

AUSTIN BEUTNER UPDATE TO THE SCHOOL COMMUNITY

AS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY – SEPTEMBER 21, 2020

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

We've a lot to cover this morning including a new survey which reinforces the need to provide a safety net to the families we serve, an update on attendance and a look at how students and teachers connect online, a progress report on our program to test for COVID-19, a new effort to provide free vaccinations for the seasonal flu at schools and we'll share a preview of a new movie about the incredible work by teachers during this pandemic. The film will air on this TV channel later this month.

Many of the challenges faced by society present themselves in schools – poverty, homelessness, housing insecurity and a gaping digital divide just to name a few – and those needs have only become greater during this crisis.

A recent survey sheds further light on this. The Partnership for Los Angeles Schools, which oversees 19 of the 1,386 schools in Los Angeles Unified, joined with USC to listen to concerns of families and what they heard is sobering.

- 3/4 of families have experienced a loss of income since March.
- 1/4 didn't have access to the internet.
- More than 1/3 of students don't have an appropriate and quiet place to study or participate in school at home.
- Families want more feedback on how their children are doing in school.

Our objective in Los Angeles Unified is to serve students in our schools and their families in the best way possible. We're working to address these needs.

- Provided a safety net to families suffering from income loss with food for children and adults. The efforts by Los Angeles Unified have provided about 62 million meals, more than any other school-based effort in the country.
- Schools have provided a computer and free internet access to any student who needed it. Los Angeles Unified's efforts have included a first in the nation partnership with Verizon which became a model for the state of California a few months later and has now been adopted in 40 other states.
- Created a partnership to provide 130,000 high school students with noise-cancelling headphones. We worked with Amazon to achieve an all-in, delivered cost of less than \$4 a pair. A charitable effort we established picked up all of the cost.
- Teachers are providing regular feedback on student progress to families.

And most recently, Los Angeles Unified announced an effort which sets a new standard in public education to help provide the foundation for the safest possible return by

teachers and students to schools. The program includes COVID-19 testing for students and all staff at schools.

The survey makes clear the need, but any conversation about helping students and families has to move beyond the schoolhouse as all parts of government have a role to play.

Los Angeles Unified has yet to receive any funding from local government to help pay for the meals being provided to adults.

There has not been funding provided by the state of California to help pay for the computers or internet access that Los Angeles Unified is providing for free to all students who need it.

And the federal government needs to provide funding for school systems like Los Angeles Unified to enable COVID-19 testing at schools which is needed to help return students, teachers and all who work in schools back to campuses in the safest way possible.

We continue to receive support from many local business and individuals in the relief efforts and I want to share some thoughts from our latest partner, Claire, a 4th grader who reached out to me with an offer to help.

We can all play a role in providing a safety net. Please join Claire in her efforts or text NEED to 76278. \$20 will provide a hungry child with a week's worth of meals.

Each day, schools are making progress toward the goal of keeping all students and families connected with their school community. Attendance continues to be a few percentage points less than the comparable period last year.

As this chart shows the challenge is greatest in neighborhoods which have been traditionally underserved and are hardest hit by this crisis. This was also reinforced in the survey we spoke of earlier. While we can measure the impact at schools when students have yet to connect, it has to be an all hands on deck effort – including not just schools but other government agencies, not-for-profits, faith-based organizations and others – if we're to provide the support students and families need and deserve.

One change we see because of the online tools is the way students and teachers are engaging. Teachers get going before students and some students are burning the midnight oil.

While enrollment in our earliest grades are slightly lower than last year in aggregate, the number of students enrolling for the first time – in kindergarten and transitional kindergarten – is down significantly. This has created concerns about losing teachers and reorganizing classes.

We want to provide as much stability in the classroom as we can and avoid disruption where possible.

We've taken unprecedented steps to allow each class in all these early grades, transitional kindergarten through 3rd grade, to stay together to help foster the bond between students and teachers. No teachers will be displaced from these classes.

It's an unfortunate fact of life that inadequate funding of public schools by the state of California creates these types of issues. Despite the difficulties presented by the state, we're taking this action to protect our youngest learners.

Our effort to provide COVID-19 testing to all in the school community finished its first full week. We've provided almost 15,000 tests to staff who are currently working at schools and their children who are in childcare. We expect the relatively low occurrence of the virus thus far to increase a bit as we test more people who have not had access to testing but the initial results are encouraging.

I'm pleased we've been able to contact 100% of those who tested positive and refer them for medical care. There have been no school associated contacts. An important part of any program like this is the ability to quickly contact and isolate any individuals with the virus so it doesn't spread any further. Schools are well situated to help since we've good information on those we're testing and those who are part of this program trust schools to use the information appropriately.

The overall level of COVID-19 continues to decrease but the Los Angeles area is still in the state's highest risk category and County officials have said no schools will be allowed to open before November 1st.

Meanwhile, we continue to plan for an eventual return of students to school when health conditions in Los Angeles make it possible. One challenge is to create a school schedule which balances the learning needs of students with the health practices we'll need to maintain in schools. The issue will be most acute in secondary schools and I'll try and explain.

In general, elementary school students are together with the same teacher most of the day. A smaller class will be needed to maintain an appropriate distance in the classroom so let's say 12 students with a teacher and an aide in 2nd grade, instead of 20 students, this can work instructionally and will establish a small health cohort to help isolate risk from spreading the virus. If the teacher and aide have 12 students in the morning, 12 different students in the afternoon, the effective cohort, for health purposes is about 26 (12, 12 & 2).

It's not so simple in high school. 12 students, one teacher, one aide one class again form an initial cohort of 14. But if the 12 students go on to five other classes and the teachers teach 4 other sections, the health cohort can become effectively 250 or more people.

This has big implications for mitigating the risk from an occurrence of the virus. If one case were to occur in a cohort of 26 at elementary school, then 26 students might need to stay home from school until health authorities OK'd their return.

If 14 people in high school became effectively 250 for health protocols, then all 250 people might be kept from school so in effect a smaller class size wouldn't do as much to isolate the class risk in secondary schools.

This will not be simple to solve and will require some compromises on what in-person instruction can be offered to students at schools. We've a team of people working to develop the best solution we can.

In addition to providing COVID-19 tests at schools, we'll soon offer free vaccinations for the seasonal flu when a student or staff member receives their COVID-19 test. Seasonal flu presents a health risk to many in the school community.

And in a closing note, I'm delighted to announce Los Angeles Unified will be hosting the national premiere of a new movie "A Trusted Space." This film is the product of a collaboration between USC Rossier School of Education and education and health experts from across the country. This documentary sheds light on the realities of social emotional learning and the extraordinary work of teachers during these challenging times.

Enjoy this short clip.

This is a film that every educator, family and student will enjoy watching.

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.