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Education in South Los Angeles

Education has always been a means for uplifting people, but neglecting it, has also proven to be one of the most effective modes of suppression. In its current form, the Education system fails to provide an equal opportunity to all children, thus negatively impacting the future of many communities. As a low-income student in South Los Angeles, I have seen the impacts of a bad education system all around me. In elementary I saw programs being cut because there wasn't enough money, I have seen incredible teachers who are starting their career being laid off because there wasn't enough money. However, I soon came to realize that it wasn't money what was missing, what was missing was the willingness to invest in education.

I became most aware of the flaws of the education system when I was preparing for the next step in my life. As I started doing my research for the colleges I wanted to attend, I noticed that most of my peers were as clueless as me when it came to how to navigate the application process. I knew I had to write essays, take the SAT, and fill out financial aid applications, but that was about it. At first, I thought this process wouldn't be too complicated, however, as I continued it became evident that my school was lacking resources meant to ensure students were college ready. This completely shocked me since most of my peers would-be first-generation college students, meaning that students in schools like mine would need the assistance in the process more than any other. In the case of my school a single college counselor had to divide her time amongst 500 or so seniors, whilst also planning college preparatory events for underclassman, and ensuring that AP exams were arranged for, given College Board's new policy of having students sign up for AP exams early in the school year. Investing on college readiness would mean investing on the

student's future, it would mean investing in low-income marginalized communities, it would be investing on a better future for this country.

Many of my classmates were not only lost in the application process but they were also coming to their senior year ill equipped for the challenge that they were about to face. This made me reflect on what had been done wrong the previous years in order to get to this point. Melisa Gonzalez — one of the students I was able to speak with—explained that the English Language Development (ESL) students, were perhaps given less college readiness than other students. An ex ESL student herself, Melisa explained that she faced several barriers when attempting take an AP class—something that other students never had trouble with. The first time she told the counselor she wished to take AP Spanish Literature, Melisa was told that she needed to reclassify before enlisting in the AP class, despite her first language being Spanish. A few months later when she received the news that she had reclassified, she went back to the counselor with the same request. This time she was once again put down by the counselor, claiming that she was not prepared for such a rigorous class. It was only after the AP Spanish teacher personally talked with the counselor that the student was allowed to enroll in the class. A year later, this student who was told by her own counselor that the class was too rigorous for her, was the only one to receive a score of a 5 on the AP Spanish Literature exam from her class. Melisa's experience made me wonder, how many talented and capable students had been neglected opportunities because of the way our education system is structured.

Following the problem that ELD students faced in my school, I decided to speak with Ms. Sanchez, the ELD Community Representative at another High School in my neighborhood. Ms. Sanchez was able to further explain the process ELD students face when entering her school. To understand the situation of ELD students, we must first understand that many of the ELD students

from my community are just entering the United States. This means that upon entering school they are already behind several classes, since they must take two ELD English classes that do not count towards the four years of English required by the A-G requirements. In addition, schools are often not well prepared for these students, as a result many end up in classes in which they don't understand the teacher and the teacher doesn't understand them. This can further delay the student's completion of their high school diploma, since their grades are affected and the classes they need to re-take to comply with college requirements pile up. On the long run this affects the college eligibility of many students and discourages them from continuing to pursue higher education.

The community of ELD students in South Los Angeles high schools is essentially an untapped source of potential, that has for many years been ignored. If schools were better suited to incorporate these students, many brilliant students could have the chance to pursue their educational goals and to foster their intellectual curiosity. Perhaps if we provide aid for students whilst they are struggling instead of waiting until they have been negatively impacted, we can allow more students to continue on with the path they envisioned and be college eligible by the time senior year comes.

It is also important to consider that many students are affected by situations outside of school. For instance, many students come from single parents, placing an additional economic burden. Others have to assume responsibilities that are for people far above their age such as raising children and running a household. All the complex situations that affect students in my community, must also be addressed by our schools since at the end of the day their academic performance is affected by these situations. One prominent resource that schools can offer, is access to mental

health professionals. Currently many schools in my community do not have enough professionals to deal with the high demand there is.

The current education system in Los Angeles, harms marginalized groups and does not adequately prepare them to be college ready. Moreover, the resources to support students to achieve their educational goals—whether it be mental health professionals, counselors or tutors-- are lacking in many institutions. The effects of this lack of resources are most prevalent in low-income communities given that many families can't afford to pay for these services and rely solely on schools to have access to them. If we do not structure schools to be a place where all students are given the opportunity to reach their full potential then we are failing the future generations, and we are failing to comply with the desires of communities of color.