

AUSTIN BEUTNER UPDATE TO THE SCHOOL COMMUNITY

AS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY – MARCH 29, 2021

Good morning I'm Austin Beutner, Superintendent of Los Angeles Unified. I hope you're enjoying a safe and restful spring break.

Today we'll share an update on school reopening plans, as well as our efforts to begin providing vaccinations to families with children in schools. And on a special note, we'll share the amazing talents of students to celebrate our start on the path to recovery.

We know the best place for most students to learn is in a classroom at school. I'm pleased to say we are ready for students and staff to return to campus in the safest way possible. Los Angeles Unified has implemented the highest standards of COVID safety of any school district in the nation. We've upgraded air filters with the equivalent of an N-95 mask and reprogrammed the systems to circulate air 24 hours a day. Custodial staff is doubled to make sure schools are cleaned and disinfected top to bottom. And classrooms have been reconfigured to keep all at school safely apart. Staff have been trained and schools have been provided with adequate supplies of PPE.

Back in February, I set a goal to reopen schools in 60 days and I'm pleased to say we'll meet this target as we start on the path to recovery.

We will open 61 elementary schools and 11 early education centers the week of April 12th. These were selected by a team of experienced administrators based on the school's readiness to reopen and their locations in each of the communities we serve. To put this in perspective, these 72 schools we are opening the week of April 12th would be, by themselves, the eighth-largest school district in the state.

The remaining elementary schools and early education centers will open the week of April 19th, and middle and high schools will open the week of April 26th.

Every elementary school in Los Angeles Unified will be offering a full-day, in-person instruction program for all students. Students will receive 3 hours of focused instruction in literacy, math, science and social studies, they will have recess with their classmates and eat lunch together. Students will also have the opportunity to receive help with their homework and to participate with friends in activities like painting, dance and yoga until 4:00 each day. We will also continue to provide one-on-one tutoring after school as well.

All of this will be done while maintaining the highest standards of COVID safety practices and protocols.

The reopening of schools isn't a simple exercise – COVID safety protocols and testing, class schedules and lesson plans, after-school programs, transportation, meals and much more all need to come together at a school.

In order to do this safely and smoothly, we'll stagger the reopening of each school over several days. For example, an elementary school might see a quick check-in online for students with their teachers to start the day on April 12th. The remainder of the day students will work independently while all school staff – principals, teachers, bus drivers, librarians, counselors, custodians, cafeteria workers and many others – carefully review safety protocols and fine tune schedules.

Kindergarten and first grade students will return to school on the 13th, Grades 2 and 3 on the 14th and 4th and 5th Graders on the 15th. We'll start with the youngest learners because many of them will be visiting school for the first time. This will help them get familiar with their routines.

The same, careful phased-in approach will be used for all schools during the course of the month. Our commitment has always been to reopen schools in the safest way possible and this very deliberate approach will help us to do so.

Specific dates for the reopening of individual schools and grades were shared by school principals last week and can also be found on Los Angeles Unified's and individual school websites. Schools will share detailed information about schedules the week of April 5th including updated information for families who choose to have their children continue with online instruction.

All students and staff who are at schools will be required to participate in Los Angeles Unified's COVID testing program and they will need to take a baseline COVID test the week prior to returning to their school campuses. We encourage you to become familiar with the testing process and the use of the Daily Pass in preparation for the reopening of your child's school.

Once a school reopens, COVID tests will be provided at that school for the weekly testing of students and staff.

We have been providing free COVID tests for students and staff and their families for some time now and are pleased to see the overall rate of the virus in the Los Angeles area continues to decline. To give it a little bit of context, the current rate of those testing positive at schools and COVID case levels in the Los Angeles area were last seen in September and October.

Before spring break, we'd received survey responses from almost three-quarters of families with children in elementary schools and about half of them indicated a preference for their child to return to school.

In order to ensure that all families have the information they need to make an informed decision about whether or not their child will return to in-person learning at this time, we will continue with outreach efforts, including good old-fashioned knocking on doors. Last week, I visited with families in South Los Angeles to let them know our schools are safe

and that teachers and school staff are excited to have students back at schools for a full day of learning.

The issue of whether students attend schools in-person rather than remaining online has enormous implications for public education in Los Angeles and across the country. The opportunity gaps for students from families who are struggling to get by will only worsen if they're not back in schools sometime soon. We hear directly from families what their concern is – it's not the relative safety of schools. They know in Los Angeles we have created the safest possible school environment. Their concern is that a child might go to school and, however remote the possibility, bring the virus home to a family member in a multigenerational household.

Vaccinating family members will enable more children to return to school without the fear of bringing the virus home to a grandparent. If vaccinations for family members of students from low-income communities are the barrier, let's fix the problem. Schools can help with access to COVID vaccinations for the families we serve.

Governor Newsom has taken an important step by expanding the eligibility to be vaccinated to all individuals 18 and over in the state of California. But eligibility and access are not the same thing.

Many barriers still remain for those most in need – access to technology, the lack of time or the inability to navigate the online vaccine lottery to find an appointment and the lack of access to transportation to a distant vaccination site.

In the weeks and months ahead, stadium parking lots will be needed for returning fans, while drug and grocery stores and even medical clinics aren't always present in low-income communities and they may not have adequate space for people to spend the required wait times after they receive the vaccine.

On April 5th, we will be opening two school-based vaccination centers to help families with children in schools – one in East Los Angeles, one in South Los Angeles and hopefully more in the weeks to come. On these two sites, we're working with St. John's Well Child and Family Center, a long-time partner in our schools. St. John's will provide the doses of vaccine and the clinical staff to administer the shots while Los Angeles Unified will oversee the outreach to the school community and provide operational support at the school sites.

Families of students in the neighborhoods served by Lincoln and Washington Preparatory High Schools will receive information about this from their school and help in scheduling an appointment if they need it. Or they can just walk up and get vaccinated if they prefer. We hope this approach can serve as a model for other communities throughout the Los Angeles area.

Looking ahead we'll need community-based approaches like this to reach the 85% target set by experts like Director of U.S. National Institute of Allergy and Infectious

Diseases Dr. Anthony Fauci. Los Angeles County has administered first doses of the vaccine to 28% of people 18 years and over. That's taken a remarkable effort by many but there's still a long way to go.

Hidden in the average figures are communities with rates as high as 40% and as low as 10%. Unfortunately, many of the communities served by schools in Los Angeles Unified are at the lower levels.

And that doesn't begin to address the issue of children for whom there are not yet vaccines approved. 90% of people on a school campus at any point in time are children and it makes sense to vaccinate them where they are almost every day – their local neighborhood school. Just like America did with polio a generation ago.

An important part of reopening schools is to provide opportunity for students to participate in all kinds of extracurricular activities. I had the good fortune last week to attend the opening day baseball game between Banning and Hamilton High Schools. And visit with students and coaches from the softball, basketball, soccer, volleyball and football teams. Across Los Angeles Unified, 13,000 high-schoolers have been COVID tested and are ready to participate in sports.

Los Angeles Unified continues to lead the nation with a safety net for the communities we serve. We have provided more than 118 million meals along with 26 million items of much-needed supplies including masks and hand sanitizer, diapers and wipes, clothing and shoes, toys and sports equipment, books and school supplies, as well as computers and internet access for half-a-million students. We've also provided more than 600,000 free COVID tests to students, staff and families at their neighborhood school.

This commitment will continue when students return to schools, though look a little bit different. Students will receive meals and COVID tests at school, and our Community of School Offices will be the hubs for providing needed supplies to families. We'll share more information on this the week of April 5th.

If your family is quarantined at home due to the virus or experiencing food or housing insecurity, please reach out to your neighborhood school. We are here to help.

To join in our relief efforts, please text NEED to 76278 or visit lastudentsmostinneed.org.

Our journey on the Magic School Bus took us to several schools this week. The COVID pandemic brought challenges for everyone. It's inspiring to see how so many young artists have flourished even in these most difficult of times. Please enjoy a short clip of some of the concerts, recitals and theatre performances, and visit Los Angeles Unified's website for the full-length versions.

Thank you for your continued patience and support. I'll see you at school sometime soon.