



April 21, 2021

Los Angeles Unified School District
Board of Education
333 S Beaudry Avenue
Los Angeles, CA 90017

Dear Board Members:

As the son of a public-school teacher and the product of a great public education, it has been an honor to serve as Superintendent of Los Angeles Unified for the past three years. It is the most rewarding job I've held during my nearly 40-year career.

That sentiment guided my thinking as I weighed your request to consider an extension of my contract. I reflected on the shared lessons and significant progress of the past three years. We have built a foundation to enable Los Angeles Unified's dedicated teachers, hard-working staff and engaged Board to continue on the path to recovery for children and provide them with the education and opportunity they deserve.

I also found myself returning to Robert Baden-Powell's words to "leave this world a little better than you found it." We have indeed accomplished that during my time as Superintendent. By putting students, their schools and the communities we serve back at the center of everything we do, we have regained the trust of teachers, school staff and families. Educators in schools throughout Los Angeles Unified have proven that we can break free from some of the past practices which stood in the way of progress. This newfound ability to try different approaches to help students will continue to bear fruit. The combination of renewed trust and the ability to make change for the better provide the foundation for a successful reopening of schools, and they will be the seed for continued progress in the years to come.

And so I believe that it is fitting that a new superintendent should have the privilege of welcoming students back to school in the fall. I respectfully request that my contract end as planned on June 30. In the meantime, I will remain focused on the task of ensuring that schools reopen in the safest way possible while helping in a seamless leadership transition. I believe the next superintendent of Los Angeles Unified can be found amongst the current team and she or he will be well placed to continue the progress at this critical time. The leadership ranks of Los Angeles Unified have never been stronger and I know you share my gratitude for the commitment of the women and men who answer the call to serve in public education.

Education is inherently about the future – about instilling in children a love of learning that will guide them, and us, into tomorrow. But it is also instructive to look back and reflect on shared accomplishments in order to appreciate the opportunity that lies ahead. With your support and that of many partners – in labor, in government, in industry, in the community and in the homes of each family and every student – we have together over the past three years:

- Transformed Los Angeles Unified from a top-down, one-size-fits-all bureaucracy into 44 nimble local teams, each dedicated to the community it serves. Community schools unite families, educators, and community partners to provide all students with quality instruction, enrichment activities, physical and mental health services and social-emotional supports, which create the opportunity for children to succeed in school and in life.
- Reduced central office expenses to generate about \$150 million in annual savings that were immediately reallocated directly to schools. In addition, plans are underway to realign excess real estate and free up dollars that can be used in schools to help students. This realignment will also make it easier for some employees to work closer to home and to the schools they support.
- Settled open contracts with all labor groups during the 2018-2019 school year to create a shared path forward. In collaboration with labor partners, restructured the cost of health benefits resulting in savings of more than \$6 billion while still providing the same benefits to employees.
- In 2019, reduced chronic absences while students achieved across-the-board improvement in English and math scores on state tests; a record 80% of 11th graders took the SAT.
- Increased graduation rates to a record 81% in 2020.
- Created the Primary Promise to help elementary school students build a foundation in literacy, math and critical-thinking skills. The initial cohort of 2,500 high-needs students who were struggling to read have already caught up to their first-grade peers in just half a year. Achievement for elementary school students will continue to show significant gains as the program is expanded to all schools when students return to classrooms.
- Led the passage of an historic \$7 billion school-construction bond with the overwhelming support of 71% of voters. These funds will allow LA Unified to update and maintain top-notch school facilities.

These initiatives helped restore public trust in Los Angeles Unified and uniquely positioned schools to meet the needs of the community during an unprecedented 393 days of school closures due to the pandemic. On March 10, 2020, I was entrusted with emergency authority to take any and all necessary actions to ensure the continuation of public education and the health and safety of Los Angeles Unified students and staff. This Board action has stood the test of time.

While I expect this emergency authority will no longer be necessary once schools have reopened, it's worth reflecting on what we've accomplished during the crisis. Your commitment to the families we serve empowered me along with staff and teachers to respond in extraordinary ways to:

- Maintain a safety net for the families we serve by providing more than 123 million meals to those in need: 93 million to children and 30 million to adults.
- Distribute 30 million items of supplies including masks and hand sanitizer, diapers and baby wipes, clothing and shoes, toys and sports equipment, books and school supplies to families in need.

- Establish LA Students Most in Need, a charitable fund that raised \$40 million to help families in the communities we serve.
- Launch a groundbreaking partnership with PBS, providing educational programming to students and their families. The partnership has become a national model adopted by more than 100 TV stations in 30 states.
- Procure and distribute computers and internet access to 500,000 students to keep them connected with their school community and help them continue to learn.
- Enter into a groundbreaking agreement with Verizon to help bridge the digital divide, which became a model for the entire state of California. The Verizon Distance Learning Program is now available in 38 states and the District of Columbia, reaching more than 36 million students through sponsor, state and ISD partnerships.
- Create and implement innovative ways to help students, including a partnership with SNAP to launch a book club with Alicia Keyes and Russell Westbrook keeping high school students engaged in remote learning.
- For the first time ever, offer summer school for all students, which included unique enrichment classes such as learning to play guitar with Fender, animation and storytelling with Illumination and a Voyage on the Titanic with James Cameron. 5,000 middle-school students have participated in the teacher-led Fender classes after receiving free guitars, ukuleles and basses.
- Rebuild relationships with community partners and philanthropic organizations while creating new partnerships to help schools and students. Step Up Tutoring was launched to provide free, online tutoring and will be helping more than 2,000 students by August, CAA has helped tell the stories of students' needs and their accomplishments and ReWork is facilitating donations of technology and learning equipment from major corporations across California being used by students in schools, to name just a few.
- Lead efforts at the state and national level to create a "Marshall Plan" for schools to address the lack of adequate resources that schools in Los Angeles have suffered from for more than a decade. The resulting \$5 billion increase in funding for schools in Los Angeles Unified over the next several years represents record amounts from both state and federal government.
- Use these additional resources to fund the Path to Recovery in schools, including additional reading and math teachers in elementary schools, additional teachers in secondary schools to reduce class sizes, more mental health counselors for students, increased support for students with learning differences and disabilities and maintaining safe school environments.
- And reopen schools in the safest way possible by:
 - Assembling a coalition of world-class universities, technology companies, health insurers, and innovative and cost-effective testing laboratories to advise on health and safety practices.
 - Providing regular COVID testing along with contact tracing to school staff, students and their families as part of the most comprehensive, school-based COVID-testing program in the nation.
 - Putting in place health and safety practices at schools that exceed CDC guidelines.

- Upgrading air-filtration systems in all classrooms and 80 million square feet of buildings. The air is filtrated 24 hours a day through the equivalent of an N-95 mask.
- Providing vaccinations for school staff.
- Establishing 25 school-based vaccination sites for families in communities that lack access to health services.

The past three years have presented LA Unified with unprecedented challenges. I'm proud to say we've risen to the occasion and grateful to have worked alongside so many who are deeply committed to helping children. It has been my privilege to contribute to work that reinforces one of the greatest achievements in human history: a free public education for every child. Education creates a path out of poverty for many of the children we serve and the promise of greater opportunity for all students.

Education is fundamentally about what's next. And I am optimistic about what's next for students and their schools in Los Angeles Unified. All of us have a duty to contribute what we can in the time we have – to ensure that those who follow have the opportunity to succeed in school and in life.

Thank you for the opportunity to serve.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Austin Beutner', with a stylized, flowing script.

Austin Beutner
Superintendent