

AUSTIN BEUTNER UPDATE TO THE SCHOOL COMMUNITY

AS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY – JULY 20, 2020

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

Today we'll talk about our continuing efforts to provide a safety net to students and families and explore a major effort we're undertaking to put students and their schools at the center of all we do.

Teachers and students have a break from the last day of school in June until school starts in August. Today typically marks the midpoint of the summer. But this year's different as many students and teachers are participating in summer school and they'll have a much shorter break. Throughout all of this time, Los Angeles Unified has continued efforts to provide a safety net for students and their families. By the end of the month, we'll have provided more than 50 million meals, the largest school-based relief effort in the country.

One of the challenges Los Angeles Unified faces is how to best serve the unique needs of students and families who live in a diverse set of communities spread across 710 square miles. For too long, the school district has tried to find the one answer that works for all students and believed that answer should come from the top. I don't believe one-size-fits-all, top-down, compliance-driven bureaucracies are the answer. The answers lie at the grassroots in the classrooms of the communities we serve. In effect we need to turn the school district upside down or really, right side up and place the students at the top.

I'm here at Perez Learning Center in the heart of East Los Angeles. Families are welcome here and educators meet here to collaborate on how to best meet the unique needs of students in this community.

When I visit an elementary school classroom, students will often ask me what a superintendent does. My answer is always the same: "My job is to make sure the people who work in this school have what they need to provide the best possible education." That's what a school district should do to support each and every school.

Not long after I started as superintendent, I put together a task force of the best and brightest minds from all of our schools led by one of our most experienced administrators. They looked at strategies in other school districts, spoke with experts from across the country and, most importantly, held dozens of meetings at schools with thousands of family members and most they spoke with felt strongly – a big part of the answer on how to accelerate student achievement is to put the school back at the center.

As a school district we had to rethink how the school district was organized. Two local district leaders volunteered to find the way and each empowered local leaders to create the best solutions for the communities they serve. Local District East, serving 100,000 students across 45 square miles, is now letting local leaders in Bell, Boyle Heights, Cudahy, East Los Angeles, El Sereno, Huntington Park, Lincoln Heights, Maywood, South Gate and Vernon take charge. Local District South, with 148 schools supporting over 85,000 students, has empowered 7 local leaders to serve San Pedro, Wilmington, Carson, Harbor City, Lomita, Gardena and the Watts-Willowbrook communities.

All of the central departments from Facilities to Health and Human Services are changing the way services are provided to schools so these local leaders have the flexibility they need. We've learned in this COVID crisis that many people don't need to work in an office tower downtown. Rather, their work is better done at schools in the local community. We're reevaluating the downtown footprint of Los Angeles Unified so more people can be deployed to schools.

This transition to the community is an important one which will take time to fully realize. But all involved are convinced it's the right direction and the early signs are quite encouraging.

I've asked Jose Huerta and Mike Romero, the Local District leaders who have been piloting efforts in this work, to join us for a conversation about what they've accomplished thus far.

You'll hear a great deal of excitement and a clear commitment to the work. How it starts with what's best for students and their unique needs. How it's connecting principals and teachers around a common vision. How teachers in the same grade and subject from different schools are collaborating and sharing ideas, how schools are helping students with learning differences and disabilities participate in classes with their general education peers, how schools can better coordinate with their community to address student and family needs and how business, civic institutions and elected officials in local communities have embraced their local schools. And you'll hear how issues families have can be solved with a short walk to school rather than a long drive across town. Please watch.

The great progress in communities in the East and South have provided the foundation to implement this approach across all of Los Angeles Unified and as of July 1st, we're now organized around 40 local communities.

These 40 local leaders spent this past week reintroducing themselves to the communities they serve in town halls throughout the school district. They discussed plans for the new school year and the questions and concerns many of you have. All of this feedback will be incorporated in the planning to prepare for the start of the new school year and a return to school facilities as soon as possible.

That takes us back to the topic of COVID-19 and the impact it will have in the upcoming school year. We're working to balance the learning needs of students, the impact the virus is having on working families and the health and safety of all in the school community. You have my commitment to do the best we can.

Thank you for your continued patience and support.