

AUSTIN BEUTNER UPDATE TO THE SCHOOL COMMUNITY

AS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY – APRIL 5, 2021

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

Today we'll review preparations for the reopening of schools next week, outline plans to open 25 school-based vaccination centers to serve school families in high-needs communities and look at some of the specific steps we're taking to help students as part of the path to recovery.

Schools will begin reopening next week and by the end of the month all schools in Los Angeles Unified will have students back on campus. We will open 61 elementary schools and 11 early education centers starting the week of April 12th. The remaining elementary schools and early education centers will open the week of April 19th, and middle and high schools will open the week of April 26th.

Each school will have in place the highest standards of COVID safety practices and protocols.

The reopening of schools is not 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'll stagger 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 on April 12th. Students will work independently 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 many of them will 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 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.

As families help prepare their children for a return to school, we want to remind everyone about the details of our COVID-19 testing program at schools. This testing program is an important part of each school's COVID safety plan. Every student and staff member on a school campus will be tested each week.

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. More than 1,000 employees have been working at these testing sites six days a week since August to make sure that all in our school community have access to free COVID testing at a school in their neighborhood. School nurses have already helped provide more than 600,000 free tests to students, staff and their families at neighborhood schools.

Please make sure your child gets COVID tested sometime this week if their school is reopening the week of April 12th. Los Angeles Unified testing centers will be open 7 days a week, from 7 am to 7 pm, from April 5th to April 25th. If you need more information on this or wish to schedule an appointment for a COVID test at a school near you, please call the Family Hotline at 213-443-1300 or your school principal.

Responses by families to school surveys tell us about half of them are planning for their child to return to in-person instruction. Our goal isn't just to reopen schools – it's to make sure we can open them in the safest way possible with all students there. Many families who have chosen to remain in online instruction tell us their primary concern is that their child might go to school and, however remote the possibility, bring the virus home to a family member in a multigenerational household.

Barriers still remain for many to receive a vaccination – access to technology, the lack of time or the inability to navigate the online vaccine lottery to find an appointment or the lack of access to transportation to a distant vaccination site. School-based vaccination efforts – in the neighborhood by trusted partners – can help solve these issues. Schools are in regular contact with the families they serve and are a trusted part of the community.

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 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 school classrooms.

To help address the issue of vaccine access, Los Angeles Unified will be opening 25 school-based vaccination centers to help the families we serve. Where possible, we will collaborate with a community health partner in this groundbreaking, school-based vaccination effort.

The first two will open on April 6th at Washington Preparatory and Lincoln High Schools in collaboration with St. John's Well Child and Family Center, a long-time partner in our schools. St. John's will provide the doses of vaccine and the clinical staff to administer the shots while Los Angeles Unified will oversee the outreach to the school community and provide operational support at the school sites.

On April 9th, we will open a vaccination center at Gage Middle School with the help of Northeast Community Clinics to serve school families in the Huntington Park community.

The expansion of this effort to 25 school sites from just 2 we announced a week ago is made possible through a partnership with the Los Angeles County Federation of Labor and Northeast Community Clinics. We share a common goal to make sure all families with children in schools receive access to vaccinations to help their children return to school in the safest way possible. Federal, State and County health authorities have made commitments to ensure these school-based sites receive sufficient doses of the vaccine.

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 at (213) 328-3958.

More broadly, Los Angeles Unified continues to lead the nation with a safety net for the families we serve. We have now provided more than 120 million meals along with 26 million items of much-needed supplies including masks and hand sanitizer, diapers and wipes, clothing and shoes, toys and sporting equipment, books and school supplies, as well as computers and internet access for half-a-million students. We're now expanding this safety net to include vaccinations as part of our commitment to do all we can to protect the health and safety of everyone in the school community.

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 are here to help.

To join in our relief efforts, please text NEED to 76278 or visit lastudentsmostinneed.org.

The reopening of schools is just the first step on the path to recovery which lies ahead. It will be supported by an additional \$1.8 billion of investment at schools for the 2021-22 school year. This unprecedented effort is needed – it's the Marshall Plan for schools that we've been calling for and it's becoming a reality. If this crisis has taught us one thing, it's that we can't go back to the way things were and assume that's enough.

For the 2018-19 school year, schools in New York had a bit more than \$29,000 to invest in each student while schools in Los Angeles were asked to make due with a bit more than \$16,000. We have seen the consequences of this lack of adequate funding which include class sizes that are too big, there aren't enough mental health counselors in schools and not all students had the appropriate tools and technologies to participate in online education when this pandemic began.

In the coming school year, we'll spend more than \$21,000 per student. Federal dollars, which typically make up about 13% of school budgets will account for almost a quarter of that amount.

The funds from the American Rescue Plan just approved by Congress and President Biden will provide for an additional \$5,800 per pupil for the 22-23 school year. All of these additional funds will be invested directly at schools to provide services to students.

School classrooms that are open while students remain at home isn't the objective. The commitment to COVID safety – including COVID testing and vaccinations – is necessary for families to feel it's okay for their child to return to school. To help keep schools clean and safe, we'll invest an additional \$220 million in custodial staff, cleaning supplies, upgraded facilities and COVID testing.

Instruction at all levels will be supported by an investment of more than \$1 billion for additional reading and math teachers, extra staff for tutoring and small-group instruction, state-of-the-art technology and tools and an extended school year.

\$170 million will provide more mental health counselors at schools to help students process the anxiety and trauma of the past year. Students with learning differences and disabilities will benefit from a \$140 million investment which will allow staff to quickly update Individualized Education Programs and provide more direct services to students.

Elementary school classrooms will have additional reading and math specialists to help every child build a foundation in literacy, math and critical thinking skills.

We'll use funds to hire teachers and reduce class sizes in middle and high school. While the average will come down meaningfully, the funding will also provide schools with the flexibility to help a smaller group of students with the greatest needs without impacting others who are on track.

Additional mental health counselors at schools will provide the direct support students need. Children will return to classrooms with more than a year's worth of trauma and anxiety. Three-quarters of the families we serve have had a family member lose work during this crisis, illness and death rates are much higher and many students are struggling with loneliness and isolation.

It's important to note it will take a collective effort including businesses, philanthropic and community organizations and all levels of government to help students recover and continue their progress. Let's look at just one of the challenges created by the crisis and its impact on the class of 2020.

June saw record graduation rates in high schools across Los Angeles Unified – almost 81% of students received a high school diploma. Extraordinary efforts by students, their teachers and all who work in schools together with a bit of understanding about the difficult family circumstances got many students across the finish line despite the crisis. But dig a little deeper and you'll see a real concern.

The good news is the same portion of graduates, almost 30%, enrolled in four-year colleges. The bad news – a 9% drop in students who enrolled full-time in two-year colleges after graduation.

And like the rest of the country, the issue is most acute in low-income communities. In a recent article, Time magazine cites a report by National Student Clearinghouse Research Center which showed a drop of about 11% in the college-going rate by students who are from low-income communities like those we serve.

Unfortunately, this is a pattern that's becoming all too familiar during this crisis – job losses are greater, COVID deaths are higher, vaccination rates are lower and education and life outcomes are suffering in low-income communities.

We know the impact from lockdowns and school closures and struggles with online learning made it more difficult for some students to stay on track. But the reasons for the drop in college-going rates extend far beyond the schoolhouse – for many young adults an illness or job loss in the family meant they had to go directly to work to support themselves and their family.

Many of the challenges faced by society are reflected in schools but critics and observers are making a grave error in assuming schools alone can solve the problem. The path to recovery which lies ahead will be measured in months and years. We've lots to do and the kids are counting on us.

I hope you all had a restful spring break. Thank you for your continued patience and support. I look forward to seeing you at a school next week.