members to be at work full time. We are developing a plan to provide this care for children of families who need it.

We've covered a lot of ground today. This is an enormous undertaking for schools, as well as for the students and families they serve. There will be questions and, as we've seen since March, circumstances can change quickly. We'll do our best to keep everyone informed with regular town hall and school meetings, as well as ongoing surveys and focus groups to make sure we're learning about concerns and continuing to address them.

A new school year brings excitement as the doors of opportunity open to students. The doors may not be open at school facilities as we start the year but the opportunity to learn must be there for all students. Our efforts, whether online or at school, are to make sure we provide students with a good education. The impact of COVID-19 requires us to take different approaches and put forth extraordinary efforts, we are committed to both.

When school starts, the doors of opportunity open for students. While the doors to classrooms will not be open in August, it's our goal to provide the best education possible for students so they continue to have the same opportunity.

Thanks for your continued patience and support.