

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

### **AS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY – MAY 17, 2021**

Good morning. I'm Austin Beutner, Superintendent of Los Angeles Unified. It's nice to be back at school.

Today I'll share news about an exciting partnership with Amazon to provide high school graduates with jobs to help support their families while they attend college, take a closer look at COVID testing and vaccinations at schools and share more information about the path to recovery.

Now that students are back on campus, plans are coming together for each school to hold a safe, socially distanced, outdoor graduation ceremony. This is an important part of any child's journey. For high school seniors, graduation reflects a lifetime of hard work and provides a chance to recognize athletes, scholars, artists and others who have accomplished many great things. It's also a time to celebrate the culminations and great work of students in all grades.

The next step for many graduates from high schools throughout Los Angeles Unified is to continue their studies at a local college. Unfortunately, the pandemic has brought financial challenges for many low-income families which has impacted the ability of their children to pursue their dreams and continue learning.

The portion of graduates from the Class of 2020 who are attending two-year colleges directly after graduation decreased 30% from about 39% the prior year, or about 3,000 fewer students. The greatest declines occurred in low-income communities which have been disproportionately impacted by COVID-19. Many students tell us they couldn't afford to continue their studies because they needed to work to help support their family.

We reached out to Amazon to help and, together, we've created a groundbreaking new effort to help ensure that graduating seniors who are facing financial hardship don't have to postpone or forgo a college education.

Beginning with the Class of 2021, graduating students who enroll full-time in community college will have the opportunity to secure one of several hundred jobs with flexible hours that Amazon will help make available to these students. This will allow students to attend classes and still earn money to help support their families. These jobs may include preparing Amazon orders for delivery or working at Amazon Fresh and Whole Foods supermarkets.

Amazon will also host resume-building and practice job interview sessions for students. The company will provide students with information about the types of jobs which are available as well as advice on how to apply for them. In addition to valuable work

experience and the flexibility necessary for students to continue their education, students may also be eligible for scholarships after their first year of employment.

Amazon Web Services will provide free, comprehensive training beginning this summer to teachers and schools to help deepen their computer science curriculum. Students who complete the course will earn a certificate in cloud computing, equipping them with the skills needed for careers in the tech industry. With this certificate, students participating in the program will be eligible to obtain higher-paying technology jobs at Amazon while attending community college as soon as spring of 2022.

Marie Lloyd from Amazon and I had a chance to discuss a few highlights of the program. Please listen and I hope you'll come away as excited as I am.

This partnership with Amazon is just a start. I hope many other employers in the region join us in this effort to make sure every child has the opportunity to pursue their dreams.

Students interested in learning more about the program should visit a special website we've set up which explains more. More information about the program will also be provided in a webinar for school leaders and counselors sometime this week.

We are excited to again offer Summer School for all students, which will include reading, math, science and English for K-8 students, credit-earning opportunities for high school students, and enrichment classes for all ages and all grades.

Full-day, in-person programs will be available from 8:30 am – 6 at night, Monday through Friday for students up to 8th grade. They can participate in academic classes in the morning and sports, arts and other activities in the afternoon. All participants will receive breakfast and lunch every day while on campus. Academic and enrichment classes will also be available online.

On-campus and at-home options are also available for high school students. They can earn credits to get back on track and, for the first time, they will have the opportunity to earn additional credits during the summer to get ahead.

We are thrilled to be bringing back some of the most popular classes from last summer, including Science of Sports with the Los Angeles Chargers, and a Voyage on the Titanic with James Cameron. The Fender Play Guitar classes will offer an additional 2,500 middle school students the opportunity to receive a free acoustic or electric guitar, an electric bass, or a ukulele and join the 5,000 students already participating in teacher-led music classes. We have worked with the creative talents at Illumination, the creators of the Minions, to put together an Honors Cartooning and Animation class where high schoolers can earn 10 credits that qualify for both high school graduation and college admission requirements.

Looking further down the path to recovery and the new school year which starts this fall, all students will have the opportunity to participate in on-campus, in-person instruction.

Full-day programs for both elementary and secondary students will look much like they did prior to the pandemic.

We continue to see very low incidence of the virus in schools, and only one case of possible transmission on a school campus – between two unvaccinated adults. This is in line with what the world-renowned Cleveland Clinic recently reported -- 99% of patients they have admitted for COVID treatment since January 1st had not been fully-vaccinated.

For students who are unable or choose not to participate at schools for in-person instruction, an online option must remain in place for the school year which starts in August. Some students and some staff members may need to stay at home due to health reasons or because they live with an immune-compromised family member, until all at schools are vaccinated. Students at all grade levels will have the option to participate in online classes overseen by Communities of School leaders and staffed with Los Angeles Unified teachers. We expect the vast majority of students, teachers and staff to be at school every day but recognize we must provide the online opportunity for those who need it.

All of our schools are now open, and we want to keep them open and keep them safe. Schools in Los Angeles Unified will continue to maintain the highest standards of safety of any school district in the nation. As part of our continuing commitment to safety, Los Angeles Unified is providing regular COVID testing at school sites for all staff and students participating in in-person learning, while maintaining 12 stationary testing sites for employees and students who are not participating in-person or may need testing to participate in athletics or for other reasons.

Last week, Los Angeles Unified provided more than 150,000 COVID tests. On an average day, Los Angeles Unified administers about a third of all COVID tests in the Los Angeles area, making it the single largest provider in the region.

If 90% of the people on a school campus are children who have not yet been vaccinated, the safest thing to do is test everyone, children and adults, before they start school and regularly thereafter. And that's exactly what we're doing at schools in Los Angeles Unified.

This past week 2 student athletes as well as 24 students and 4 staff members who are at schools tested positive for COVID-19 in the school-based testing program.

Los Angeles Unified's contact tracing team reached everyone with a positive COVID test within a day of the test being taken. School principals were informed and able to prevent the individuals with the virus from coming back on school campuses until they are no longer contagious.

Last week, for example, a first-grader at Dolores Huerta Elementary who had a negative baseline test prior to returning to school tested positive during a subsequent test at

school. Two other students were identified as close contacts and all three are quarantined at home. The other students in the cohort at school and their teacher were notified of the positive case and advised they weren't considered close contacts. All of them remain at school.

So far, there's just been one case of COVID with a link to any other people at school – a possible transmission of the virus from one unvaccinated adult to another unvaccinated adult that we discussed. This not only underscores the importance of all on a school campus being vaccinated when eligible, but also, more broadly, shows that all of the mitigation measures we have put in place -- not just the testing but the upgraded air-filtration systems, wearing masks and Personal Protection Equipment, social distancing, extra custodial support and vaccinations for school staff -- are working. We're doing everything we can to reduce the risk of spread of the virus in schools.

As Los Angeles Unified has transitioned from stationary testing sites to mobile testing at schools, and from online learning to in-person classes, we are adding more people to help provide the COVID tests. About 98% of schools were visited by the mobile testing teams last week.

We've made it easier for school staff as well as for the students and families we serve by publishing weekly COVID testing schedules and locations for the week ahead. These can be found on Los Angeles Unified's and individual school websites.

Every child continues to be able to receive meals at any school, every weekday, whether they are participating in school in-person or online. Last week, we provided almost a half-million meals to students who are not at schools, part of the more than 7 million meals provided to children at home since schools reopened. A stark reminder that food insecurity remains very real among the families we serve. We will continue to provide meals to children, even those not at school, throughout the summer until school starts in the fall.

Our work to provide a safety net to the students and families we serve continues. School teams will keep providing items such as diapers, masks and hand sanitizer, clothing, backpacks, socks and shoes, food items and other treats to families. Last Sunday, the Los Angeles Dodgers helped my colleagues provide food, COVID resources and lots more at Horace Mann Middle School in South Los Angeles. If you are in need of help or struggling with housing or food insecurity, please reach out to your local Community of Schools office. We're here to help.

We've also expanded the safety net to include vaccinations at school sites as part of our commitment to do all we can to protect the health and safety of everyone in the school community.

Nineteen school-based vaccination clinics are now open in neighborhoods which have been most impacted by the virus.

This school-based approach is already helping high-schoolers, aged 16-18, and is being expanded to students 12 and older, who are now eligible to be vaccinated. The availability of vaccines for children ages 12-18 is an important part of the path to recovery. Ninety percent of people on a school campus at any point in time are children. Herd immunity won't be reached in schools or in the broader community until children are vaccinated. Patricia, a Senior at Panorama High was first in line to get vaccinated. She told us she's happy to get vaccinated because it means she and her family will be safe.

Los Angeles Unified serves almost 650,000 students in schools spread across 710 square miles. There are almost 300,000 students 12 and older who attend schools as part of Los Angeles Unified. Our mobile vaccination clinics will visit all of these students at about 250 school sites over the next several weeks to make sure all had the opportunity to be vaccinated at a location closest to home. It's worth noting that these students are about half the entire population of children that age in the communities we serve.

No other organization has such a deep relationship with that many children. Schools are trusted partners with the families they serve and are in almost daily contact with their students. This engagement is a critical piece of any vaccination effort. There's no better place to provide vaccinations to schoolchildren than at their local, neighborhood school.

More than 80% of students in schools in Los Angeles Unified are from families who are struggling to get by. They live in communities which have been hardest hit by the virus but lack access to healthcare services. About a third of students we serve don't have regular access to a pediatrician and many already receive other vaccinations at schools.

We want to start vaccinating students during this school year while teachers, staff, and students are still in schools. Educators can share information with families and help encourage students to get vaccinated. Schools can empower student voices to speak about this opportunity with their peers.

Los Angeles Unified will operate a vaccination effort for children at schools much like it's already doing with COVID testing and its existing school-based vaccination sites. Mobile vaccination teams will visit each school on a predetermined schedule to administer doses of the vaccine to students. Schools will use the Daily Pass to share information and schedule appointments as is now being done for COVID testing and adult vaccinations.

Our plan is to visit each middle and high school campus to offer vaccinations to students at least once before school ends and again during the summer. Because health authorities require a family member to accompany anyone under 18 when they're being vaccinated, Los Angeles Unified will provide paid time off to all staff to accompany their child to a vaccination site. We encourage all employers in the Los Angeles area to do the same.

This isn't a simple undertaking but it's been done before. An entire generation of children received polio vaccinations at schools.

We'll start this effort next Monday. Stay tuned for more information as we'll soon share a schedule of when vaccinations will be available in your community and at your child's school.

If you have any questions or need assistance in receiving a free vaccination at a school in your neighborhood, please call our Family Vaccination Hotline, or visit Los Angeles Unified's website.

No one is more appreciative than I about how hard everyone in Los Angeles Unified has worked and what's been done – providing more than 130 million meals to hungry children and adults, making sure a half-million students had the computers and internet access they needed to stay connected with their school community and putting in place the highest standard of COVID safety practices of any school district in the nation which includes upgraded air-filtration systems, extra custodial staff to clean and sanitize schools, adequate supplies of masks and Personal Protective Equipment and a comprehensive school-based system of COVID testing and vaccinations.

All while providing the best possible online education.

Along the way, we've advocated for what we've called a Marshall Plan for schools – to make sure schools have adequate funding to help the students and families they serve. Thanks to actions at both the state and federal levels, this has become a reality. Schools in Los Angeles Unified will have record amounts of funding for each of the next several school years.

All of this will help keep students on the path to recovery.

The additional funds will allow schools to add reading and math teachers in elementary schools to help students build a foundation in literacy, math and critical-thinking skills. Secondary schools can add more teachers to reduce class sizes. Children in schools will benefit from additional mental health services while students with learning differences and disabilities will receive more direct supports. For the first time in decades, there is sufficient funding to do all of this.

Staff have been preparing plans to implement these steps for months and will be bringing to the Board on May 25th a specific set of actions in all of these areas to add teachers and staff to schools to provide more direct services to students.

The objective is to make sure each student has as much instructional and mental health support as possible while they are at school.

But I want to add a note of caution to the conversation. Almost all of the money provided to schools is used to pay people who work directly with students. The additional people schools will need don't grow on trees. To stay with the metaphor, the orchard will need to be nurtured and grow quite a bit to be able to provide the people schools will need, not just in Los Angeles but across the state. Yes, more money would allow schools to hire more reading teachers... if there were more to be hired. While it's amazing that schools will have adequate funding for the first time in a generation, money alone won't solve the problem. It's how the money is used, the people who are hired and how they are trained that will make the difference.

Let me share a few examples. This school year, we added about 210 reading specialists to be part of the Primary Promise program and it's having an extraordinary impact in schools. Students in the Primary Promise program who were well behind in reading when the school year started have already caught up with their peers by midyear with this focused help. There are now about 6,700 students in the program, but we still have an additional 50,000 students who are struggling. Schools really need to hire an additional 4 to 500 reading teachers to help all of these students. And while schools will have the \$70 million or so each year they need to do the hiring, fewer than 200 people are currently graduating each year from university programs with a reading specialist certificate in the entire state of California. Quite a bit less than 4 or 500.

In algebra – often considered the gatekeeper to post-secondary education – only 56% of high school students pass the course on their first try. We'll provide more training, collaboration and planning opportunities for teachers, but we also need to reduce class sizes to offer more individual support for students. There are about 35 students in an average algebra class in our high schools. More individual support for students would effectively reduce the average class size to about 25 students. To accomplish this, schools will need to invest another \$20 million or so, to hire about 170 algebra teachers. Sounds simple, but it's not easy to do. They're only about 1,000 teachers who graduate each year from university programs in the state with the training to teach algebra.

On about 800 school campuses, there are almost 600 people working directly with students on mental health issues. If one person was added to every Title 1 school and a second to the highest-needs schools, that would require an additional investment of about \$150 million for 1,000 more mental health counselors. That's also more than two-thirds the pipeline of qualified people who graduate each year in the state of California.

As you can see, money alone isn't the answer. For the additional school funding to have the impact we all want to see, it will require the largest effort in teacher training and development, both for new and existing teachers, in more than a generation.

Out of crisis comes the opportunity to do what was once unimaginable. This is a once in a lifetime chance to make things meaningfully better for the children we serve. But only if we go about it the right way.

This past week, the Magic Electric School Bus took me to Koreatown where I participated in a ribbon cutting ceremony at Hobart Elementary, alongside Kyong Jae Park, Consul General of the Republic of Korea. We unveiled a series of beautiful murals created by artist Jason Chang. His vision was to bring hope and harmony to the community. This project was funded by the Consulate General of the Republic of Korea and the International Korean Educators Network. In Los Angeles Unified, we serve a population of almost 5 million people and about 650,000 students spread across 710 square miles. We are diverse by geography and by culture with more than 100 languages and even more dialects spoken in our schools. This effort at Hobart is a great example of how we can recognize and celebrate the unique nature of each of the neighborhoods and communities we serve.

As we finish today, I want to acknowledge the work of 34,000 unsung heroes who have worked tirelessly this past year to help the students and families we serve. Please watch.

Thank you for your continued patience and support.