



March 23, 2020

The Honorable Los Angeles County Delegation Members
The Honorable San Diego County Delegation Members
State Capitol Building
Sacramento, California 95814

Dear Members of the Los Angeles County and San Diego County Delegation,

The crisis created by the coronavirus is not something any of us could reasonably have expected to happen, and we are in uncharted waters as we work to prevent the spread of the illness and deal with the consequences for our students.

Governor Newsom has been clear that schools should expect to be closed for a long period of time. While our school facilities are closed, plans are being implemented for students to continue learning and receiving essential supports during this time. Los Angeles Unified is operating 60 food centers to provide meals for students and families in need and is working on a plan to provide online distance learning for all students. Similarly, San Diego Unified is transitioning the entire school district to online distance learning, while expanding the existing 10 food centers that are providing meals to students.

As we plan for the weeks and months ahead we are seeking guidance, and where appropriate, financial support to be able to implement our plans. We need to move quickly from guidance into standards and actions for which we can all be held accountable. We also offer ourselves – or any of our colleagues – to be part of a small task force to work with state officials to develop solutions to the issues raised in this letter and others which will arise. The combination of state policymakers and practitioners in the field working side by side (remotely, of course) may be a sensible approach in these unusual times.

Emergency Appropriation and Budget Relief

We appreciate the Legislature's passage of emergency legislation to ensure schools will continue to receive their existing funding and an appropriation of \$100 million for the purchase of personal protective equipment and to pay for costs associated with cleaning school sites. However, this appropriation is limited in scope and it is not sufficient to cover the costs we are incurring. We are spending reserves to cover costs, which in ordinary times would be incorporated into the state required 3-year budget plans. Said simply, our budgets will not balance for the current fiscal year because of the extraordinary costs associated with responding to the global pandemic. We request an additional emergency appropriation to address these unforeseen costs.

Address the Digital Divide

The transition to online distance learning highlights inequities faced by students who are on the wrong side of the digital divide. Both of our districts are taking steps to ensure students can continue to learn from home through educational resources via broadcast television and online courses. Our schools serve a high portion of students from families living in poverty and their families cannot provide them with digital tools and internet access like more affluent school districts. We urge the state to authorize an emergency appropriation of a minimum of \$500 per student to fund the costs of creating online distance learning for every student, irrespective of family circumstances. The funding should be based on student and family need – i.e. the dollars provided to school districts should be based on the number of free- and reduced-priced eligible students, students with disabilities, foster youth / homeless students, and English learners in the school district.

Modifications to Graduation Requirements and Impact on Students' Postsecondary Options

Students in 12th grade are missing instruction time and coursework necessary to meet all of their graduation requirements. We ask the Legislature consider modifying the state graduation requirements and consider the implications of school closures on students' post-secondary education opportunities, since college entrance exams and Advanced Placement exams scheduled for this Spring are cancelled. Solutions for students will also require the state's public universities to consider adjusting eligibility requirements for students.

Additional Flexibilities and Funding for Special Education

Our school districts are doing everything we can to continue providing special education services. In an effort to provide our students an individualized set of materials and resources, teachers are working to plan and develop materials in support of students who require modifications to access distance learning. However, transitioning to distance learning and meeting the requirement that local educational agencies ensure equitable access to comparable opportunities creates greater need for tools and financial resources that our school districts do not have. For example, Los Angeles Unified provides education to more than 67,000 students and San Diego Unified serves close to 14,000 students with an Individual Education Program (IEP). The transition to online learning impacts all of these IEPs. The process to update them for online learning and plan for a return to school is not a simple undertaking.

Meeting the needs of English Learners will also require additional resources to ensure that individualized instruction is incorporated into our online distance learning models. Between our two districts, more than 100 languages are spoken and more than 150,000 students are learning to speak English proficiently. Our school districts are making every effort to adhere with state and federal laws and regulations that prescribe the number of instructional minutes devoted to English language development. In an effort to transition to distance learning, we will need to provide tailored supports and professional development to educators who teach English Learners and standards-based instruction since this shift will break new ground.

Family Supports for Mental, Health and Child Care Services

We recognize the current priority is to address the public health implications of the virus, but these individual health issues are creating significant community issues which present themselves in our schools, and also need to be addressed. The closure of schools for an extended period of time will impact children's overall wellbeing and development. We serve the children of low-income families, first responders and health care workers, who will need child care services during any extended period of school closures. We urge the Legislature to collaborate with city and county officials to consider how those needs will be met by personnel who are familiar with the needs of young children, in a manner that is safe for the providers and the children.

Coordinated State Level Team

The State of California provides virtually all of the funding and prescribes most of the rules and laws that govern public education in the state. This oversight is conducted by many different departments and agencies. In ordinary times, the inter-departmental efforts at the state level with each school district can be bureaucratic but are made to work. In extraordinary times, we need a more coordinated and responsive effort at the state level where we, and the state, could proactively plan for the weeks and months ahead and make sure all of the various state agencies and departments align their efforts with those of school districts. As indicated previously, we offer ourselves to be part of any statewide discussions or task force to work with state officials to develop solutions to the issues raised in this letter and others which will arise.

Thank you for your consideration.



Austin Beutner
Superintendent
Los Angeles Unified



Cindy Marten
Superintendent
San Diego Unified