

## **AUSTIN BEUTNER UPDATE TO THE SCHOOL COMMUNITY**

### **AS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY – JUNE 15, 2020**

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

Today we'll cover the latest on our efforts to provide a safety net to the communities we serve, a few graduating students will share their thoughts on the future, I'll provide a quick update on the school budget process and we'll start a conversation on the role of school police.

Los Angeles Unified has now provided about 33 million meals to families in need. Our efforts have been joined by World Central Kitchen, the LA Food Bank and more recently by Farmers to Families, a federal program which is purchasing food directly from farmers and delivering it to Los Angeles Unified so we can provide it to families. This collective effort will continue until school facilities reopen.

Last Friday, June 12<sup>th</sup> was the last official day of the 2019-20 school year. It's a special time for students, their families and school staff as we acknowledge all of the scholars, athletes, artists and dreamers for their hard work. For the Class of 2020, this marks the end of high school and the commencement of the next chapter of their lives. For kindergartners, the Class of 2032, it's the first step in a wonderful journey which lies ahead.

California is where America comes to see its future and in the hands of these extraordinary students, that future is very bright. I thought you might enjoy hearing from just a few of them.

Tonight we've a special surprise for the Class of 2020. At 6 pm on this station, I'll be joined by Governor Gavin Newsom, musician Lil Jon, Dodgers Manager Dave Roberts, Senator Kamala Harris, TV producer Kenya Barris, Ellen DeGeneres and many other special guests to honor the graduates from all of the schools in Los Angeles Unified. I hope you can join us for this special event.

June is also a transition time for the school system as we finish one school year and start the next. This month is normally when the budget for the upcoming school year is finalized and formally adopted by the Board of Education. That process began in January when schools were provided by the state of California with estimates of the dollars they'll have for the 2020-21 school year which begins in August. The world has changed a great deal since then but our commitment to students has not.

Since January, the state revised budget figures in March and again in May. We expect a third, different set of figures will be formally adopted by the state sometime in June.

The state has already said they do not know what the next few months might look like, let alone the next few years. All with good reason. They have also said they will revise the June figures sometime in August and may change the state budget yet again at that time.

This budget uncertainty at the state level informs our approach to school budgets since more than 90% of the funds at schools in Los Angeles Unified are provided by the state of California. Our plan: simple, do the best we can now and plan to incorporate more information about what tomorrow may bring as soon as the state provides us with that information.

We do know with certainty students will have great needs when the new school year starts on August 18th. They'll have been absent from schools for about five months and those who may have been less prepared to learn independently – elementary students, English Learners, students with learning differences and disabilities and those who were struggling before school facilities closed – will need more, not less. There will be a need for more mental health support for students in schools as they deal with the trauma in their lives. And we know it will cost substantial amounts of money to keep schools clean and safe while protecting all in schools from COVID-19.

We also know this is the one chance students have to get back on track in their learning. Students who aren't capable readers in elementary school will carry that burden with them the rest of their lives. We cannot allow a health crisis to become an education crisis which causes irreparable harm to children.

Our commitment is to provide the best possible education for students that we can now and continue to work with state and federal governments to solve the problems of the next few years as they arise. We're not going to take actions in 2020 which will sacrifice students' futures in a misguided attempt to solve the uncertain challenges of 2023.

All that said, we will tighten our belts as the funding outlook is dire. I've ordered a hiring freeze for any personnel who do not work at schools as well as a ban on travel or conference attendance. All purchases in excess of \$50,000 must be approved by the Deputy Superintendent of Operations.

During the summer, we'll be undertaking a bottoms-up look at every one of the departments in Los Angeles Unified to find savings and make sure every nickel is being spent to help students learn.

In addition, we are joining forces with San Diego Unified, the second-largest school district in the state, and the charter schools in Los Angeles to work together in purchasing the supplies and materials which will be necessary to help protect students

and staff from COVID-19. The collective buying power on behalf of about 800,000 public school students will allow us to get the best possible pricing.

This budget review will also include Los Angeles school police. Across the country, efforts are being undertaken to address systemic bias and institutional racism which impact Black children and adults. It should be clear to all in our nation there is much work to do if we are to create a just and equitable society. Los Angeles Unified must take action and be part of the solution.

School police are not part of the Los Angeles Police Department, the LA County Sheriff's Department or any of the 13 other municipal law enforcement agencies in the communities we serve. They are trained differently and their role is different. While school police were asked to investigate more than 150 threats of mass shootings at schools last year, and responded to over 100,000 incidents which included attempted robbery, assaults and other serious crimes, school police have never fired a weapon on campus since they were formed in 1984. They counsel and mentor students and help de-escalate incidents on campus.

But we cannot ignore the legitimate concerns and criticisms that students and other members in the school community have about all forms of law enforcement. The culture and climate at schools must be founded on inclusion and respect. No person should feel the presence of a safety officer on a campus as an indictment of them or their character. Students deserve to be heard on this topic and their views taken into account.

I have asked a small group of community members with expertise in this area to help a team from Los Angeles Unified who work in schools take a careful look at this. They will listen to students, families, those who work in schools and all in the communities we serve. They will look at what is needed to keep schools safe as well as what students need to feel free from stigma and feel they are a respected part of their school community. They will ask hard and uncomfortable questions and come up with concrete recommendations. The objective is to present the findings, as well as any suggested changes in practice or policy, to the Board of Education for their consideration as soon as possible.

Los Angeles Unified has led the way in school culture and climate for a long time. A decade ago, more than 60,000 student days were lost to suspensions. By last year that number had been reduced to less than 3,000.

The School Board has already voted to eliminate random wandering in schools effective July 1st and I will be recommending to the Board to eliminate the use of pepper spray and the policy allowing carotid holds before students return to schools in August.

But these actions are just a part of the picture as Los Angeles Unified needs to look much deeper at all of the practices in schools of which school police are only one part.

Our goal in this is not to make a political statement, it's to do the best we can for students.

As we finish the school year and look forward to a community celebration this evening, I am reminded of the meaning of commencement. Webster's Dictionary refers to it as "the beginning." These past few months have brought more challenge than the school community has faced in a long, long time. My hope is together we can find the strength and optimism for a new beginning as we look forward to the new school year which will start on August 18th.

There's talent and promise in every one of our students and they're counting on us to provide them with a great education to help realize the bright future which lies ahead for them.

Thank you for your continued patience and support.