

AUSTIN BEUTNER UPDATE TO THE SCHOOL COMMUNITY

AS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY – SEPTEMBER 14, 2020

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

Today we'll discuss continuing efforts to provide a safety net to the communities we serve, share ways we're keeping families informed during this crisis, take a careful look at the virus testing program we're building and discuss the issues involved in returning to schools.

Los Angeles Unified has provided almost 60 million meals and 8 million other items to children and adults since school facilities were closed. Businesses and individuals have contributed more than \$23 million to support this relief effort, including Payless, which has provided shoes and other support to students.

It's been six difficult months for the families we serve since school facilities closed. Many of them are essential workers or people for whom work is essential to keep a roof overhead and provide food for their family.

Government services, from schools to health care and public safety, all play an important role in supporting families. The federal government provides much of the funding for these services and it allocates the dollars based on information collected every 10 years in the national Census. It's important everyone is counted so dollars are apportioned fairly. If the families we serve participate in the 2020 Census, our students will get a fair share. A quick look at some of the communities in the Los Angeles area shows participation in the Census is well behind the levels in 2010. There's still time to act. Please go to 2020Census.gov by September 30th and complete the questionnaire if you haven't yet done so already.

Throughout the crisis, we've tried to provide as much information as possible to the families we serve. We started in March with the data about the number of students who weren't connected with their school community, in April how students engaged in school online, in June the impact the crisis is having on school budgets, the latest COVID data in July which informed the decision to start the school year online in August and we continue with what student enrollment and attendance looks like in September as we start a new school year. Los Angeles Unified has set the standard for transparency by school districts across the country. While we don't have perfect information or a crystal ball, we'll continue to share the information we have in a timely and coherent manner.

The work continues to keep families informed. Town Hall meetings are being held across the district and each school community is publishing a biweekly newsletter. These highlight student work, share important information from local school leadership and help provide answers to questions.

Back-to-school gatherings have been held for students and families. The traditional school visits were replaced by Zoom gatherings, virtual information booths and online parent and community workshops.

More than 98% of students are now connected with their school community. Tireless efforts by all at schools helped make this happen. I want to give a special shout-out to classroom teachers who, in addition to planning lessons, teaching Zoom classes and providing support to students throughout the crisis, have taken on the task of helping students navigate technology issues, power outages and the like, all with a smile. Thank you for your commitment to students.

It's important we support this connection between teachers and students, avoiding any disruptions where possible. Each year, schools make estimates of what enrollment will be and plan classes accordingly. In a typical year, adjustments are made to staff about a month after school starts to accommodate the actual enrollment. This year we are trying to limit these changes and will not be making staffing changes for classes that are within 5 students in 4th-12th grade or within 10 students in TK-3rd. The result will be some smaller class sizes in all grades and more stability in the classroom, both of which are a good thing.

The dizzying changes in guidelines and pronouncements by health authorities over the past many months haven't changed the basic facts about COVID-19. It's a highly contagious and deadly disease. We're going to be careful and we're going to be deliberate about bringing students back to schools.

We closed schools in March before there was any occurrence of the virus in the school community. We made the tough decision in July to start the school year online because the overall level of the virus was too high and that continues to be the case. The Los Angeles area is in the state's highest risk category with what is characterized as "widespread" risk.

We'll learn from New York where community health conditions are much more favorable and it's likely other communities in California will be able to bring students back before we can in Los Angeles.

Any return to schools is not without risk. A recent study of COVID-19 outbreaks associated with child care in Salt Lake City found some young children contracted the virus at child care and spread it to adults at home. Many of the children and staff in our schools live in multi-generational households and we must avoid schools turning into a petri dish.

Let's be clear, it's not an issue of desire, we all want students back in classrooms, but the decision must be based on science and it has to be right.

Careful and deliberate is just that. Don't expect to see a decision about a return to school classrooms by students until the case rate in the area is significantly lower and remains there. We share information about COVID-19 every week so the school

community knows exactly what we're looking at. There's no prize to be had by bringing students back too soon and this can lead to more cases of the virus in the school community amongst students, staff and families. Hasty actions now will set back a more coherent, long-term approach if we lose trust from any of our stakeholders. We'll continue to consult with families and those who work in schools to make sure, together, we make the best decision about a return by students to schools.

At this point, more important than when students might return, is what we're doing to prepare for their eventual return in the safest way possible. Our planning started months ago, right after school facilities were closed in March.

Our return-to-school plan has 3 main parts – state of the art health practices at schools, COVID-19 testing for students, staff and family members and the ability to notify and isolate any members of the school community who may have come in contact with the virus.

The health practices are in place. 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 at a campus and classrooms and facilities have been reconfigured to keep all at a school a safer distance apart. When students do return to schools, they'll be kept in small cohorts to reduce the risk of spreading the virus. As we learn of other ways to enhance these health practices, we'll incorporate them as quickly as possible.

The effort to test for the virus in the school community is underway. With several months of planning and preparation and a few weeks of trial testing behind us, we've begun testing staff who are currently working at school sites as well as their children who will be participating in child care at schools. This past Thursday and Friday, Los Angeles Unified tested more than 5,000 staff members and their children.

Over the next several weeks, all staff and students will be provided with an initial, baseline test. After this, there will be periodic testing based on advice from epidemiologists at Stanford, UCLA and The Johns Hopkins University. Their models will take into account the results of prior testing, learnings from the latest research and information about the health impacts of COVID-19 in the communities we serve. We will also provide testing for household members of students or staff who test positive for the virus or those who show symptoms. This testing will help identify cases of the virus and reduce spread in the school community.

Once we're closer to the time when students might return to classrooms, there will be a second round of baseline testing for all.

By the end of last week, we were testing more than 2,500 people each day. This week we're planning to test at about double that rate and in a few weeks we expect to be testing about 20,000 people each day to gather information about the spread of COVID-19 in the school community. You may recall from the earlier slide that Los Angeles is

lagging well behind most big cities in the amount of testing being provided. The effort by Los Angeles Unified will help address the need for more testing.

Our agreements with testing providers allow us to increase the number of tests to 40,000 per day which we plan to do when it's safe and appropriate for students to return to campus.

An operation of this scale has implications beyond schools. We'll be testing both symptomatic and asymptomatic individuals. It's likely the portion of those testing positive in our proactive program will be lower than other testing efforts which are more likely to include people who went for a test because they have symptoms for the virus.

It's likely the overall county data which combines all tests will show a lower overall positivity rate going forward due to the testing effort by Los Angeles Unified.

The initial positive rate for tests for the nearly 5,400 people last Thursday and Friday was about .1% as 5 people tested positive for the virus. We expect the rate of positive tests in the school community increase as we include students and families who have not had access to testing, but the rate should be meaningfully less than the 3.5% reported by the county last week.

Testing at schools will be for all in the school community, including many from neighborhoods which have lacked access to testing. We'll also be including far more children in our testing effort.

The information from this program, which is based on a school community, will be of value to researchers and policy makers as they develop plans to combat the virus and provide additional support to schools.

We take the responsibility for this program very seriously. We've brought together a world-class team of researchers, epidemiologists, virologists and data scientists, leading health care companies and hospitals which provide coverage and care for students, staff and their families, state of the art testing laboratories and a technology giant to provide the tools and technologies.

Our commitment to all in the school community is share as much information as we can while protecting the privacy of any individual who may test positive for the virus.

All of the information about test results will be kept in a separate, secure database and only shared with the appropriate scientists, administrators and health authorities.

As this School COVID-19 Report Card shows, our plan is to contact directly those who test positive for the virus or may have come in contact with the individual in their school cohort. We'll also inform all in a school community about an occurrence at their school.

Let me give you a specific example. If someone in a 4th grade cohort of 12 people (1 teacher, 1 aide and 10 students) tests positive, all 12 will be contacted directly. The individual who tested positive will be referred to appropriate health authorities for medical care. The other 11 people will be notified they may have come in contact, and we'll provide them with a COVID-19 test and they will be given instructions about staying home to self-quarantine and how to follow up with health authorities.

All members of the school community will have access to an updated Report Card which shows an occurrence has happened and in which cohort it occurred.

Neighborhood and community level information will show the status of each local school as well as information about the prevalence of COVID-19 in the area.

More broadly, we'll share information about the tests being provided, and details by geography and other groupings, including age. While the School COVID-19 Report Card and the Community and District Dashboards shown in these slides are just examples, actual data is shown for test results from September 10th and 11th.

This is an enormous undertaking and there will be challenges along the way. There may be issues with the technology or in the labs, test results may be late or inclusive and it will take some time to help all in the school community understand how the program works.

No other school district in the country has put together an effort like this. While unprecedented, it's necessary and appropriate as we must do everything we can to protect the health and safety of all in the school community.

I'll finish this morning by trying to answer the question I'm asked every day, "When are students going back to school?" The short answer, as soon as it's safe and appropriate for them to do so.

Changing guidelines and rules aren't something we can respond to on a daily basis. Two weeks ago, new guidelines said certain students could be back in groups of 12, or about 50% of classroom capacity, last week it was changed to 10% of school capacity. At the same time, a barbershop in the same size space is limited to 25% of capacity. The science hasn't changed over the past two weeks and neither should our approach.

We start with the overall state framework. Los Angeles is purple on the state dashboard, the highest risk category, defined as widespread COVID-19 transmission in the area. That means it's not appropriate for students to be back in classrooms.

This week, we'll begin to offer care for the children of essential workers, those individuals who are currently working at schools. About 3,000 children will be kept in small cohorts of no more than 6 children, together with 2 adults. All are being tested for the virus before they come to school.

We'll also begin offering one-to-one tutoring to students who need it most. The teachers and students will be outside, a safe distance apart. Again, all will be tested for the virus before participating in the program.

We'll be watching this carefully and studying the experiences of other communities where children are returning to campuses. We'll see what's working and what's not.

If the childcare and one-on-one tutoring goes well, we may expand the efforts. We might offer care for more children and in person, one-to-one help could become one-on-two, one-on-three or some form of small group instruction.

Careful and deliberate steps will provide the foundation for an approach which stands the test of time. Our schools have about 75,000 people who serve the needs of almost 700,000 students. On any given day, students are in as many as 70,000 different classes. What we do has real consequence and will impact the lives of millions of people.

We're faced with three, sometimes conflicting objectives. The learning needs of students, support for working families and the need to protect the health and safety of all in the school community. We cannot compromise on health and safety.

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.