

AUSTIN BEUTNER UPDATE TO THE SCHOOL COMMUNITY

AS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY – AUGUST 24, 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 the communities we serve. We'll take a closer look at how the first week of school went and we'll review the latest information on COVID-19 including some details on how we intend to roll out a virus testing and contact tracing program in schools.

We have provided more than 55 million meals to hungry children and adults since March and plan to continue this relief effort until students are back in schools.

There are a couple of operational changes in the program I want to make sure you are aware of. The first is we're shifting the opening an hour earlier to 7, to make sure there's plenty of time for families to get food before their children start school at 9.

In addition, we are asking families to bring their student's meal card which looks like this picture, so we can record the information. The Trump administration has issued rules which would restrict the meal program to students with school ID's. We do not agree with that approach and we'll continue to provide meals to any hungry child or adult with or without the card. But collecting the information will help make clear to the Trump administration that there is still a great need in the communities we serve.

The relief effort has become the largest of its type in the nation with the support from many businesses and individuals in the community.

This past week, Nature Made of Woodland Hills donated \$1 million to LA Students Most in Need to support the effort, bringing the total raised to over \$23 million. We are grateful to the Nature Made team for understanding the important role that food security plays in a child's development and education.

Baby2Baby has been a part of the relief effort since the start, providing millions of diapers and wipes, as well as school supplies, clothing, masks, soap and shampoo to students and families in need. Two new residents of the Golden State, Prince Harry and Duchess Meghan, brought a royal welcome to families this past week as they volunteered as part of the effort at one of our schools.

Last week marked the start of a new school year which brings excitement as the doors of opportunity opened to students. The physical doors may not be open at school facilities 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.

The extraordinary efforts of all who work in schools are paying off as attendance on the first day of school, as measured by classroom teachers, was within a few percentage points of last year. Last week's attendance was adversely impacted by power outages in some of the communities we serve. Our hope is state and local authorities can minimize these disruptions, in particular during the school day, so students can stay connected with their school community. Even with all of the challenges schools are facing and all of the challenges being faced by students and their families, the school community came together for the start of school.

The good start has been made possible by the tireless efforts of all who work in schools, starting with school principals. Great school leaders build great schools and that's never been more apparent than during this crisis. Whether it's making sure students have devices and internet access, helping with food relief efforts, participating in summer school, leading training for their staff or reaching out to families to enroll students, principals continue to be local heroes in service of their school community.

The attendance figures are just a snapshot as many families our schools serve have been impacted by the coronavirus. Housing insecurity and job uncertainty may lead to an even higher level of transiency than normal amongst students. A student enrolled last month may be part of a family which has since moved in search of work or housing.

Our shared goal is 100% attendance and an all hands on deck effort will continue with outreach to families whose children have yet to join and welcome them all to the school community.

We've learned a great deal since March and are applying this in all we do. When online learning first started about 19% of high school students or almost 23,000 young adults weren't connected. It took some time and a great deal of effort, but virtually all students were connected. The work since March puts schools in a much better place to start the new school year and about 95% of high school students had already connected with school by the end of last week. A device and internet access is being provided to any student who needs them and is enrolled in our schools. Part of the challenge is making sure families let us know if they still need the tools and encouraging students to use them. Principals, teachers and all of the staff at schools will keep working to connect every student with their school community and keep them learning.

I visited several schools last week to join as principals welcomed their school community, teachers met with their students for the first time and a regular day of school began for all. Please enjoy a few highlights of my visits.

It was great to see the excitement of students and the smiles of teachers. We all wish we could be back together in schools, but it's not safe or appropriate given the current levels of the virus in the Los Angeles area.

The level of new occurrences of the virus continues to decline though it's still well above the state guideline of 100 new cases per 100,000 people. It will take some time and continued safe health practices before Los Angeles approaches these levels. We'll continue to study school reopenings across the country and learn from these. It's worth noting that all of the successful efforts, like Rhode Island, are in communities where the overall level of spread of the virus is quite low.

We'll be watching what happens in New York when they start the new school year after Labor Day with a Hybrid instructional program. Closer to home, San Diego and San Francisco are closer to the state guidelines and we'll be watching closely to see what local leaders decide is an appropriate path for their school communities.

Our efforts to protect the health and safety of all in the school community will include state of the art health practices and an unprecedented effort of testing for the virus and contact tracing at schools.

All of the people involved in this effort have been working around the clock to get the program started in the right way. We pushed the start of testing back a few days due to the extreme heat last week as the testing materials may not be stable at high temperatures. We want to make sure the results are sound.

The current emphasis is on training school nurses who will help administer the tests and training contact tracers who will follow up on the test results. Teams are also working to make sure all of the operational and technology systems are in place to do it properly.

Sometime this week we'll provide the first tests beginning with those involved in the testing effort. By the end of the week we hope to start testing staff who are currently working at schools as well as the children and staff who are involved in the childcare program.

We'll provide weekly updates on this effort and all staff and families will soon receive more information about the program. The information will include details on how to maintain safe health practices and check for symptoms at home as well as where tests will be provided and how to sign up.

This program is an enormous undertaking and we'll be listening carefully to the experts on the team at each step along the way.

We hope to gain as much information as possible about the presence of the disease in the school community to help reduce the spread and provide the foundation for an eventual return by students to schools in the safest possible way. The ability to quickly isolate any occurrence and test those who may have come in contact should help keep schools open while mitigating risk to all at a school.

As we start the second week of school all who work in Los Angeles Unified will be doing their best to help students continue to learn.

Thank you for your continued patience and support.