

AUSTIN BEUTNER UPDATE TO THE SCHOOL COMMUNITY

AS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY – APRIL 12, 2021

Good morning I'm Austin Beutner, Superintendent of Los Angeles Unified. Today, I'll share details from my visits with school principals to get a firsthand look at how they're preparing to reopen schools starting tomorrow, give an update on the vaccinations we're now providing the school community and discuss the path to recovery for students.

We'll take an important step on the path to recovery this week when we welcome students back to school. Sixty-one elementary schools and 11 early education centers will be opening their doors to students tomorrow. The remaining elementary schools and early education centers will open the week of April 19th, and middle and high schools the week of April 26th.

The past 404 days will be remembered as a time of sacrifice and determination, but also of hope and optimism, as all of us at Los Angeles Unified worked to maintain a safety net for the communities we serve.

We knew when school campuses closed that hundreds of thousands of children counted on us for meals every day at school. In less than a week, Los Angeles Unified set up a food relief effort that has since provided children and adults with more than 122 million meals along with 26 million items of much-needed supplies.

Behind each meal, a dedicated team of cafeteria workers, custodians, warehouse workers, truck drivers, school principals and staff and countless others without whom none of this would have been possible. Together, we provided meals to all who needed them without question because we knew it was the right thing to do.

Fortunately, Los Angeles Unified was joined in this effort by businesses, individuals and philanthropic organizations who understood the need. They contributed money and in-kind donations totaling almost \$40 million to LA Students Most in Need, the charitable fund we created to help provide a safety net for the school community.

This nation-leading relief effort is a great demonstration of what can be accomplished when we all work together to help those in need.

I joined one of the partners in this effort, Baby2Baby, along with pop star Kelly Rowland, Local District Superintendent Frances Baez and Principal Heidi Ortega at MacArthur Park Elementary School last week to help make sure young children and their families have all they need for the start of school. I hope you enjoy the smiles as much as I did.

With students returning to the classroom, we'll be transitioning our food service program back to a school-based effort focused on children. Beginning this week, students who

return for in-person instruction will be provided multiple meals at school while students who continue with online learning from home can still pick up meals at their own school. This will make certain every child can continue to receive meals from their local school.

As schools open during the month, our Grab & Go Food Centers will begin to close. April 9th was the last day for 22 of the school-based food centers and the remaining 41 sites will close this Friday. School principals are providing families with additional information, including available resources in their local community that can help those continuing to experience food insecurity. If your family is quarantined at home due to the virus or experiencing food or housing insecurity, please reach out to your neighborhood school. We're here to help.

It's been our privilege to serve the community in this time of need. We will continue to do all we can to help the students and families we serve in our schools.

The reopening of schools isn't a simple exercise – COVID safety protocols and testing, class schedules and lesson plans, after-school programs, transportation, meals and much more all need to come together at a school.

In order to do this safely and smoothly, we're staggering the reopening of each school over several days. For example, some elementary schools will see a quick check-in online for students with their teachers to start the day today. Students will work independently for the remainder of the day while all school staff – principals, teachers, bus drivers, librarians, counselors, custodians, cafeteria workers and many others – carefully review safety protocols and fine-tune schedules. Kindergarten and first-grade students will return to school on the 13th, Grades 2 and 3 on the 14th and 4th- and 5th- graders on the 15th. We'll start with the youngest learners because for many of them they'll be visiting school for the first time. This will help them get familiar with their routines.

The same, careful phased-in approach will be used for all of our schools during the course of the month. Our commitment has always been to reopen schools in the safest way possible and this very deliberate approach will help us to do so.

I took the Magic School Bus to visit several schools last week and check in on the preparations. There's an old adage in education – great principals make great schools – and it's never been more true than during this crisis. School leaders have taken on every challenge which has come their way. These local heroes are making sure each and every one of the schools in Los Angeles Unified is ready to welcome students back in the safest way possible.

At Warner Elementary, Principal Kamau showed where staff have been doing their planning to reopen school and the different areas students will learn and play. At Canfield, Principal Gullat shared plans to welcome back students in the outdoor Shakespeare Garden. And at Alexandria, Principal Gadea took us to the ETK

classrooms where teachers like Ms. Ong will welcome their youngest learners for the first time.

Please enjoy a few highlights from my visits, and be sure to thank your school principal for everything they do.

As families help prepare their children for a return to school, we want to remind everyone about our school-based COVID testing program. This is an important part of our commitment to reopen schools in the safest way possible.

Last summer, we brought together Stanford, Johns Hopkins, UCLA, Anthem Blue Cross, Health Net, Cedars-Sinai and SummerBio to help us create the nation's most comprehensive school-based COVID testing program, while Microsoft built the software to schedule the tests and share the information with the school community and health authorities.

This is an extraordinary undertaking -- making sure every student is tested for COVID before they return to school and every week thereafter. Los Angeles Unified is by far the largest school district in the nation to establish this standard for school safety. There are bound to be a few bumps in the road, but once it's in place it'll be worth it. It's all part of our commitment to create the safest possible school environment.

All students who return to campus for in-person learning must receive a COVID test the week prior to their school opening. For students returning to school the week of April 19th, please schedule your appointment sometime this week. And for students who are starting school this week, it's not too late to be tested today.

All of Los Angeles Unified's school-based testing centers will be open 7 days a week, from 7 am to 7 pm, through April 25th. If you have any issues with scheduling, please call our hotline, visit LA Unified's website, walk up to the school testing center closest to you or call your school principal.

Since this crisis began, Los Angeles Unified has had 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.

Los Angeles Unified continues to lead the nation with a safety net for the families we serve. In addition to our food-relief effort, we have provided masks and hand sanitizer, diapers and wipes, clothing and shoes, toys and sporting equipment, books and supplies, as well as computers and internet access for half-a-million students. We've also provided nearly 700,000 free COVID tests at schools to students, staff and their families.

We're now expanding the safety net we're providing to include vaccinations for families as part of our commitment to do all we can to protect the health and safety of everyone in the school community. This effort at 25 school sites is made possible through a

partnership with the Los Angeles County Federation of Labor and many local health and community partners. All of the partners in this effort share a common goal to make sure families with children in schools receive access to vaccinations to help their children return to school in the safest way possible. We hope to add more locations to serve other communities which lack access to the vaccine as health authorities provide a greater supply of doses.

The first of these school-based vaccination centers opened this past week - at Washington Preparatory and Lincoln High Schools in collaboration with St. John's Well Child and Family Center, and Gage Middle School with the help of Northeast Community Clinics. I had the chance to visit all three school sites, together with St. John's Well Child and Family Center President and CEO Jim Mangia, Weingart Foundation President and CEO Miguel Santana, Los Angeles County Federation of Labor President Ron Herrera, Northeast Community Clinics Executive Director and CEO Dr. Christopher Lau, John Wesley Community Health Institute President and CEO Al Ballesteros, First AME Pastor J. Edgar Boyd, Brotherhood Crusade President and CEO Charisse Bremond Weaver, Lakers legend Kareem Abdul-Jabbar and Johnathan Franklin and Rampage from the Rams.

At each stop I heard similar stories from grateful people – we're bringing access to the vaccine at a trusted location in their neighborhood.

Families heard about the opportunity from their local school or a community organization, many chose to make an appointment with a simple phone call and a good portion of those who were vaccinated simply walked to the school from their home and got help without any prior appointment.

This effort helps address the lack of access in many of the communities we serve. In more affluent communities like Bel-Air and Beverly Hills, vaccination rates of adults are well in excess of 50 or 60% while in Watts, Bell, Van Nuys and Pacoima, they are closer to 20%.

But this isn't about numbers, it's about people. At Washington Prep, I visited with 3 families I had met last December during my visit to the school as a not-so-secret Santa to share holiday wishes and a few gifts. Each of the families, ranging in age from 5 to 65, were returning to make sure all of the adults in the family got vaccinated.

One young woman's story is both heartbreaking and inspiring. She learned about the opportunity to get vaccinated the day before from her school and brought along her father and her brother. All three got vaccinated. Unfortunately, since I saw her in December, she's lost her mother and another brother to COVID.

She's an extraordinary individual – bright, engaged and resilient. She'll graduate in June and plans to attend Cal State LA to study nursing. Please keep her and her family in your thoughts and prayers.

COVID has had a devastating impact on many families in the communities we serve. Optimistic statements by elected officials about reopening schools and society won't be sufficient to heal the wounds or address the fear many people have about the virus. It's going to take resources, support and a good deal of time.

These fears also translate into a reluctance by families to send their children back to school. The opportunity gaps for students from families who are struggling to get by will only worsen if they're not back in schools with their peers from more affluent neighborhoods. It's simple enough to see part of the solution – providing vaccinations for families with children in schools is the single most important thing we can do to get more children back in schools.

If you have any questions or need assistance in receiving a free vaccination at a school in your neighborhood, please call our Family Vaccination Hotline, visit LA Unified's website or call your local school principal.

Creating the safest possible school environment is an important piece of the foundation on the Path to Recovery.

Tomorrow, we'll be sharing more information with the Board of Education about the significant investments we'll be making in schools, along with the recommendation for an extended school year beginning in August. We surveyed families and the majority expressed an interest in extending the school year. Staff will be proposing to add one extra week in August and another in January. Each of these weeks will be split between time for teachers and school staff to plan and participate in additional training and time for students to process the trauma and anxiety they've experienced the past year and work on learning fundamentals.

The Board will also be reviewing the Path to Recovery Plan we've created which includes more reading and math teachers in elementary schools to help students build a foundation in literacy, math and critical-thinking skills, more teachers in secondary schools to reduce class sizes, extra staff for tutoring, additional mental health counselors and expanded services for students with learning differences and disabilities.

The reopening of schools is just one step on the long path to recovery which lies ahead and the return of some sense of normalcy in students' lives. Friday night saw another small step as football teams from schools across Los Angeles Unified returned to competition on the field – games that meant much more to all of the students than just the final score.

Thank you for your continued patience and support. I look forward to seeing you at school.