

AUSTIN BEUTNER UPDATE TO THE SCHOOL COMMUNITY

AS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY – NOVEMBER 23, 2020

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

Today, we'll share an update on COVID-19 in the community, discuss the continued effort our schools have been making to provide a safety net to students and their families and reflect on the upcoming Thanksgiving holiday.

The past week has been sobering as the level of COVID-19 has risen dramatically, with the number of cases in Los Angeles area more than doubling in the past two weeks, including the highest daily count since the crisis began.

Job One for state and local authorities is to lead us down a path to reduced levels of the virus. There's simply no safe way to reopen schools with COVID-19 at current levels.

And once that's accomplished, we must find a way to get students back into the classroom – as soon as possible and in the safest way possible.

An important element of that will be the COVID-19 testing program we're implementing at schools now. We've tested more than 150,000 people of all ages and it's become the largest school-based effort of its kind in the nation.

We continue to learn important information from this testing program. There has been a dramatic increase in the portion of those who test positive over the past several weeks, in line with the figures published by the County. The trend data tell us the spike the past week shouldn't come as a surprise as the level of those testing positive have been doubling just about every two weeks since early October.

The vast majority of those tested at schools are asymptomatic individuals who aren't currently at school so the results might give an indication of what actual community spread looks like.

The data also tell us people of all ages can get COVID-19. And we know from other studies that children can pass it to adults and adults to children. Taken together, this highlights the importance of testing all at a school since children represent more than 90% of people on a campus.

My commitment remains the same as I made when we closed schools in March – we will not reopen schools until it's safe and appropriate to do so.

When it's possible, we want to be ready to serve students at schools in the safest way possible. We are in the midst of sharing with families information about what a return to school might look like. Our goal is to provide families everything they need to make an

informed decision about what's best for their child and their family when the time comes – a return to school when it's possible or continuing with online learning. The school district held more than 40 Town Hall meetings last week with thousands of families to discuss the plans and next week school principals will review the information with their school communities. Please take the time to participate in one of the discussions if you can.

As we get ready to celebrate Thanksgiving, I want to share my gratitude. In addition to my family and friends, I'm thankful to be serving alongside all of the hard-working women and men in Los Angeles Unified, the school board, community partners and volunteers who work tirelessly to provide about 650,000 students with the best possible education.

In past years, I was able to visit classrooms and join students as they prepared turkey, stuffing, gravy and pumpkin pie as part of their culinary arts programs. This year, Thanksgiving will be just a little bit different but I wanted to continue the tradition with students and I'm delighted to share a few recent classroom visits as students worked alongside teachers to prepare their favorite recipes.

You heard that correctly from Manish, on the day before Thanksgiving, our schools will pass out more than 1.5 million meals to make sure every family has something to eat while celebrating the holiday.

This effort sounds like something out of the "Guinness Book of World Records," as I don't think any relief program has ever provided 1.5 million meals in just one day.

If I've managed to whet your appetite, recipes for all of these dishes can be found on Los Angeles Unified's [website](#).

In this season of gratitude, I'd like to recognize all of our colleagues behind the screen – from office staff and administrators, bus drivers to food services, facilities and maintenance teams – you're helping to support classroom educators and provide a safety net for the students and families we serve. I also want to extend my gratitude to our safety heroes – plant managers and custodians keeping schools clean and sanitized and nurses and staff at school testing centers – who are working to protect the health and safety of all in the school community.

Since March, all who work in Los Angeles Unified have worked tirelessly to help feed those in need, made sure every student is connected with their community, provided mental health support, kept schools clean and sanitized and figured out how to use different communications and learning technologies that are part of an online education.

Everyone in Los Angeles Unified is doing their best to help students and their families. For that, we can all be proud.

We're grateful to our partners in the business community, philanthropic organizations and other institutions for their support across the board, from new learning opportunities and academic enrichment to addressing food insecurity to building a COVID testing program. This collective effort has also provided millions of items of much needed supplies from diapers and baby supplies to books and noise-canceling headphones to sports equipment for children.

During the holiday season, Entercom, a radio powerhouse, will be helping raise money to support Los Angeles Unified's efforts to provide gifts and clothes to those in need this holiday season. We hope this will give families the ability to recognize someone special in their lives.

Please help if you can by texting GIVER to 76278 or by visiting [LAStudentsMostInNeed.org](https://www.lastudentsmostinneed.org) to donate.

Thank you to the families we serve. It's not easy helping students with their online learning at home while juggling your own job and family responsibilities. You have my unwavering commitment to do the best we can for your children.

And I want to end with a note of recognition for our students. You're trying your best to embrace online learning. Being away from school makes it difficult to maintain your connections with your friends, classmates and teachers. Thank you for your patience and fortitude. You are and will always be our inspiration.

If there is one thing this year has reminded me, it's that we're better together. I'm grateful to work as part of the team at Los Angeles Unified. There's no school district in the nation of this size and complexity that's accomplished as much.

I hope you're able to enjoy Thanksgiving with family and loved ones and can find a bit of time for a well-deserved break.

Thank you for your continued patience and support.