

AUSTIN BEUTNER UPDATE TO THE SCHOOL COMMUNITY

AS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY – NOVEMBER 9, 2020

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

Today, we'll discuss the truly remarkable efforts our schools have been making to provide a safety net to students and their families, share an update on COVID-19 in the community and reflect on Veterans Day and those who've chosen to serve our country in the military.

This past week, Los Angeles Unified passed a milestone of providing 75 million meals and more than 10 million items of needed supplies to students and their families. This relief effort has already provided 50% more meals than were given to victims of Hurricane Katrina, and it's the largest, school-based relief effort in the nation's history.

During the nearly 8 months since school campuses closed, Los Angeles Unified has been joined by thousands of individuals, businesses and philanthropic organizations who have provided money and donations totaling more than \$29 million to support the effort. Founding donors Richard Lovett, the Ballmer Group and the Anthony and Jeanne Pritzker Family Foundation made contributions to start a charitable fund, LA Students Most in Need, to provide money for this relief effort, Nature Made and Reed Hastings each contributed \$1 million and Chuck Lorre more than \$750,000. While Claire, a fourth-grader in one of our schools, raised more than \$600 to buy hotspots for children through an online talent show and dance-a-thon. Thousands of grassroots donors have made contributions averaging \$70 a piece. Most recently, the Ford Motor Company donated 2 million masks for students, teachers and staff to use at schools.

Schools have provided families with food every weekday since March 18th. During this time, many have helped support the most vulnerable members of our community. Mattel, LA84, See's Candies, World Central Kitchen and Baby2Baby have provided thousands of toys and recreational items, hundreds of thousands of pounds of chocolates and other treats, and more than 6 million diapers and wipes alongside the meals.

Today, you'll hear from a few of our partners about why they're helping and from families about what the effort has meant to them. You can help by texting NEED to 76278 or visiting LAStudentsMostInNeed.org. \$20 will buy a week's worth of lunches for a hungry child.

We've also passed a milestone in our COVID-19 testing program as we've now provided more than 100,000 tests to students and staff at schools. We extended the hours in many locations and offer testing on Saturdays to make it easier for working families to participate. This program is part of a plan which sets a new standard for the return of students to schools in the safest possible way.

Schools in Los Angeles Unified serve almost 700,000 students in 1,413 schools spread across 710 square miles. We share information at the district level to show the overall prevalence of the virus and how it varies by age. We can also see trends over time and compare it to those in the overall Los Angeles area.

At the community level, we can look at a group of schools in a neighborhood and compare that to the spread of the virus in that local community.

Most importantly, we'll be able to share specific information about a small group of people at a school. This will help identify and isolate any individual who tests positive or those they may have come in contact with. All members of each school community need to know as much as possible about what's happening at their local school.

Our goal is to be as transparent as possible while making sure personal information is kept confidential. A team at Los Angeles Unified worked with outside legal and technology experts to develop this approach and cleared it with the appropriate legal and regulatory authorities. Like many things in this time of COVID-19, there aren't a set of rules or guidelines which existed so we rolled up our sleeves and created a solution.

While we continue to plan for a return to schools in the safest way possible, the overall level of COVID-19 in the area remains higher than state guidelines for the reopening of school campuses.

Last week saw the highest daily count of new cases in three months. That should be of concern to all of us as this week will mark 8 months since school facilities closed. We can't sit and watch the virus case count like one watches the sun rise and set and assume there is little one can do about it.

The level of the virus has been significantly reduced in the Bay Area. While Midwestern cities are seeing Fall turn to Winter and as temperatures drop, people head indoors and the spread of the virus may increase due to more contact. But it was almost 80 degrees downtown last week when the record-high case rate occurred so we can't blame the weather here in Los Angeles.

Local policies and actions matter and we all have to do our part to help reduce the spread of the virus. There's only one path back to schools and it starts with a lower overall level of COVID-19 in the area.

We need plans from Governor Newsom, the state Legislature and, most importantly, local county and city governments on how to reduce the spread of the virus and we need clear protocols on how to return students to schools in the safest way possible.

While schools remain closed, we'll continue to support students with one-on-one and small-group instruction and childcare for those most in need.

High schools have begun holding athletic conditioning for students on campuses. In order to do so in the safest possible manner, all coaches and athletes will be tested for

COVID-19 prior to starting. All conditioning will take place outside, in groups of no larger than 12, with lots of space between all who are participating.

Last Tuesday, voters overwhelmingly approved Measure RR, which will provide Los Angeles Unified with the funds to help create safe and updated schools. Students are the real winners, and the victory is theirs. We are grateful to voters and to our labor, business and community partners for their support.

We know it's not been easy on anyone since the virus forced schools to close. More than 80% of the families we serve were struggling to get by before this crisis began and estimates are 3/4 of them have had a family member lose work due to COVID-19. Every family is burdened by the need to balance work and their children participating in online classes at home.

And all of us are feeling the discomfort and pain from the isolation and challenges we're experiencing and the struggles we see in the community around us.

We'll keep trying our best to provide a good education to students and maintain a safety net for them and their families. Thank you for your continued patience and support of our efforts.

This Wednesday, the nation will observe Veterans Day to show our appreciation to the brave women and men who serve in the military. Los Angeles Unified is honored to have veterans serving throughout the school district. I recently spoke with former Coast Guard Petty Officer Megan Monroe, Navy Petty Officer Jose Puentes and Marine Corps Corporal Jose Razo about their experiences. It's inspiring to hear their commitment to service and how they are rising to the occasion to help students. I hope you'll be as inspired to hear from them as I was.