

AUSTIN BEUTNER UPDATE TO THE SCHOOL COMMUNITY

AS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY – JANUARY 18, 2021

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

Today we recognize and celebrate the life of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.– whose call to non-violent action and leadership in the civil rights movement is one of our nation's proudest moments, and whose assassination is one of our most shameful.

Dr. King's fight for equity and equality resonates especially loudly this year and at this time. Our nation has experienced increased racial violence, re-normalization of hate speech, the tragic killings of Black people, and the disproportionate impact COVID-19 is having on communities of color.

This injustice must be more than a topic of conversation at every dinner table, in every board room and at every government hearing. It must be the impetus to unapologetically and with conviction address the systemic bias and institutional racism which have so starkly shown themselves to continue to exist in society.

In recognition of Dr. King, fifth-graders at Martin Luther King Junior Elementary School had an opportunity to read a book about Dr. King with Chargers players Justin Jones and Jason Moore. We are grateful to Mr. Jones and Mr. Moore and the Chargers organization for donating 400 copies of the book to the school and for their ongoing support of public education.

Our schools are committed to being part of the solution, and work every day to better connect schools with the communities they serve. But progress will be greater if all of us – schools, government agencies, philanthropy, business, labor and community organizations – work together to support children. All of us need to demonstrate in our actions every day that Black lives matter.

As Dr. King taught us, "The time is always right to do what is right." That time is now to do what is right for children.

As part of our commitment, I want to share the steps Los Angeles Unified is taking to protect the health and safety of our school community – including a plan to help provide vaccinations. We'll also talk about the impact COVID continues to have on students from food insecurity to college preparation and financial aid..

Since school campuses closed in March, we have provided almost 96 million meals to students, families and community members in need. With the help of many partners, we have also provided more than 18 million items of much-needed supplies and treats.

We'd like to thank Primal Kitchen, which recently contributed more than 21,000 family-size frozen meals, and AVerMedia Technologies, which donated 3,000 webcams for classrooms.

To join the efforts to support students and families, text NEED to 76278 or visit LAStudentsMostInNeed.org.

COVID levels in the Los Angeles area remain at dangerously high levels, and hospitals and emergency services are stretched to their limits. Los Angeles remains the epicenter of the crisis, and public health officials estimate 1 in 3 residents have had the virus. An average of 10 people are dying each hour of COVID in the Los Angeles area.

The current State school reopening criteria places the bar at an adjusted daily average of no more than 7 cases per 100,000. By that same measure, Los Angeles is currently at 77 or 11 times the threshold set by the state. County health officials recently recommended that schools "not reopen for in-person instruction" under current conditions.

To help keep those in our school community safe, we continue to provide free COVID tests at schools for all students, employees and their family members. Please visit our website to register for your family to be tested. It's free, quick, safe, painless and available at a school near where you live.

Last week, Los Angeles Unified reached an agreement with all of our labor partners, which together represent more than 75,000 employees who work in schools, to extend the existing health benefits agreement until the end of this year. The agreement caps the costs for the District at the same level we've been paying since 2017 and provides additional savings. These savings of almost \$225 million will go directly to help students learn.

This agreement builds on the progress we've been making since 2018. So far, we've reduced long-term liabilities for health care by more than \$6 billion.

This agreement also makes sure all employees continue to have health care coverage during this crisis. We want to make sure our employees stay safe and make sure they have access to great health care. We are one of the largest employers in the state and we hope our actions will encourage other employers, large and small, to do the right thing for their employees.

As part of the extension, the District will have the opportunity to bargain with its labor partners on total compensation. Previous agreements provided for separate negotiations on salary and health benefits.

While educators in our schools continue to make heroic efforts to provide online instruction, we know for many students the best learning happens in a classroom. It's

imperative we provide the opportunity for students to participate in learning in a classroom if that's what their families choose. We need to reopen schools as soon as possible in the safest way possible.

A critical piece of that is the ability to provide vaccinations for COVID-19 to all who work in schools. This will not only protect the health and safety of our essential employees but will provide enormous benefit to children and their families as it will lead to a sooner reopening of schools and the economy more broadly by enabling the working families we serve to go back to work.

This morning I sent a request to the California Health and Human Services Agency and the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health that they immediately authorize Los Angeles Unified to provide vaccinations for COVID-19 to our school staff, to the community at large, and ultimately, including students once a vaccine has been approved for children. We have reviewed the guidelines issued by the Department of Public Health and are working diligently to formally enroll in the government vaccination and reporting programs, and complete all necessary planning and paperwork. We hope state and local agencies will expedite the review process once our application is received.

Schools which are part of Los Angeles Unified are uniquely situated – and uniquely qualified – to help in the vaccination effort:

- We have 1,413 schools which serve diverse communities spread across 710 square miles. Our schools are conveniently located right in the middle of neighborhoods where people live, which will help make vaccines accessible to people in all communities, in particular those which may lack access to health care services.
- Since this crisis began, Los Angeles Unified has proven its ability to meet the needs of the community on a dramatic scale, operating 63 food distribution centers at schools which have provided 96 million meals along with 18 million items of much-needed supplies, distributing computers and internet access to 500,000 students and operating 42 COVID testing centers at schools that have administered more than 350,000 tests to students, staff members and their families – the largest school-based program in the nation.
- Our school facilities are well-designed for large-scale distribution and provision of services. We know how to manage a large number of visitors to a school campus and schools have the space needed to allow individuals to wait safely after their vaccine dose to make sure they are not having an adverse reaction. Schools have all of the necessary infrastructure already in place – security, electricity, restrooms and covered and open areas – to support the vaccination process.
- Los Angeles Unified already has 12 school-based health clinics in high-needs areas that are licensed to provide vaccinations. These sites can immediately

provide COVID vaccinations while many more locations at additional schools become qualified under the state guidelines.

- Los Angeles Unified has the staffing, both clinical and logistical, to begin administering vaccinations now. We employ more than 450 registered nurses and 120 licensed vocational nurses, all of whom can administer the vaccine and attend to those who may have an adverse reaction to the vaccine. In addition, Anthem Blue Cross and Health Net, partners in our COVID testing program, have both committed to provide additional clinicians to support a school-based vaccination effort. On the logistics front, we've a capable team of more than 1,400 people involved in the food distribution and COVID-testing efforts every day. Their duties include collaborating with local, state and federal agencies, procuring food and testing kits, scheduling and administering COVID tests and accurately reporting data to all relevant authorities. All people involved in these efforts have been trained in appropriate health and safety protocols related to COVID-19 and know how to safely manage providing services to large numbers of individuals at schools.
- Los Angeles Unified has a technology and data system built with support of Microsoft which can register and schedule vaccination appointments and share the data with appropriate authorities. Microsoft is connecting the District's existing technology capabilities with the vaccine platform Microsoft has already deployed in other cities and states across the country. This platform includes registration and scheduling, reporting on complications/adverse effects, tracking of vaccines in stock, contactless appointment check-in and data capture at time of appointment, rules to sort high-risk individuals and offer waitlists to low-risk individuals, and dashboards to view data, among other features.

All of the programs Los Angeles Unified is currently operating operate at the highest health and safety standards and are reporting the necessary data to relevant state, local and federal authorities in a timely and accurate manner. The food, computer and internet access and COVID testing programs are cost effective which helps scarce public dollars go further to help more individuals in need.

Few organizations in the Los Angeles area have this deep and proven set of capabilities and few are as trusted by the community. Families trust schools to keep their children safe and that trust extends to all aspects of a child's life. Providing the vaccination at a trusted location will increase the chances of a successful and more speedy vaccination effort.

Access to healthcare services is a real barrier for many people in low-income communities. More than 80% of the families served by Los Angeles Unified live in poverty and 83% are Black and Latino residents, who have been the demographics most impacted by the virus. It's critical that the vaccine be made available to these families. In a typical community we serve, there are about 3 drugstores, 2 fire stations

and 25 schools. No organization has the infrastructure to provide easier access to vaccinations than schools.

There's a unique and important benefit to Los Angeles Unified being a vaccination partner – doing so will help reopen schools as soon as possible, and in the safest way possible. Online learning for many students pales in comparison to learning in a classroom and we must find the safest path to provide in-person instruction. A critical part of reopening school classrooms will be creating a safe school environment including providing vaccinations to people who work in schools. This will not only protect the health and safety of our essential employees but will provide enormous benefit to children and their families, leading to a faster reopening of schools and the economy more broadly by enabling the working families we serve to go back to work.

Other communities have already made schools a priority. New York has begun providing vaccinations to those who work in schools. Kansas City has committed to provide vaccinations to all school staff in February. While locally, vaccinations are available in Riverside for all who work in education, teachers in Ventura will start receiving vaccinations next week and Long Beach will begin providing vaccinations to school employees later this month.

All of the children in our school community deserve to be given the opportunity for a better future, the foundation of which is a great education. And that starts with schools being open.

We stand ready to extend our service to the communities we serve by helping to provide vaccinations and look forward to working with the State and County on this effort.

In the interim, while school campuses in Los Angeles Unified remain closed, we continue to provide the best possible online instruction and learning experience for students. Los Angeles Unified is proud of our partnership for many years with the College Board. Students have benefited from programs offered by the organization. As our region continues to struggle with COVID, the County stay-at-home order requires the cancellation of the January 26th PSAT tests, which will impact thousands of students in our schools.

A recently released College Board study showed Los Angeles Unified increased 10th-grade participation in the PSAT from about 7,000 students ten years ago to almost 36,000 last year. The College Board also confirmed Los Angeles Unified's policy of covering fees for 10th-grade students led to a similar increase in students taking AP exams.

It would be a travesty to see the gains in student participation decrease due to the pandemic. Los Angeles Unified has requested the College Board provide either an alternate PSAT test date later this school year or an online testing option. We hope the College Board will work with us on a solution that will enable students to safely

take the test later this academic year.

Another issue facing students brought on by the crisis is financial aid for college. The number of Los Angeles Unified students completing the financial aid applications (FAFSA or California Dream Act Application) is about 15% lower than it was last year, in line with the decrease nationwide.

Los Angeles Unified is providing after-school and weekend help for students and families to complete their financial aid applications. Workshops are offered live and recorded for on-demand viewing, in both English and Spanish. We encourage students and families to work with their school counselors to plan for college and apply for financial aid as soon as possible.

Just prior to the winter break, I had the opportunity to visit a high school class and participate in a discussion with director James Cameron, students and teachers regarding the history, science, and stories of the Voyage of the Titanic. This class provided students from many schools the opportunity to learn from internationally recognized experts. The work of several students who participated in the class was also selected to be displayed at a hotel in Las Vegas. Please enjoy this short clip of our conversation and the students' work.

Registration for Spring Semester enrichment classes like this one is currently open. Don't miss on the opportunity to sign up for the Introduction to Artificial Intelligence with Intel, Playwriting and Acting with The Unusual Suspects Theatre Company, American Sign Language, Spanish and German language classes, Exploring the Culture of Hip Hop through Dance and Music, American History of Rock & Roll, or one of our other exciting classes.

In closing, I wanted to share a conversation I had last week with Barbara Wexler who teaches eighth-grade English at Hale Charter Academy. Ms. Wexler shared with me some of the challenges and successes she's experienced this school year. She is a great reminder of the hope and promise school offers to all children. Life is serving up an abundance of lemons at the moment, but Ms. Wexler keeps turning them into lemonade. Please enjoy our conversation, and thank you for your continued patience and support.