

AUSTIN BEUTNER UPDATE TO THE SCHOOL COMMUNITY

AS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY – JANUARY 25, 2021

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

Today, I'll share a quick update on our continuing efforts to provide a safety net to the communities we serve, we'll discuss what needs to happen to reopen school classrooms and we'll begin a tour across the school district to share some of the great things students and teachers are up to even in these most difficult of times.

Since March, we've provided more than 98 million meals along with 18 million items of much-needed supplies to the communities we serve. To give you some sense of the scale of a program like this, the milk and juice alone would more than fill the reflecting pool which sits between the Lincoln Memorial and the Washington Monument in our nation's capital.

New partners continue to join us every day to support the effort. Intuit recently donated \$100,000 to help with technology and internet access for students. Cedars Sinai, which has already contributed funds to support the rollout of school-based COVID testing, is providing 2.5 million masks for students and staff and reWerk helped facilitate the donation of gently used technology and office equipment which will go to family centers at schools.

Please join in the effort by texting NEED to 76278 or visit LAStudentsMostInNeed.org.

To help keep those in our communities safe, we are providing COVID testing at schools for students, school staff and their families. It's free, quick, safe and painless. Please sign up and get tested at a local school in your neighborhood.

Last week, we celebrated the life of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. As Dr. King taught us, "The time is always right to do what is right." And now is the time to do what's right for children and make sure they can return safely to schools.

While educators in our schools are making heroic efforts to provide online instruction, we know for many students the best learning happens in a classroom at school.

It's time for a real conversation about how to safely reopen schools. What's needed is for state and local governments to reduce the level of the virus in low-income communities, to set a clear and consistent standard of what constitutes a safe school environment and to provide vaccinations for school staff. It will take a whole-of-government approach to get students back in classrooms.

There is little likelihood the low-income communities we serve, which have been hit hardest by the virus, will meet the proposed "Safe Schools for All" COVID guidelines by

February 1st. Many experts say even March 1st is unlikely, given current health conditions. Sadly, COVID numbers remain at dangerously high levels in nearly every category – infections, hospitalizations and deaths. In some of the communities we serve, about 1 in 3 children with no symptoms or known exposure to the virus are testing positive. It won't be possible to safely reopen schools if that remains the case.

Public health officials must tackle this challenge head-on or we will be left with more of the same – continued high rates of the virus in low-income communities that make it unsafe to reopen school classrooms.

Once COVID levels are reduced, all in the school community – students, staff and their families – will need to have confidence that schools are as safe as possible. California has long had among the highest standards for public education in the nation. This crisis is no time to lower the standards for instruction, health and safety in schools or the protections for school employees.

State COVID standards must identify what is necessary for all schools and all communities – rather than the patchwork that currently exists. The risk of the virus is the same in every classroom throughout the state and the standards of safety should be the same. Different standards in different communities create confusion and undermine public trust.

These proposed new state guidelines have been published without a full explanation by health experts and many experts now tell us COVID-safe schools are about more than one number. Students and their families as well as school staff need clear, consistent and well-understood guidelines in order to maintain confidence that schools will be kept safe.

The last piece to help reopen classrooms is for state and local health authorities to use all the tools at their disposal to create a safe school environment, including vaccines. There's a unique and important benefit to vaccinating all who work in schools – doing so will help reopen schools sooner. This will not only protect the health and safety of staff but will provide enormous benefit to children and their families with a faster reopening of schools and of 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 before the end of February. Locally, vaccinations are available in Riverside for all who work in education, teachers in Ventura began receiving vaccinations this week and Long Beach will begin providing vaccinations to school employees later this month.

The last 10 months have been a well-documented struggle in schools. Elected leaders at the state and local level need to join with all who work in schools to understand what we've learned, what can be improved and how we can all make sure the next 10

months are better for students and their families, as well as for all who work in schools, than the past 10 months.

It's not enough to just say the words "schools need to reopen." State and local government leaders need to match words with deeds – they must act to reduce the spread of the virus in the communities our schools serve, create a clear standard for a safe school that all can understand and quickly vaccinate school staff. Once that's done, we'll be at the school front door with big smiles (under our masks) to welcome students and their teachers back to classrooms where they belong.

Vaccinations are a critical piece of the puzzle and we're all frustrated at the pace of the rollout despite everyone's best efforts. While every community across the nation will face a limit imposed by the number of vaccine doses it receives, the goal locally must be to ensure all in the community have access to the vaccine, in particular those who live in areas which have been most impacted by the virus and lack healthcare services.

And if we look ahead just a bit as more doses arrive, we'll need to address the looming challenges to achieve the broadest possible participation in the national vaccination effort – building public trust and making sure people in underserved communities have access. The Biden Administration has set a goal of administering 100 million doses in the next 100 days. Two doses per person means 50 million people or about 15% of people in our country will be vaccinated by April 30th and 85% will still need to be vaccinated.

This will take time and if the goal is 80, 90 or even 100% participation, trust and access will be critical. And no public institution is better positioned to help on these issues than our nation's public schools.

The 1,413 campuses of Los Angeles Unified School District shuttered by the pandemic are part of the solution to their own reopening – and to taming the deadly virus by vastly expanding equitable access to the vaccine.

In the same way that schools throughout the pandemic have provided students and their families with food, computers and internet access and COVID testing, they can – and must – be part of California's vaccination strategy. Three factors make this a public policy no-brainer: location, experience and technology.

Across Los Angeles County's 4,753 square miles, a handful of high-profile mass vaccination sites are overwhelmed by long lines of cars. In contrast, there are an average of two Los Angeles Unified schools every square mile – within an easy walk, bike ride or drive for millions of people from San Fernando to San Pedro.

Unlike a stadium parking lot, school campuses are built to care for large numbers of people. We have restrooms and space for them to spread out so vaccine recipients can be monitored for adverse reactions. In addition to the existing 12 school-based health clinics Los Angeles Unified has long operated, we have a staff of 450 registered nurses

and 120 licensed vocational nurses who can administer vaccines to the communities we serve at additional school campuses across the region.

Most importantly, our campuses are located where the families who have been most impacted by the life-threatening ravages of COVID live and work. Before the pandemic, more than 80% of the families we serve lived in poverty, and since then 75% of them have had someone in their household lose work due to the crisis. More than 70% of the families are Latino, 10% Black – two populations that are, respectively, twice and three times more likely to die from COVID and its complications than whites.

We have the trust of the families we serve which is crucial to widespread vaccination. They trust us because we have a proven track record of caring for their children while providing the social services families need.

Los Angeles Unified operates at a scale matched only by big cities, many states or multinational corporations. Since the pandemic began, we have provided more than 98 million meals to hungry families. We've equipped more than half-a-million students with the computers and Internet access they need to stay connected with their school community and continue to learn while school facilities are closed. And, directly relevant to vaccinations, we already operate one of the largest testing and contact tracing programs in the state, with almost 400,000 tests administered to students, staff and their families.

The proof is in the doing. On Christmas Eve, we provided almost 1.5 million meals at local neighborhood schools and the average time a person spent waiting was about 5-10 minutes.

This past week we provided about 30,000 COVID tests. And again, nobody waited more than 10 minutes.

And as with test scores, attendance and countless bits of information required by California's 3,500-page Education Code, we securely track and accurately report the data to appropriate local, state and federal authorities – another core competency in the successful administration of vaccines.

We have worked with Microsoft and our university and healthcare partners to enhance our existing data management capabilities with an easy-to-use app that allows users to schedule vaccine appointments and the data be shared with relevant public health authorities. In short, this will make it easier for families to schedule a vaccine appointment and help ensure they get the second shot while monitoring for complications.

Last week we celebrated the inauguration of a new President, the result of one thing more Americans take part in each year than anything else. No, it's not watching the Super Bowl, it's voting. And the place most people vote is at their local, neighborhood school.

Public schools – and the people who have dedicated lives to serving children and their families – are integral to speeding the delivery of the vaccine to more people.

We've always given kids a shot. We're ready to do the same for everyone in the communities we serve.

One tradition I have missed out on due to COVID is a tour at the start of each semester to schools across the school district. My aim in doing this is to share with the community highlights of the great things happening in our schools – from young children finding the joy of learning at an early education center, elementary students reading their first chapter of a book, middle school students finding their voices in a guitar class, high-schoolers building world-class robotic fuel-cell cars, students in a career-training class learning valuable life skills and adults getting the training they need to land a good-paying job as a high-voltage lineman. It's the hope and promise we provide at schools.

So I've decided to take all of you on a virtual tour over the next several weeks. Hop on the magic bus and let's get going.

We'll start on the east side with a group of students from Bell High School, El Sereno Middle School and Griffith Middle School, who participated in a special program over the winter break. They rolled up their sleeves and worked together to help students improve fall semester grades.

From the east side of Los Angeles, we'll head to the northeast San Fernando Valley where I joined with students in Brenda Rodriguez's and Edemir Castano's classes at Cesar Chavez Social Justice Humanitas Academy to watch the Inauguration of President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris – the first woman to be sworn in as Vice President. From the San Fernando Valley, we'll head south to Compton Avenue Elementary School. We'll visit with Mr. Ochoa's class to participate in an "I Spy" challenge.

Please enjoy highlights of these school visits. Thank you for your continued patience and support.