

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

### **AS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY – AUGUST 31, 2020**

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

This morning, we'll discuss efforts to provide a safety net to students and families, share information on student attendance and explain how the virus testing and contact tracing program will work at schools.

Our food relief effort has provided the communities we serve about 57 million meals, feeding more children and more adults than any other school-based program in the country. We've also provided more diapers and baby products than any other school-based program – about 6 million items. Why diapers? Families struggling to get by can't afford diapers after paying for their rent, food and utilities.

Last week was the first full week of school. Until students are back in classrooms, it's all hands on deck to support teachers providing online instruction. Students have regular schedules, there's daily, live instruction at all grade levels and there will be regular assessments of student progress to help teachers provide feedback to students and their families.

There is more small-group instruction and we'll soon start providing one-on-one help to students who need it most.

Average, daily student attendance is 88.4% compared with 91.8% for the first 7 days of school last year. There's a new state law which sets forth the rules for how attendance is measured while students are online and all schools in Los Angeles Unified are following those rules.

The gap versus prior years has closed a bit over the past week due in part to updated enrollment data. Families can enroll their children in public schools at any time and there are typically shifts in the first few weeks of school as additional students enroll or families who previously enrolled a child confirm they have moved.

Since the school year started on August 18<sup>th</sup>, about 4% of all students and their families have yet to connect with their school community. There's been progress across the board in this area though gaps remain in some student groups which have historically been hard to serve.

Schools are making sure every student and their family is connected so students can participate in class. Schools are providing every student with a computer and internet access if they need it. All who work at schools are doing their best to reach out to families. Any family who is having difficulties in this area can contact their child's school, call the hotline or go to the YouTube channel we've created to provide help.

Overall enrollment is down at about the same level as prior years. The main drivers of this are the lack of affordable housing in the communities served by our schools and the continued decline in birthrate.

The most significant change in enrollment is at the kindergarten level. The biggest drops in kindergarten enrollment are generally in neighborhoods with the lowest household incomes. We suspect some of this is because families may lack the ability to provide full-time support at home for online learning which is necessary for very young learners.

This is yet another reminder that this crisis is having a disproportionate impact on low income families. We expect the job impacts and housing insecurity due to COVID-19 to cause additional volatility in enrollment and attendance figures for some time to come.

Since the crisis began, schools have had to balance three sometimes conflicting priorities – the learning needs of students, the needs of working families and the health and safety of all in the school community. We cannot compromise on health and safety.

While health conditions in the Los Angeles area are improving, they're still far from the levels at which it would be appropriate to consider a return to school campuses. But we're working overtime to put in place the foundation for an eventual return in the safest possible manner.

A return by students and all in the school community to campuses will include the highest standard of health practices at schools as well as testing for COVID-19 for students and staff and family members who may have been exposed to the virus. This plan, while unprecedented, is necessary and appropriate. We have put together a group of extraordinary institutions to help and I'm pleased Cedars-Sinai, a world-class medical organization, has joined the team and are providing funds to help plan the program.

Microsoft is building a system of tools and technologies which will connect and provide information to all members of the school community.

It starts with an App which can be accessed on a phone or computer. Students, staff and family members will register and self screen for symptoms. It's easy to use and each step from signing on, to checking for symptoms or scheduling a test can be accessed in real time via the device and internet access schools have provided to all students and their families. The data collected on the App will provide information to all involved.

The goal is to make sure every member of the school community has the green light to safely enter school each day. And if there are any caution signs or indications of the virus, the individual can be quickly connected with the appropriate health professionals for follow up and care.

All of the information will be kept secure and shared only with the appropriate school or research personnel according to work place, health and legal standards. The information will also be shared with state and federal health authorities as required by law.

As one might imagine, this is an enormous undertaking. Teams are working to make sure we put the appropriate policies and practices in place to share information with the school community, fine tune all of the details of daily operations from scheduling individuals to take virus tests and nurses to administer them to making sure the lab operations and data are coordinated. The data and information systems are being tested for accuracy and security. People are being trained to properly follow up with all who will be involved receiving tests. And university researchers and health industry partners are figuring out how to combine the testing results with the latest research and information about the health impacts of COVID-19 in the community to inform the pattern of testing and the overall program.

We'll start slowly. This past week we ran trial tests on nurses and test administrators to see what improvements need to be made in the system. The goal is to have a solid foundation in place to start testing all who are currently working at schools, and their children who will be in childcare, soon after Labor Day and then we'll begin testing all staff and all students.

This program will help reduce the overall level of COVID-19 in the communities we serve, provide a baseline of information to prepare for a return to schools and help schools quickly isolate any individuals with the virus and test those who they may have come in contact with them on a timely basis.

We've seen examples of success in Germany, for instance, where a comprehensive system of rapid testing and tracing is in place and we've seen problems occur in several states in the U.S. where there isn't one. One case of the virus quickly becomes many, all students and staff leave school and confusion reigns. The school becomes a haunted house nobody wants to return to because all in the school community lack the information they need to know about whether it is safe and appropriate to return. The chaos from a lack of information must not be our experience.

We'll do all we can to mitigate the risk from the virus and provide for continuity of learning in a school environment once overall health conditions in the Los Angeles area make it possible.

Next Monday is Labor Day, a time to celebrate the people whose hard work provide the foundation for strength, prosperity and well-being. I want to acknowledge the extraordinary efforts of all who work in Los Angeles Unified for their commitment to the students and families we serve.

In recognition of Labor Day, schools are not in session next Monday. My weekly remarks will resume on September 14<sup>th</sup>.

Thank you for your continued patience and support.