

# Austin Beutner: LAUSD's teacher contract offer creates a pathway to prevent a strike

By Austin Beutner  
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LAUSD Superintendent Austin Beutner, center, on September 5. (Los Angeles Times)

Since I began work as superintendent of the Los Angeles Unified School District, I've visited about 50 schools and listened to the stories of many students. One young man — I'll call him Sam — has faced a lot of adversity: an abusive and incarcerated father, learning challenges, placement in foster care and taking responsibility for his younger siblings. Yet he is still at school every day, aiming for a career as an aeronautical engineer.

Sam's courage and resilience are inspiring. We need to demonstrate that same kind of courage and resilience to improve Los Angeles schools. District data show that out of 100 students entering high school, 12 will drop out, 79 will graduate and only 12 will earn a college degree. The status quo is not good enough. We have work to do and the kids are counting on us.

At every school I've visited, I have also met caring, dedicated, hardworking teachers who are doing everything they can to help students like Sam — engaging them in the classroom, overseeing after-school clubs, working evenings and weekends to develop lesson plans, and finding time to work one-on-one with youngsters who need specific help. There are great teachers in all of our schools. Los Angeles Unified needs to pay them better, and provide them with more support and more professional development.

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That is why Los Angeles Unified made a contract offer today to United Teachers of Los Angeles that provides for a fair pay raise for teachers, additional teachers in high-needs schools, teacher pay aligned with student needs, and increased transparency in our labor contracts.

Los Angeles Unified proposes to add teachers and reduce class size at 15 middle schools and 75 elementary schools in communities that have the highest needs. The offer includes additional pay for teachers who take courses in STEAM curriculum (science, technology, engineering, arts and math), in dual language instruction, in early literacy intervention and other areas that help teachers better support their students. It provides for a 6% pay raise for all teachers, which would match agreements we've already reached with our administrators, cafeteria workers, bus drivers and office workers, who represent more than 60% of the district's workforce. And we'll create a "plain language" version of the UTLA contract to help students, families and communities to have a voice in all of the issues the contract covers.

We are eager to discuss these proposals with UTLA when we begin mediation on Sept. 27, as part of the state-mandated negotiation process. Our offer creates a pathway for the district and the union to avoid a strike that would hurt L.A.'s most vulnerable students and families. Los Angeles Unified is committed to the lawful bargaining process, but we also remain open to any other way to resolve the issues fairly and transparently.

Los Angeles Unified and UTLA want many of the same things — smaller class sizes, better pay for teachers, and additional teachers, counselors, librarians and support staff in every school. But we need more money to pay for those things; we can only spend what we have. UTLA's "last, best and final" [offer](#) would bankrupt L.A. Unified and lead to the unprecedented layoffs of about 12,000 employees, including teachers. Los Angeles Unified simply cannot agree to do that.

I share the teachers' frustration that in just a generation, California has gone from top of the charts in education funding and student achievement to near the bottom. That is not acceptable; something must be done. The question is what?

Teacher strikes across the country in the last year have been statewide, not local actions. That's because state legislatures control education funding. Los Angeles Unified gets about 90% of its funding from Sacramento. Instead of L.A. Unified and UTLA fighting each other, we should, together with our other labor partners, students, families and communities, jump on our yellow school buses and head to the Capitol to start working to increase funding for public education. The current per student amount of \$16,000 is simply not enough.

I'm the son of an immigrant and a schoolteacher and the proud product of public education. I would not have the privilege of leading Los Angeles Unified without the strong foundation my public education provided. It is my singular goal to help rebuild public education and make sure all Los Angeles Unified students get the great education they deserve.

*Austin Beutner is superintendent of the Los Angeles Unified School District.*