



Sent via Electronic Mail

May 3, 2021

Superintendent Austin Beutner
Los Angeles Unified School District
333 South Beaudry Avenue
Los Angeles, CA 90017
superintendent@lausd.net

Dear LAUSD Superintendent Beutner,

We write on behalf of LAUSD students from the Youth Liberty Squad and InnerCity Struggle. The Youth Liberty Squad (YLS) is a student-led youth group founded by the ACLU of Southern California. YLS works on a variety of social justice issues in Los Angeles and across California and is made up of high school students, the majority of whom attend LAUSD schools, including Manual Arts High School, Girls Academic Leadership Academy, Foshay Learning Center, Ramon C. Cortines, Fairfax High School, César Chávez Learning Academies, Bravo Medical Magnet, Venice High School, South Gate High School, and many others. InnerCity Struggle is a grassroots community-based organization with the mission to achieve social and economic justice for youth and families in the Eastside of LA. InnerCity Struggle's student leaders attend LAUSD schools, including Garfield High School, Mendez High School, Wilson High School, Roosevelt High School, Lincoln High School, and Esteban Torres High School.

As you know, this past year has been extremely hard for us and our peers. Beyond experiencing the same distance learning problems that all students have faced, we live in predominately Black and Brown communities that have been hit the hardest by the pandemic. We have had friends and family members lose their jobs, get sick, and even pass away. Despite these challenges, we remain hopeful that students, community leaders, and LAUSD leadership will be able to work together to develop a plan that will safely and effectively support all those who make up the LAUSD community—and specifically a plan that prioritizes equity and our communities that need the most help.

First, we have appreciated your support and strength throughout this difficult school year. We are elated to learn that LAUSD will invest \$170 million to provide additional counselors and psychiatric social workers in schools. With that being said, we hope that you will consider the voices of students from across Los Angeles Unified as you continue to move forward with school reopening plans and develop your Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP). We believe that to have a successful transition back into in-person schooling, students need to be at the center of the conversation, as they will ultimately be the most impacted by the decisions made. As such, we have participated in LAUSD's stakeholder engagement sessions over the past

several months. Now, we have gathered input from our student leaders and peers and compiled some of our concerns and suggestions below. Although this is not an all-encompassing list, we hope that it will serve as a good starting place as you develop both your LCAP and long-term plan to recover from the pandemic:

1. Mental health services
 - a. Provide mental health services such as counseling and support groups available for students through Zoom if they are in distance learning or in person upon return to school.
 - b. Make all mental health resources accessible to youth regardless of medical insurance coverage
 - c. Counselors should meet with every student to determine how they can support them and should work alongside students, teachers, and families to find solutions for issues that the students are facing.
 - d. Students should be allowed access to mental health resources that do not require parental consent as there is often stigma when doing so.
2. Standardized testing and academics
 - a. Given the stress that this places on students, the time that it takes away from classes, and the fact that students have experienced much learning loss through no fault of their own, students should have the option to not take standardized testing without any penalty this year. Further, students should not be penalized if they elect to take the test but perform poorly.
 - b. During the first full semester of returning to campus, have “pass/fail” grades to allow students to have a better transition to in-person school.
 - c. Provide funding for tutoring and other back-to-school activities including credit recovery and A-G completion programs, to help students bridge the gaps in learning that they may have after one year doing online schooling.
3. In person vs. hybrid vs. online education and the plan to return to school
 - a. Many students and families do not yet feel safe returning to school and need to either finish the school year online or return in a hybrid fashion. Therefore, for the remainder of the 2020-21 academic year and the upcoming fall semester, students should be allowed to choose the path that they want to take and that there also be opportunities for students and families to change their preference (hybrid to online, online to hybrid, etc.) if they no longer see their current option as the best. Because their communities have been most impacted, Black and Brown families must have an opportunity to stay in distance learning if they do not feel comfortable returning.
 - b. Because students are going through a lot and may not be able to attend every class, LAUSD should record lectures (even for in-person classes) for students who are absent so students can review the information if they miss a class. If this is not feasible, schools should find another way to allow students to catch up on missed content meaningfully.
 - c. Schools should adopt grace periods for students turning in assignments late without penalty. It is going to take a while for students to adjust back to an in-person classroom, therefore, students should not be pressured to answer questions in front of their entire class if they are not ready to do so.

- d. Schools should continue a 9am-2pm schedule that was adopted by many campuses during online school.
 - e. Schools should adopt block schedules for students to have more time in classes as students cannot properly learn when teachers have to rush through curriculum each day.
- 4. Transparency on planning for Fall 2021 semester
 - a. LAUSD must do a better job making clear their plans for the upcoming fall semester. Most notably, after receiving input from the families it serves, LAUSD must announce whether there will be a different pathway from the one presented this semester or if the options for returning will look the same as early as possible to allow families the opportunity to plan for the future.
 - b. While many students fell behind in their classes during the 2021-21 school year, do not increase the days of instruction in the upcoming school year, because doing so will not help students catch up or recover. In particular, increased days will not address the trauma and anxiety they've experienced this past year, and instead will only increase the burden on students. Instead, schools should focus on strengthening their social emotional learning approaches and how to become trauma sensitive schools to better serve the needs of students.
- 5. Summer school
 - a. The district should provide additional funding for summer classes and make sure that these are advertised in a way that all students are aware of the opportunities being offered (e.g., send universal emails to student's school email accounts or post them on the school's social media accounts). Furthermore, it is important that there is not only a focus on classes that allow students to graduate but also on classes that students may need to apply for college (e.g. some colleges require certain STEM classes when applying with majors such as engineering).
- 6. Communication with students and families
 - a. Use emails or texts since phone calls can be more disruptive and many families do not answer their phone. Schools should also consider utilizing apps such as Remind, Band, or Edmodo to send out mass communications to students and parents/guardians about upcoming events. Schoology is not a reliable platform to provide time-sensitive information, as it often crashes, and students frequently experiences service disruptions.
 - b. Continue to hold town halls (virtual until the district can fully transition to in-person), for both students and parents to inform them of updates and answer questions. These townhalls, whether virtually or in person, should be engaging and accessible to everyone in terms of time, location, and how students and families are informed about such events.
 - i. These can also be used as an opportunity to collect further input from students and parents/guardians in real-time.
 - ii. Schools should refrain from relying solely on PowerPoint presentations to share information. Instead, they should incorporate engaging activities such as having breakout groups, polls, real-time surveys, and group report-backs.
- 7. Extracurricular activities

- a. Have the most activities possible allowed (as permitted by CA COVID regulations) as these are important for students' transition and also play an important role in college applications. For example, continue to provide band, sports, and arts programs even while social distancing.
- 8. Student safety
 - a. Continue providing personal protective equipment (PPE), including masks, hand sanitizer, plastic barriers, and social distancing, and reasonably enforce their use.
 - i. While LAUSD should ensure students wear masks and socially distance, enforcement of PPE should not lead to punitive measures, violent behavior, loss of class time, or arbitrary targeting of students.
 - ii. Continue conducting bi-weekly COVID tests and temperature checks for students, staff, and visitors.

We hope that you will incorporate these recommendations into your LCAP and recovery plan. Once again, we thank you for time and look forward to working with you in ensuring that the voices of students are heard during this critical time. Please feel free to reach out to Irene Rivera at irivera@aclusocal.org or Daniela Hernandez at daniela@innercitystruggle.org who will coordinate on behalf our youth leaders if you have any questions or would like further input.

Sincerely,
LAUSD Student Members of the
Youth Liberty Squad and InnerCity Struggle

CC: Kelly Gonez, Board President
Dr. George McKenna
Monica Garcia
Scott Schmerelson
Nick Melvoin
Jackie Goldberg
Tanya Ortiz Franklin
Derrick Chau
Sarah Chevallier
Sara Mooney
Kamarie Brown