

## **AUSTIN BEUTNER UPDATE TO THE SCHOOL COMMUNITY**

### **AS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY – OCTOBER 19, 2020**

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

Today we'll take a look at the extraordinary work taking place in many schools, learn more about online tutoring for students, give a quick update on the overall level of COVID-19 in the community and discuss continuing efforts to provide a safety net for the students and families we serve.

When schools closed in March, we made the commitment to keep every student connected with their school community. Schools provided computers and, if needed, free internet access. In the spring and again this fall when the new school year started, principals, staff and teachers worked together to accomplish an extraordinary feat – making sure every student has a computer and internet access, even students in preschool. A remarkable accomplishment for a school district this size.

Along the way, we've shared how students are using these tools to connect to school and attend class. Over these past 7 months, students as well as teachers and school principals have continued to learn how to best use this connection.

While there's no substitute for learning which can take place in the classroom, extraordinary work is taking place in many schools and classrooms while online.

Let's take a closer look at just one, Fleming Middle School. Consider this a somewhat typical middle school, about 1,200 students with diverse backgrounds, many from families who are struggling to get by.

The school and its students are making progress. Teachers are taking the same approach as last year and using the new tools and technologies to help students continue to learn.

As you listen to Principal Heather Karuza, and math teachers Stacey Takamoto and Raul Hernandez, you'll hear a few consistent themes.

- Progress is being made. For example, proficiency in math, as measured by regular weekly assessments, has grown across the board.
- These formative assessments take no more than 15 or 20 minutes and provide real-time diagnostic information.
- The information from the assessments is used by teachers to tailor instruction and assignments for each student. The approach might take different forms.

Sometimes it's problem solving in a breakout room, often led by students, or it can be a review of a short, Khan Academy-style explainer.

- Students have the opportunity to demonstrate what they're learning. Tools like GradeCam and Nearpod provide a view of student progress. Doing this online can actually foster increased engagement because students can see all of the different approaches to problem solving without knowing whose answer each was. Gone is the middle school reluctance to participate for fear you might have the wrong answer.
- All of this information is shared with families on a regular basis.
- And school administrators are spending time in each classroom and sharing their observations with teachers. This shared feedback is an approach developed together with classroom teachers.

Please watch as the team at Fleming takes us through this in more detail.

The work at Fleming, while showing just how far online instruction has come since March, also highlights how great a challenge remains.

The progress at Fleming is only possible because the principal, teachers and staff have pulled together various tools and technologies and combined them with teacher-led instructions to make it all work.

But online learning is still in its infancy. Imagine if iTunes or Spotify didn't exist and you had to download songs from different artists onto different devices which didn't connect to each other. And each download required a separate sign on. That's about the current state of the digital tools teachers are using. There's work to be done.

Online learning is not a substitute for being at school, but despite the difficulties principals and teachers are making big strides in what great online instruction looks like.

The imperative, however, has to be for students to return to schools as soon as it's safe and appropriate. The Bay area is at levels well below the state guidelines for schools to consider reopening. Unfortunately, the overall level of COVID-19 in the Los Angeles area remains well above the levels the state has set for schools to consider reopening.

Here in Los Angeles, it would be helpful to know more about how the virus is being spread. Elected officials at all levels are under lots of pressure to "reopen the economy." As card rooms, indoor malls and other venues where groups of people can gather are allowed to reopen, one starts to question priorities. If these can open without causing an increase in the spread of the virus, that makes sense. But if these openings are tied to increased cases and that increase in cases is keeping schools closed, I've a problem with that.

We all need to better understand how these choices are being made. There's a waiver program for schools to open K-2 classrooms which is limited to 30 high-needs schools per week in all of Los Angeles County. Los Angeles Unified alone has 439 elementary schools. All together, there are 1,297 elementary schools in Los Angeles County, virtually all of which have high-needs students, yet only 30 can open.

Are similar restrictions in place for card rooms and malls?

There's no greater imperative than getting students back in schools. While many students like those from Fleming are continuing to learn, others are struggling. Young children learning to read, students learning English, students with differences and disabilities and those who were struggling before school facilities closed need to be back in classrooms. But they can't return until it's safe and appropriate.

While students remain online, we continue to work on additional ways to provide more support to students who need it most.

Schools have begun providing individual tutoring, both in person and online. The online effort takes advantage of the technology which provides a one-on-one connection between schools and the students and families they serve.

Step Up Tutoring, a nonprofit launched to support Los Angeles Unified and the students in our schools, is now providing online tutoring to 500 students from nine schools. They offer carefully selected and trained university students and other professionals to help students. Students are referred to the program by their teachers.

Study after study tell us one of the biggest differences between families struggling to get by and those in more affluent communities is families who can afford it, provide extra help for their children at home. This new online effort seeks to close that gap by offering free tutoring to students from families in high-needs communities. The shared goal is to learn from this experience and expand the program to include more students.

Please take a moment to hear from the founder of Step Up and one of the students they're helping.

Work continues to plan for a return by students, teachers and all in schools in the safest way possible.

In addition to health practices at schools, Los Angeles Unified is embarking on a nation-leading effort to provide testing for COVID-19 for all students and staff. This initial phase will offer testing for all students and staff to help gain important information about the prevalence of the virus in the school community. Our effort at schools is bringing testing into communities which have not had access to testing and other services during this crisis. We're seeing that children and adults of all ages have the virus in relatively similar proportions.

This past week, Health Net, one of our partners in the COVID testing program, started providing free vaccinations for the seasonal flu at schools. As Health Net President and CEO Brian Ternan said, “Together, we can help prevent what many experts are calling a ‘twin-demic,’ as both the COVID-19 pandemic and flu season begin to overlap.”

We’ll continue to keep you informed on our plans to bring students back to schools in the safest way possible.

This year has been one of great challenge but out of crisis can come opportunity. The tragic killing of George Floyd is causing many Americans to take a hard look at bias and racism in all aspects of society, including education.

One of our leaders, Dr. Adaina Brown, was asked to participate in a series of discussions ABC television network is putting together called “Our America: Living While Black.”

Dr. Brown has been a member of the Los Angeles Unified family since she started 6<sup>th</sup> grade at Broadacres Elementary School. She went on to Dodson Middle School and graduated from Narbonne High School as a 1<sup>st</sup> team All-City basketball player and captain of the cheerleading team. She started her career as a math and science teacher at Curtiss Middle School, and has served as a Title I coordinator, assistant principal, principal, Community of Schools administrator and is now a Local District Superintendent.

Three of Dr. Brown’s sons are attending Los Angeles Unified schools in the Carson area and the fourth is a graduate of Cal State University Long Beach. She and her family are all actively involved in the community, where her husband serves as a mentor to young athletes.

One of the most important things educators do, whether in the classroom or leadership roles like Dr. Brown, is model behavior for students. We’re grateful, Adaina, for your leadership.

Here’s a short preview of the series which will begin airing this week. We hope you’ll tune in.

Los Angeles Unified continues to provide a safety net to students and families. Today we’ll cross 70 million meals. Each day, more than 100,000 people are receiving help.

The numbers are extraordinary, it’s the largest, school-based relief effort in our nation’s history.

But it’s easy to get lost in large numbers. Each one of them represents a real person, struggling to get by.

As we finish this morning, please listen to Iris Martinez and Eufracia Guerrero as they remind us why this effort is so important. And help them and many others by texting NEED to 76278 or visit [LAStudentsMostInNeed.org](http://LAStudentsMostInNeed.org).

Thank you for your continued patience and support.