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## Experiences, Realities, and the Future: What the End of Random Searches Means to Students

By [dev \(http://www.fixschooldiscipline.org/author/dev/\)](http://www.fixschooldiscipline.org/author/dev/) October 23, 2019

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**#DSCWoA2019**

**ELIMINATE POLICIES AND  
PRACTICES THAT CONTRIBUTE TO  
THE SURVEILLANCE,  
MILITARIZATION AND  
CRIMINALIZATION OF SCHOOLS.**

**1.7 million students attended a school that had  
police officers but no counselors during the  
2015-2016 school year.**

#STUDENTSNOTSUSPECTS

#EDUCATESTUDENTSSTOPARRESTS

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**FIX SCHOOL  
DISCIPLINE**



## Experiences, Realities, and the Future: What the End of Random Searches Means to Students

BY

Elvia Perez

I am a recent LAUSD graduate and student rights activist. I believe that ending the random search policy is a tremendous victory for the #StudentsNotSuspects Coalition[1] who have spent years fighting for this very moment. I co-founded the Students Deserve chapter at my high school, in hopes of bringing an end to these “random” searches, as they serve to criminalize, traumatize,

and degrade racial and ethnic groups. Students Deserve is a grassroots coalition comprised of LAUSD parents, teachers, and students, who have teamed up with organizations in the #StudentsNotSuspects Coalition in the hopes of ending the criminalization of students, while improving school culture. Although LAUSD is taking the initiative to improve the quality of education for millions of students, it is important for individuals to recognize that there is still much LAUSD needs to do when it comes to investing in mental health resources, higher education, and art programs. There is this incredible opportunity for the District to administer the resources and money it used for random searches in a way that would improve educational opportunities for all students. As students, we believe that our focus should now be directed on ensuring that LAUSD chooses to reallocate the \$1,120,000 (the amount estimated to be utilized in staffing costs alone for LAUSD Schools to implement the policy) in the most effective manner, one that would best address the needs of their students. As a recent LAUSD graduate, I know LAUSD can improve the lives of millions of students by investing in more in mental health resources, arts education, and college access programs.

My high school lacked fundamental resources, such as college access opportunities and counselors, to address student needs. My school had one of the highest suicide ideation rates within the district, and the school did not have a full-time counselor to provide students with the mental and emotional support they needed. Even after one of my classmates committed suicide, our school still did not receive funds to hire a full time counselor. This tragedy serves as a reminder that mental health issues are indeed pervasive within our school district and that allocating money and resources towards this crucial issue can help save lives. In addition, because LAUSD has one of the highest concentrations of low-income students in the state, it is important to acknowledge that the traumas of poverty impact a large percentage of students within the district. . Students in LAUSD need mental health resources and support in their schools, and LAUSD should make these resources available to all students regardless of their socio-economic background. I had peers with parents who were working multiple jobs struggling to provide their families with food on the table. These parents often did not have the time or resources to seek out the emotional and mental health support that their children needed, as they were focused on bringing their families out of poverty. Most students within the district face this reality. That is why I believe that one of LAUSD's next initiatives should be to focus on ensuring all students have more access to mental and emotional health resources.

In order to better the lives of its students, LAUSD needs to invest in arts education. Throughout my life, music has been the savior that has enabled me to persevere through struggle and adversity. When I was introduced to the beautiful world of music at age ten, music filled my world with hope. I was fortunate to take part in the Summer Encounter Program at the Colburn School of Performing Arts. The program grants low-income students the opportunity to have access to

the arts. After completing the program, I received a scholarship to study violin there. My junior year, I was admitted into one of the most prestigious orchestras in Los Angeles, the Colburn Youth Orchestra, and found myself surrounded by some of the most talented musicians in the nation.

[1] The Students Not Suspects Coalition is comprised of Students Deserve, Youth Justice Coalition, American Civil Liberties Union of Southern California, Public Counsel, Black Lives Matter-LA, and United Teachers Los Angeles.

Music was my escape from my family's economic struggles. Unfortunately, many of my friends did not have access to a healthy outlet and turned to drug and alcohol abuse. When you are surrounded by a perpetual cycle of crime and poverty, access to the arts can mean the difference between life and death. For me, music was not only a savior, it was also my outlet for creative expression. Music led me deep into the uncharted territory of my full potential. Music gave me a sense of purpose and taught me invaluable life lessons and skills that have helped me become a better student and individual. Music has also helped me realize the incredible impact that the arts can have on a child's life. Every child deserves access to an arts education, regardless of their background, because art enhances life. I strongly urge LAUSD to invest in implementing more arts education in its schools. LAUSD should provide all students with exposure to the arts and a healthy and beautiful outlet that can make an incredible impact in their lives.

The district should also reallocate funding to college access programming and resources to improve the quality of student lives. My school had only one college counselor for more than 500 students. The majority of my classmates were also low-income and first-generation to apply to college. As low-income, first-generation students, with little to no prior knowledge about higher education, college seemed like an unattainable dream to most of us. How would we be able to afford to pay thousands of dollars for college? Most tuition bills are more than three times what our families make in a year. No one talked to us about financial aid, scholarships, and other college access resources. The lack of resources in our school made it incredibly difficult for all the students to obtain the college guidance they deserved. A significant number of students did not apply to college, because they couldn't meet with the college counselor to discuss their options. A few students at my school took advantage of financial aid or scholarships because they got lucky and heard about these resources from their friends or older siblings. This was what happened in my case. I heard about resources that would help me pay for college through a friend. She was fortunate enough to attend a school that did offer college access programs. It was this friend who also encouraged me to apply to prestigious universities, such as Ivy League Schools. Without receiving this help from a friend, I would not be where I am today. It is because I got lucky that I am a sophomore attending Brown University on a full scholarship. Although I worked incredibly

hard, graduating second in my class of 550 students, it is the college access support and opportunities that make a difference in determining whether students can pursue higher education.

Although LAUSD has taken the step to end random searches, we are not going to experience real change until the district takes more measures to reallocate the money and resources in a way that best meets student needs. Only students know what they need. The district should invest in mental and emotional health supports and college access programs. These are two very important resources that would serve all LAUSD students, and would have been incredibly beneficial when I was a student. At Brown University, I have discovered that my fellow classmates did not experience random searches throughout high school. Although our nation has seen an increase in mass shootings, my peers did not experience an increase in criminalization like I did. This reality suggests that random searches have nothing to do with enhancing a students' safety in schools. Random searches target students of color. By ending random searches, LAUSD has finally come to acknowledge the truth. There is still more work that the District must do to ensure its students receive the resources and guidance they need. Mental health counselors and resources have the potential to save lives. Art education can enhance a child's life. In addition, college access programs and opportunities, along with more counselors should be available to all students to help them succeed in life. It is up to all of us to ensure that LAUSD lives up to its responsibility of providing its students with the best quality of education possible. Ending the random search policy has provided the District with the resources and the obligation to now focus on what matters to really make a difference in student lives and bring about the real change that students deserve.

## **About the Author**

Elvia Perez is a sophomore at Brown University, concentrating in Political Science and Business Economics. She is extremely passionate about advocating for human rights and social justice.. To address education disparities in her community, Elvia created Latino Empowerment, a non-profit organization that helps empower youth to obtain higher education by providing them access to resources such as scholarships, summer programs, and internships. Last summer, she interned at the ACLU SoCal Education Equity Team, where she helped work on their education reform campaigns. During her freshman year at Brown, Elvia worked with Professor Hazeltine in her Independent Study Course, Addressing Educational Disparities in the Providence Community. Through government and social entrepreneurship, Elvia aspires to advocate for the needs of others and to help create solutions to the most pressing issues prevalent in our communities.

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← [The Beginning of the End of Random Searches: Students Know What They Need Next](http://www.fixschooldiscipline.org/2019/10/01/randomsearches/)  
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