

AUSTIN BEUTNER UPDATE TO THE SCHOOL COMMUNITY

AS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY – OCTOBER 12, 2020

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

Today we'll discuss continuing efforts to provide a safety net, take a closer look at the science behind COVID testing and visit a classroom to look at one-on-one tutoring which is happening in schools.

We've provided more than 68 million meals to hungry children and adults, making it one of the largest relief efforts in our country during the last 30 years. Joining the effort this week are the folks at good hYOUman, who have designed a "Better Together" T-shirt to reflect the collaboration in our community during this crisis. They'll be donating a portion of the proceeds to LA Students Most In Need. This project began with the parent of a 6th-grader – Shira Goldman – reaching out to good hYOUman, showing once again, that we are truly better together. Thank you Shira and thank you good hYOUman for your support. T-shirts are available on the [good hYOUman website](#). To join the effort, text NEED to 76278 or visit [LAStudentsMostInNeed.org](#).

Health Net, which is helping Los Angeles Unified in our nation-leading COVID-19 testing and community engagement program, will be offering free vaccinations for the seasonal flu to students and their family members at certain schools across the district. Public health officials fear hospitals could be overwhelmed if there is an outbreak of the flu during the pandemic, and the seasonal flu can share many symptoms with COVID-19. The company that's providing testing for our program is working to add seasonal flu to the test panel, meaning those who are tested will know if they have the flu or COVID-19. This is expected to be in place later this year.

We continue to put in place plans for students to return to schools as soon as it's safe and appropriate to do so. Unfortunately, the overall level of the virus remains high, and Los Angeles is still rated in the state's high risk category with widespread disease. Last week, the county reported a one-day spike of 1,645 new cases – its highest daily number since August.

To put all of the case data in some context, current state guidelines say the number of cases in the Los Angeles area would need to average about 700 or less for three weeks before schools can consider reopening. If one looks at the state guidelines and the latest data for Oakland and San Francisco, you'll see both cities remain below the levels set for the potential reopening of schools. We'll be carefully watching their progress.

As we all know, COVID-19 has spread across the world and around our community and we're all at risk of contracting and spreading the virus. Screening, testing, and contact tracing at schools will help slow the spread, but it's only one component of a

comprehensive strategy that also includes practicing behaviors to reduce the spread, maintaining healthy environments and isolating those who may have the virus.

As our testing program ramps up, I thought this might be a good time to review what scientists tell us about the virus and how a school-based testing program can reduce the risk of spreading the disease. I'll start by answering a few of the more frequently asked questions.

How can one contract or spread the virus? What if I don't have any symptoms?

Both asymptomatic people and pre-symptomatic people can transmit the virus that causes COVID-19. 40% or more of infected individuals may show no symptoms. All people who have COVID-19, whether or not they show symptoms, can transmit the virus.

The only way to know who is asymptomatic or pre-symptomatic is through testing. Virus testing at schools reduces the number of infected people who might arrive at a campus, regardless of whether or not they have symptoms.

There are 3 types of tests commonly used to identify the COVID virus: viral PCR, viral antigen and antibody. Viral tests tell us if you have a current infection. An antibody test can identify a previous infection. Scientists recommend a viral test to diagnose current infection. Of the two viral tests, PCR is the most accurate. PCR tests work by detecting genetic material in the virus.

Los Angeles Unified is using PCR tests which are the gold standard for COVID-19 testing.

What's meant by community spread?

Community spread means people have the virus, but health authorities aren't sure where they became infected or how they became infected. Testing allows for the isolation of individuals with the virus, even if they don't show symptoms, which slows progression of the virus through the community.

What's the testing strategy at schools?

We're planning 3 phases for the program. First, an initial, baseline test will be offered to all students and staff to determine prevalence of the virus and to help guide decision-making around school opening. A second, return-to-school baseline test will be offered to all students and staff who will be returning to schools before they return to school. Thereafter, periodic testing will be provided to students and staff throughout the school year to reduce the number of persons with the virus who may arrive on campuses. Students who remain in online-only instruction and staff who continue to work remotely will not be part of the testing program once students return to campuses.

Testing can help catch those who might have mild symptoms or just starting to show symptoms or show no symptoms at all. With a school district as large as Los Angeles Unified, there's a likelihood that one or more neighborhoods might have a higher prevalence of the virus than others. This might cause us to target more testing in those communities with higher virus compared to others.

The pattern and frequency of the periodic testing will be based on advice from our science partners.

Does a negative test mean I'm not infected? Can I test positive later?

You might test negative if the sample was collected early in your infection and then test positive later during your illness. You could also be exposed to COVID-19 after the test, and then get infected at a later time. Some students and staff with the virus may make it into our schools, despite our best efforts.

What else can help prevent the spread of the virus in schools?

Schools will keep students and staff in small, stable cohorts. These groups of students, and teachers or staff, will stay together throughout the day to minimize broader exposure in the school environment. This practice will help prevent the spread of the virus by decreasing the opportunities for exposure to or transmission of the virus facilitating more efficient contact tracing in the event of a positive case and allowing for targeted testing, quarantine and isolation of a single cohort instead of a school-wide measure in the event of a positive case or cluster of cases.

Classrooms and facilities are electrostatically cleaned top to bottom, air filtration systems have been upgraded with the equivalent of N-95 membranes, personal protective equipment is provided to all individuals on a campus or in a classroom and facilities have been reconfigured to keep all at a school a safe distance apart.

How does one measure the results of a testing program?

This effort to test for the virus at schools and quickly isolate those who may have come in contact is the first of its kind. The goal is to provide the information needed to create the safest possible environment in schools for students and all who work there. It will create the ability to keep schools open because any occurrence can be quickly identified and isolated so it doesn't spread throughout a school.

How much will the testing program cost?

The program will cost a bit more than \$30 for each test provided. That includes not just the test itself, but all of the clinical oversight, logistics, data reporting and contacting those who test positive or may have come in contact with someone who has the virus.

Los Angeles Unified has developed some innovative approaches to keep the cost down and make the program possible.

Microsoft has developed an App for us to help families and staff participate in the program and keep track of the data. An innovative testing company is providing tests at a cost which will save the district more than \$150 million compared with commonly cited costs for COVID tests. And as part of this, a significant capability in community engagement and contact tracing has been built to make sure we can follow up with everyone who receives a test in a timely manner.

More information about the testing program can be found on our [website](#), on Los Angeles Unified's YouTube channel (@LosAngelesSchools) or by calling the Helpdesk at (213) 443-1300.

Even as classes remain online, we continue to work to make sure every student builds a foundation in literacy, math and critical thinking. One-on-one tutoring for students most in need started last week at schools.

The teachers and students in the tutoring program also participate in the COVID testing before they start. All adhere to safe social distancing practices and follow health guidelines. Upon arrival, students check in and pick up their own bag of supplies. A student and teacher meet together either outdoors under an awning or inside a classroom with open doors. Depending upon need, students might be focused on the sounds of letters, learning to read, or they could be learning to graph quadratic equations.

Next week, tutoring will expand to include online, afterschool tutoring in small groups.

Please watch a few highlights of the extra support happening now at schools.

In ordinary times, schools would be in the middle of the fall sports season. We'd be cheering on students in volleyball, football, tennis, cross country, golf, cheer and water polo. But these aren't ordinary times. We recognize the importance of sports and team activities in the lives of our students, coaches and their families, and are planning to get athletes back on the field, on the court, on the course and in the pool as soon as possible. When health conditions permit, we'll provide for a return to conditioning and practice in the safest way possible. All students and staff involved will participate in the COVID testing program and proper health practices and social distancing will be in place. A group of educators are working to make this happen and we will continue to update you as we move forward.

Every student is unique and in order to help address different learning needs and interests, Los Angeles Unified offers a variety of options for families to choose from.

The application window for Choice Schools is open through November 13. These choices include 322 magnet programs and 200 dual language programs in eight

languages in addition to Schools for Advanced Studies and Affiliated Charter schools. Families can learn more about these school options on our website GoTo.LAUSD.net.

Recently I was a guest of Sal Khan on the Homeroom show. It was a great discussion and I want to thank Sal Khan for the great work at Khan Academy. You can view the entire conversation on our website. It will also air after this update on this channel.

We'll continue to try and provide the best possible education while students are online and keep you informed on efforts to bring students back to schools in the safest way possible.

Thank you for your continued patience and support.