

Community Based Safety in LAUSD Must be Implemented with Greater Urgency

The Police Free LAUSD Coalition aims to create holistically safer, welcoming, and affirming campuses for all students in the Los Angeles Unified School District. Our coalition works with students, families, educators, and advocates to create and support programming and services at LAUSD schools that improve school climate, safeguard community safety, and support academic achievement – all of which act as violence prevention in schools (for a full statement of the Coalition’s guiding values, see our report [From Criminalization to Education: A Community Vision for Safe Schools in LAUSD](#)).

First, our coalition extends our deepest condolences to the families in our community that have recently experienced the loss of a child--one of the greatest tragedies a family can endure. We are saddened by the unfortunate events that lead to the deaths of LAUSD students Elijah McGinnis III from George Washington HS and Shaylee Mejia from Manual Arts HS. The community violence that took their lives is rooted in widespread generational trauma and anger brought on by community conditions devoid of adequate support and resources. We know what a harrowing time this can be and took a pause in our response to respect the mourning and honoring of these young people's lives. During this time we also waited for the LAUSD’s response, hoping they would renew their commitment to implementing an evidence-based community-based safety plan. Unfortunately, instead of taking accountability for the failure and lack of urgency in developing community-based holistic safety systems, the District has begun to re-center police in its response to enduring trauma and lack of mental health support that is plaguing the children and families in our communities. Some media outlets, pro-police groups, and mis-informed parents have begun to highlight the recent increase in school violence, but have completely ignored the fact that ***suicide risk has remained at the top of all school incident report data in LAUSD since 2017-18. This has remained true above fights, threats, drugs, and weapons, underscoring the prevailing need for mental health and community based safety strategies to be at the center of LAUSD’s response to student misbehavior.***

We cannot prevent violence by introducing more weapons and more violence in schools, particularly when our Black, Indigenous, and other students of color will be forced to bear the brunt of it. There is no evidence that school police keep schools safer or prevent acts of violence, but there is ample evidence that school police presence has negative impacts on students, especially Black students and students with disabilities. Superintendent Carvahlo’s Community-Based Safety Plan, released May 7, 2024, completely neglected to demonstrate how LAUSD will build up a systematic approach to community-based safety. Superintendent Carvalho and the LAUSD School Board of Education must follow through on the [Community-Based Safety Analysis and Expansion](#) resolution, unanimously approved by the school board on June 13, 2023 and:

- Partner with a community-based safety field expert to support all work required to develop a comprehensive and highly organized department driven approach to community based safety. (landscape analysis, training, capacity building for service providers, implementation plan, etc.)
- Develop a robust landscape analysis of service providers by region and service expertise
- Establish a timeline for all BSAP schools, all Community Schools and Priority Schools, and ultimately EVERY LAUSD school to have access to and funding for robust community-based safety programs

- Develop plan to support schools in creating community-based safety plans that include Safe passage and at least 1 additional community-based safety program (conflict intervention/de-escalation, peace-building, etc) AT MINIMUM
- Establish Increased infrastructure in terms of new or reassigned staff to support schools to connect with community partners and effectively implement community-based safety plans
- Include a clear policy for how schools should respond to various safety incidents on campus aligned with LAUSD’s stated PBIS policy goal of eliminating contact between students and police to the greatest extent possible and the district’s commitment to restorative and transformative justice. This must include protocol on which school staff members should carry out conflict intervention and de-escalation and how.

Our students, parents, and community-members deserve to be safe at schools and this is a critical moment for the District to develop community-driven infrastructure and end student push-out and criminalization.

Currently, LAUSD continues to spend over \$50 million to maintain the Los Angeles School Police Department (LASPD). **A true commitment to community based safety requires a systematic and intentional effort that works to supplant the existing carceral system with an equally organized community based safety department rooted in trauma informed care, prevention, restorative practices, and resources that enable all school and community stakeholders to support safe schools.** After 3 years and a budget of tens of millions of dollars specially earmarked for community based safety, LAUSD has failed to effectively build out a comprehensive system of safe passages, peace-building, violence prevention/intervention, de-escalation, conflict resolution, restorative and transformative justice, and youth development programs to cultivate school safety as demanded by thousands of students, parents, educators, and community.

Community based safety works! When community based safety practitioners--gang interventionists, credible messengers, and peacebuilders have strong roots in the local community, are thoroughly trained, and deeply passionate, they can have a tremendous impact in reducing acts of violence. Moreover, Community based safety works when it is implemented with field expertise and coordinated with urgency and focus. Community based safety will work when LAUSD truly commits to building out a comprehensive and highly organized department driven approach to devote the necessary attention and dedication needed to transform the culture and operation of a massive school district. If LAUSD wants to implement “...community-based safety approaches and resources as a primary means of cultivating and maintaining [safe schools]” ([6/2023 resolution](#)) then it must work to do so.

We have direct evidence that here in Los Angeles, when implemented with fidelity, coordinated community-based safety initiatives decrease violence and increase actual safety for our communities. For example, Councilmember Marquese Harris-Dawson of Council District 8 has implemented the South Los Angeles Community Based Safety Initiative (SLACSI), “a community-driven initiative that focuses on preventing violence and improving public safety by de-escalating potentially violent conflict, investing in mental and emotional health and creating engaging activities for youth and families.” **Since its implementation, crime has decreased by 8% at parks and adjacent communities patrolled by SLACSI Community Intervention Workers. [Research on other intervention strategies](#) in LA has found them to reduce retaliatory violence by 41%**

LAUSD's apparent decision to center LASPD even in its plan for community-based safety goes against years of district policy that has intentionally reduced the role of police and increased actual supports for positive school climates. In 2013, the [School Climate Bill of Rights](#) called to end school police involvement in school discipline and promised to implement restorative justice district-wide, centering student needs and shifting away from punitive discipline. The landmark school board action of June 2020 took a huge step toward decriminalizing our schools by reducing LASPD's budget by \$25 million, reinvesting that money into the creation of the Black Student Achievement Plan, and removing school police from being stationed onto campuses. Superintendent Carvahlo's recent attempts to redeploy school police, and make them a larger focus in the community-based safety plan than any other measure, only takes us backwards in our movement to end the school-to-prison pipeline and transform our schools.