

May 25, 2016

Steve Zimmer
President, Board of Education
Los Angeles Unified School District
333 S. Beaudry Avenue, 24th Floor
Los Angeles, California 90017

Dear Board President Zimmer,

At schools throughout the Los Angeles area, educators work to provide an excellent education to all students in safe and secure facilities. It is with them in mind that we request a meeting with you and Superintendent King to discuss safety policies that directly impede the ability of school leaders to cultivate the kind of school environments that are safe and secure for all students and staff.

Our most pressing concern is the need to revise or rescind the District's random metal detector search policy that unfairly criminalizes students and undermines the trust built between educators, students and the community. We respectfully request a moratorium on the policy at all schools until we can collectively develop a revised policy that is approved by the District's Board and prioritizes student safety, supports a positive school climate, and protects students' dignity.

We know you share our aspiration for all students to have a learning environment where they feel not only safe, but respected and empowered. We believe a comprehensive approach to school safety is deeply embedded in the culture of a school and is supported by specific tools such as:

- curriculum and instructional materials on school safety, such as Safe & Civil Schools;
- restorative justice approaches to discipline, which build on trust and cooperation;
- layered approaches to behavioral and emotional supports, including low student-to-adult ratios, positive behavior intervention strategies, and trauma-informed practices;
- hiring appropriate support staff such as counselors and community intervention workers; and,
- community engagement efforts to promote safety, including establishing safe passages for students traveling to and from school on city streets.

We want to provide you with more background on this issue and demonstrate that schools are already ensuring safe learning environments for all students through a comprehensive, evidence-based, non-punitive approach. For example, many schools are employing restorative justice practices that prioritize repairing the harm caused by unacceptable behaviors, an approach that requires trust and cooperation among all. Additionally, by maintaining small school environments and low student-to-adult ratios, educators have been able to build trusting relationships with students that enable them to intervene, if necessary, long before any student's safety on campus is jeopardized and without unnecessarily criminalizing our children.

As a strong advocate for restorative justice, you are well aware that a growing body of research is demonstrating the benefits of moving from zero-tolerance policies to ones that foster positive learning environments. Our concern is that so-called "random wandering" alienates students, discourages them from attending school, creates a negative environment that undermines trust and respect, runs counter to restorative justice practices, and effectively treats children as young as 10 years old as criminal suspects.

We know you share with us a strong commitment to eliminating barriers to positive student learning environments where students can fully succeed and take advantage of all the educational opportunities provided to them. Accordingly, we request the District immediately revise its random metal detector search policy. We look forward to discussing collaborative and mutually workable approaches to school safety with you and thank you for your continued leadership to support the students of Los Angeles.

Sincerely,

Concerned organizations and community leaders

Pastor Mike Cummings, We Care Outreach Ministries

Reverend James Jones

Dr. Azad Paul Kurkjian, Board Certified Child and Adolescent Psychiatry

Bill Martinez, Former Executive Director Community Youth Gang Service





Watts/Century Latino Organization



CC:

Superintendent Michelle King; Dr. George McKenna; Board Member Monica Garcia; Board Member Scott Schmerelson; Dr. Ref Rodriguez; Board Member Monica Ratliff; Dr. Richard Vladovic; Claudia Vizcarra; Dr. Sharon Robinson; Lizette Patron; Edgar Campos; Arlene Irlando; Aixle Aman; Ruby Chavez; Chris Torres; Nancy Ceballos