

AUSTIN BEUTNER UPDATE TO THE SCHOOL COMMUNITY

AS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY – DECEMBER 21, 2020

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

Today we'll talk about the central role schools play in the communities we serve. They provide everything from instruction for students to a safety net for families. We'll share further information about what January will look like in schools, including the latest information on the impact of COVID-19. And we'll hear from faith leaders on the importance of being part of a community in times like these.

Since campuses closed in March, our schools have provided almost 90 million meals to students, families and community members in need. With the help of many partners, we've also provided more than 17 million items of much-needed supplies and special gifts.

For the next two weeks during the school break, food-relief efforts will be open Monday through Wednesday, with extra meals being provided on Wednesdays to make sure no one goes hungry over the long holiday weekends.

Our friends at See's Candies are helping to brighten the holidays by providing some of their delicious treats to go along with meals starting this week.

To help celebrate the holiday season, our talented staff have created a Holiday Recipe Book. Preparing a meal together is a fun activity to do as a family while you're staying safely at home. Copies of the Recipe Book are available on [Los Angeles Unified's website](#).

The effort to provide meals, toys, books, diapers, sports equipment and treats would not be possible without the hard work of many people in Los Angeles Unified's food service and distribution operation. I had the chance to speak with one of the leaders in this effort, Marc Monforte, about this enormous task of getting much-needed relief to the communities we serve.

Please join our efforts to support our students and families by texting NEED to 76278 or visiting [LAStudentsMostInNeed.org](#).

The level of COVID-19 in the Los Angeles area is staggering. It's 5 times that in San Francisco, 3 times in New York and about 15 times the level the state has set for schools to consider reopening. That's correct, 15 times the level state health authorities view as safe for schools to be open. Unfortunately, Los Angeles has become the epicenter for the virus in our country at this time.

Hospitals and healthcare workers are being stretched to their limits. It's heart-wrenching to see the devastating impact this is having on so many people in the communities we

serve. Our thoughts and prayers go out to all whose families have been impacted by the virus.

It's also heart-wrenching to see the impact this is having on students. We know many students are struggling and they learn best in a classroom. Students aren't alone in their struggles as educators are doing extraordinary things to help. Here's a note from a student who took the time to send a thank you to school staff for being available to help get in missing assignments. This heartfelt moment is just one part of an online education and reflects the plight of students during this crisis.

But we can't reopen schools until the virus is at much lower levels. In effect, the front door of the school has a COVID-19 lock on it. And schools don't have the key to the lock, local and state health authorities do.

It's going to take leadership at all levels, both state and local, to get this under control. One could look back to late October when clear increases in the level of the virus could be seen in the COVID testing data. It's people's individual actions which cause the spread but state and local authorities didn't act on the October data and impose further restrictions until almost one month later. And we're now seeing the consequences of all of this.

A toddler bumps into things because they're too busy looking at their feet, associating walking with the ground beneath them. They haven't yet figured out how to find a path forward. An elite marathoner looks way down the road and appears to glide across the pavement. In a crisis, one has to be like the runner, looking down road and planning how to get there.

As we look ahead in Los Angeles Unified, our goal remains to bring students back to schools as soon as possible in the safest way possible.

In anticipation of reopening, schools have deep-cleaned facilities – more than 80 million square feet in Los Angeles Unified alone – installed sophisticated air-filtration systems, reconfigured campuses to maintain safe distances and stockpiled personal protective equipment. And schools have developed protocols to keep students in small cohorts to keep the virus from spreading.

Los Angeles Unified has built the nation's most comprehensive school-based COVID testing program, and it's working. More than a quarter-million school staff, students and their families have already been provided with free tests. A scheduling system keeps track of appointments and test results are followed up on in a timely manner. The information from the program is provided to health authorities and being used by the researchers who are advising us on how to protect the health and safety of all in the school community.

The COVID testing is quick, painless, and free, and the results are provided within 24-36 hours. Please visit LA Unified's website to schedule your appointment.

Special treats including See's Candies, "The Secret Life of Pets 2" and Minions Beanie Babies are being provided to children at school COVID testing sites, and these sites will remain open during the school break.

The most recent data from our testing program is alarming. Over the past week, 5% of adults – who did not report any exposure or symptoms – tested positive, and close to 10% of children.

Think about that – 1 in 10 children being tested at schools show no symptoms but have the virus. It's clear we're a long way from reopening schools with the level of virus this high.

To put this in context, the 7-day daily average of new COVID cases is about 14,000 in the Los Angeles area. That number will need to drop to about 700-800 and stay there for the better part of a month before schools can consider reopening.

While we're working toward a safe reopening as soon as possible, given these numbers and the state's health guidelines, it will not be possible for us to reopen school campuses by the time next semester starts on January 11. We'll remain in online-only mode until community health conditions improve significantly.

The first day of the semester on January 11th, will be a pupil-free day to provide teachers and school staff time for planning and professional development. Instruction for students will resume on January 12th.

Los Angeles Unified and United Teachers Los Angeles have reached agreement on enhancements to online instruction for students when the new semester begins.

This progress in online instruction reflects the shared learning of all who work in schools about the need to maximize the interaction between teachers and students and their families.

Specifically, highlights of the agreement include:

- Maintaining the relationship between teachers and students by continuing current class assignments.
- Additional office hours, an increase of 30 minutes each day, Tuesday through Friday.
- 20-30 additional minutes of synchronous instruction for Grades 1-12 on Mondays.
- Increased professional development for staff focused on social emotional learning.
- A separate agreement provides for in-person nursing services to support school-based COVID testing.

While the current dangerous level of COVID in the communities we serve is keeping school facilities closed, it's our desire to reopen schools as soon as possible in the safest way possible.

We're continuing to work through all the details with UTLA on how to provide the best possible education when students are able to return to campuses. To put it mildly, this isn't simple as we have to balance the need for as much in-person instruction with protecting the health and safety of all in the school community in 1,400 schools with about 650,000 students and 75,000 employees all spread across 700 square miles.

Los Angeles Unified and UTLA have agreed on a deadline of January 24 to complete this plan to provide hybrid programs, which include in-person instruction, when health conditions allow, as well as completing a plan to increase the number of students who can participate in one-on-one and small-group instruction at schools, with an emphasis on high-needs students. We recognize the need to finalize the details on this as soon as possible so educators have the time they'll need to plan and families can be fully informed on their choices.

The following principles are guiding us as we work through the details with UTLA:

- Maintaining the highest standards for health and safety in schools.
- Providing as much in-person instruction and mental health support for students as possible.
- Allowing families to choose the option that is the best for their children.

In addition, we are working to provide the opportunity to offer in-person instruction for all students during the summer to help them recover lost learning opportunities, deal with the anxiety and trauma from the pandemic and add enrichment to their lives.

Los Angeles Unified has already reached agreements with Associated Administrators of Los Angeles, California School Employees Association Chapter 500, Los Angeles/Orange Counties Building and Construction Trades Council, Service Employees International Union Local 99 and Teamsters Local 572 on both hybrid plans and increased student participation in one-on-one and small-group instruction.

Our goal is to continue to provide the best possible education for students while protecting the health and safety of all in the school community.

To help students who are struggling because of this crisis, middle and high schoolers who are failing their courses are being given more time to improve their grades. Students who would otherwise receive an F will have until the end of January to submit makeup assignments to improve their grades.

This current grading policy, which gives students an additional six weeks to complete any missing work, acknowledges the unprecedented challenges students are facing while also recognizing their resilience and ability to overcome those challenges with the

help of their teachers and family. Students who aren't able to raise their grades in January will be able to take part in credit recovery programs later in the school year.

While we all look forward to a much-needed break, together with family and friends, holiday celebrations will be different this year as we protect each other by maintaining health and safety protocols.

To help us think about the importance of being connected to others in the community during this socially-distanced break, we sought advice from students, staff, and leaders in the faith-based community. Please enjoy their thoughts and counsel.

As we start this winter break, I would like to thank all of our employees, students, family members and community partners for all of your hard work and commitment. Working together, you've helped make the impossible possible.

Please enjoy this performance by our talented students at Grand Arts High School, Legacy Visual and Performing Arts High School, Van Nuys High School and Torres East Los Angeles Performing Arts Magnet. I want to wish you a wonderful holiday season and a happy and healthy new year.

My weekly updates to the school community will resume on January 4th. Thank you for your continued patience and support.