

AUSTIN BEUTNER UPDATE TO THE SCHOOL COMMUNITY

AS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY – DECEMBER 14, 2020

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

Today, we'll discuss the efforts by my colleagues and our partners to provide a safety net to students and their families over the holidays, share the impact COVID-19 levels are having on the communities we serve and talk about the need for mental health support for children.

Since our relief effort began on March 18th, we've provided more than 87 million meals to students, families and community members in need. With the help of many partners, we've also provided about 11 million items of much-needed supplies ranging from toys, books, diapers and clothes to athletic equipment, masks, hand sanitizer and See's candy.

We'd like to thank our friends at Entercom and radio.com for helping raise more than \$40,000 to support students who are experiencing homelessness. This includes donations of Visa gift cards from Habitat for Humanity, grocery gift cards from Grocery Outlet and generous donations from individual listeners to help brighten the holidays for families who are struggling to get by.

Long-time partner Baby2Baby recently provided another half-million diapers, Ono Hawaiian BBQ donated gift cards which were provided to families at school-based COVID testing sites and Shelter Partnership recently donated more than 80,000 bottles of hand sanitizer.

The Chuck Lorre Family Foundation donated an additional \$25,000 to help address food insecurity.

The California Endowment and the Ballmer Group each contributed \$100,000 to assist in our efforts to make sure all families are aware of the benefits of participating in free COVID testing at schools.

Our relief efforts, including both the food and COVID testing, will continue during the upcoming school break and year-end holidays. As we did for Thanksgiving, we'll provide families with food to see them through both Christmas and New Year's celebrations.

To join in our efforts, please text NEED to 76278 or visit [LAsStudentsMostInNeed.org](https://www.lastudentsmostinneed.org).

COVID-19 continues to be of great concern. Since we made the decision to shut down all student activities on campus and ask staff to work from home if at all possible, the case level of the virus in the Los Angeles area has more than doubled. Cases are approaching almost 4 times the level in San Francisco, and are well more than twice

those in New York. The health crisis is the most serious Los Angeles has faced since the pandemic began.

Hospitals are near capacity limits in their intensive care units. During this time, we'll continue to provide free COVID testing at schools to students, staff and their families. This program is helping keep all in the community safer and provides important information which will help us reopen schools as safely as possible.

While the overall trend in the data reflect conditions in the area, we're finding additional insights from school-based program of testing.

- In general, low-income families are less likely to bring their child to school for COVID testing.
- While there isn't much difference by grade level, there are stark differences by race. And students who might be struggling the most with online learning are also less likely to participate.
- The rate of those testing positive is increasing among those taking a test for the first time. Perhaps more importantly, repeat testers who may be a reasonable proxy for prevalence in the community of the virus are increasingly testing positive. This presents a sobering picture of the potential spread of the virus in the community.
- While almost all of the people who are tested at schools show no symptoms at the time of the test, there are significant differences by age of those who later experience symptoms.
- People of all ages are contracting the virus.

As part of our efforts to build a foundation for the safest possible learning environment when schools are able to open, we've provided more than 230,000 COVID tests to students, employees and their families. We're using PCR tests – the gold standard for COVID testing. The testing is quick, painless and free, and results are provided within 24-36 hours. If you are a Los Angeles Unified employee, student or family member, we encourage you to please visit a school near you for a free test and, while you're there, be sure to pick up one of the gifts offered at the test sites like the Popcornopolis popcorn, See's candy, books, masks and hand sanitizer.

This school-based healthcare system we've built to provide the testing and contact tracing that goes along with it may also play an important role when a vaccine for the virus is made available to school staff, students and their families.

The country faces an enormous challenge in making sure the vaccine is made available to essential workers, like the staff who work in our schools, as well as those who have

been most impacted by the virus – low income, communities of color like those served by our schools.

Health experts will need to answer the question of how to provide people with access to the vaccine – including shipping and distributing the vaccine and training clinical staff to properly administer it.

Schools may be a good answer to the question of where the vaccine can be best provided. A quick look at just a few of the communities we serve makes this clear.

Los Angeles Unified is organized around 42 unique groupings of schools, each of which serve a local community. Within the community live several hundred thousand people in about 10 square miles and each area has three drugstores, two fire stations and 20-30 schools. It makes sense to provide the vaccine to students and their families at a place they trust where they are almost every day, their local neighborhood school.

In addition, the App and data system we've built together with Microsoft can provide the ideal platform to schedule appointments for vaccinations and keep track of who's been vaccinated.

While we wait for COVID rates to reach safer levels, we're doing everything we can to prepare for an eventual return to in-person instruction. These plans include the best possible standards for the health and safety of the school community, the highest quality of education being provided to students and protections for employees in the workplace.

Last week, I shared my thoughts about a "Marshall Plan for Schools" and am pleased to announce the Chancellor of the Department of Education in New York and the Superintendent of Schools in Chicago are joining me in this call to action. Education must be a priority and elected leaders at the local, state and national levels have to make sure schools have the resources they need to do their job. Their time to act is now.

We published our thoughts in an op-ed in the Washington Post, and I encourage you to read it and share with your Congressperson and Senator.

It's not often leaders in Los Angeles, New York and Chicago speak with one voice. We've each listened carefully to our colleagues in schools and found a common set of needs.

One of these needs is additional funding to support the social and emotional wellness of children at schools.

There has been a great deal of media coverage about the health impacts of the virus and a healthcare system at its limits. This issue is very real.

There has been a great deal of media coverage about the impact the virus is having on the economy, including statistics about job loss and those who are impacted. This issue is very real.

There has not been enough media coverage or attention paid to the plight of children during this crisis. Not just their struggles with online education but the impact this is having on their social and emotional well-being. This issue, too, is very real.

There's an old saying, "Just because you can't measure something doesn't mean it's not important." This is even more true when it comes to children. Their wellness can't be easily measured, they lack "voice" in the conversation since they aren't a bloc of votes and they don't have fancy lobbyists. But their needs are very real.

Allow me to share a few stories from just one day this past week.

One of our senior administrators reached out to me with the story of a 13-year-old child in one of our schools who was losing his fight with cancer. Three years ago, just a few weeks before his diagnosis, Mikey received an autograph from his hero, Jared Goff, from the Los Angeles Rams.

Mikey was in hospice at home with his family and hoping to hear from his hero, Mr. Goff, just once more.

I reached out to the President of the Rams, who called me back during the Rams' game that same night to say, "Of course, we'll help."

We're grateful for this special message for Mikey which put a big smile on his face.

Sadly, Mikey passed away the next day. We send our thoughts and prayers to his family.

Unfortunately, this is part of life and schools help families deal with situations like this every day. And it's that connection between all in a school community and the support we provide to families which matters so much in a time like this.

But this crisis is straining the system of support to its limits.

I participated recently in a meeting with a group of school principals, all of whom shared stories about the impact this crisis is having on children.

An elementary school principal shared a note from a third-grade teacher whose students tearfully opened up to her about the loss of family members due to the pandemic and their fear that everyone is going to die.

A high school principal spoke about four students from her school, one who had recently lost a family member, another who had been hospitalized themselves and another experiencing depression.

A middle school teacher shared stories about a few of his students. One who was messaging him at 11:20 on a Sunday morning looking for help on an assignment which was overdue, another who was struggling because a family member is seriously ill with the virus and another who says he's given up and can't take it anymore. The isolation and anxiety has overtaken this student's ability to focus on his school work.

The needs are extraordinary. Any plan for schools has to recognize this and make sure the funding is available to help schools provide much needed support to students. We know from the data many students are struggling to learn online and we know from their stories this trauma is having an impact not only their ability to learn but their overall well-being.

Since school facilities closed in March, educators have worked tirelessly to help students of all grades.

I'm pleased to share the results for the Class of 2020 in Los Angeles Unified are now official and a record high 82.9% of students graduated high school, despite the closure of school facilities and the many challenges facing students, educators and the families we serve. Nearly all of our student groups showed improvement. This is a remarkable accomplishment that reflects the resilience of students, the dedication of all who work in schools and the commitment of families to help students reach their potential.

But we also know that many of the challenges faced by society present themselves in school – poverty, homelessness, food insecurity and a gaping digital divide to name just a few – and those needs are becoming greater during this crisis. We know these challenges will impact future graduation rates and the portion of students who go on to complete college. We'll continue to try our best to make sure all students have the opportunity to succeed.

Today, we'll hear from Stagg Street Elementary School Principal Angel Barrett about the ways in which her teachers are putting their heart and soul into providing students with great instruction and we'll hear from Wilmington Community of Schools Administrator David Kooper about how students in Wilmington are staying engaged and connected with their school community.

As we head into the final week of the semester, I would like to thank all of our employees, students, family members and community partners for your tireless commitment. I hope you'll join us next Monday to hear from students as well as leaders in the faith-based community about the importance of being connected with people as we stay safer at home over the holidays.

Thank you for your continued patience and support.